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The

No. 1,036. Vol. XXXII.

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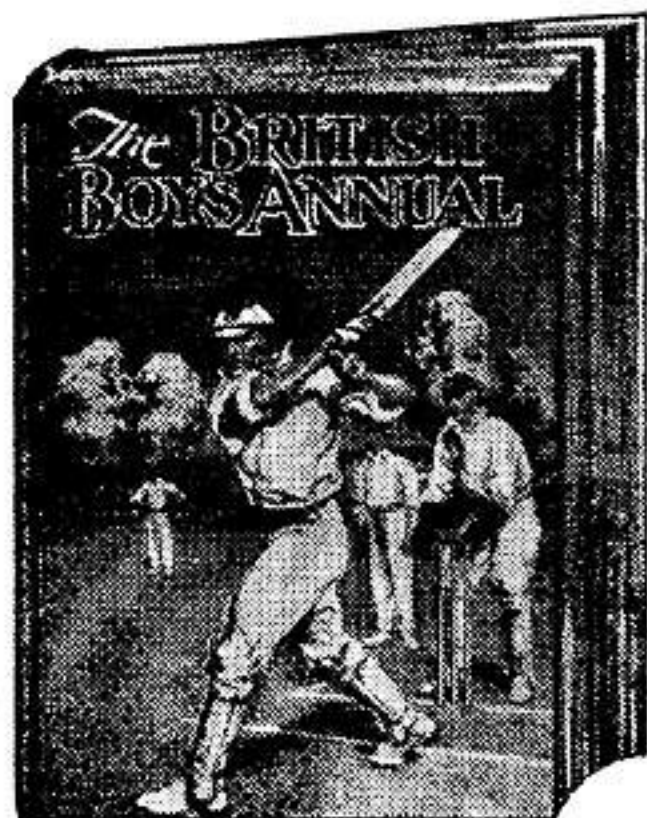


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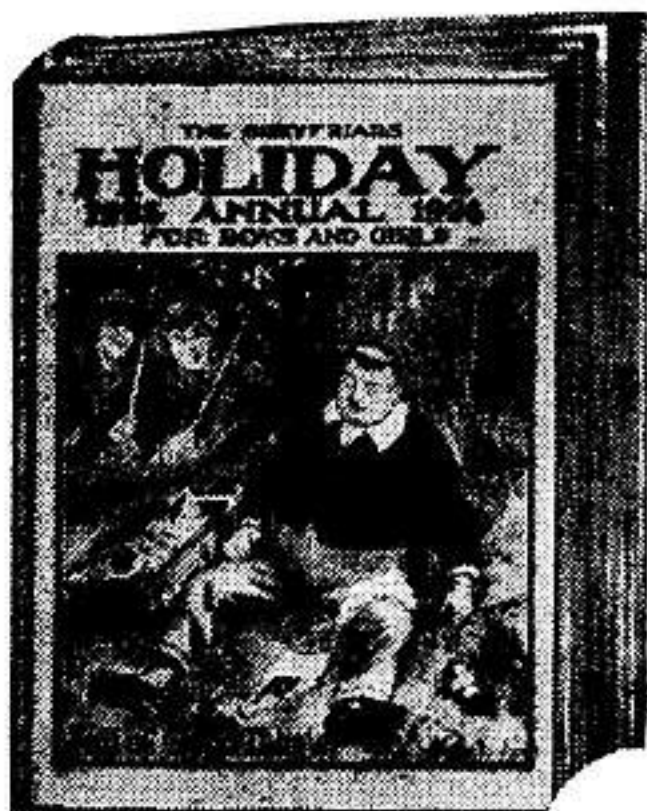
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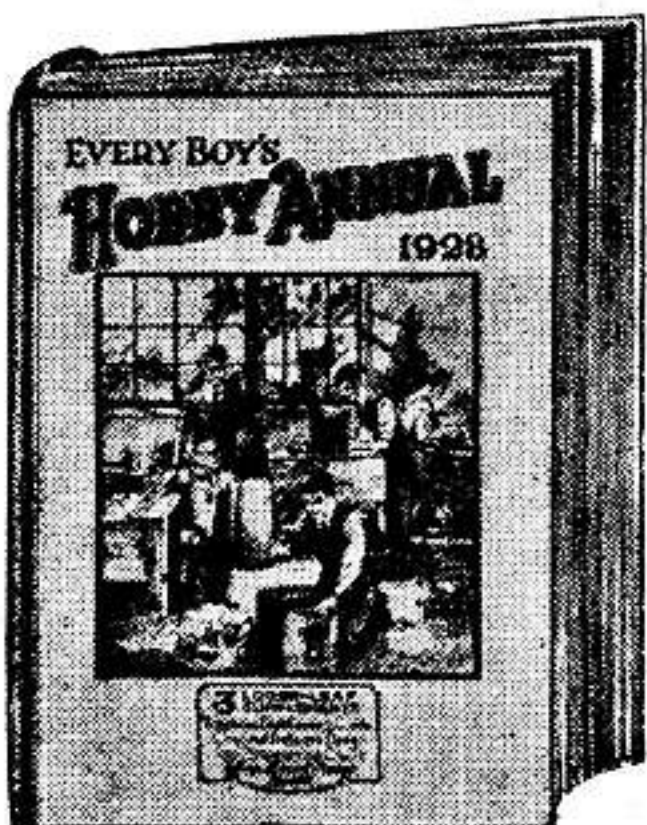
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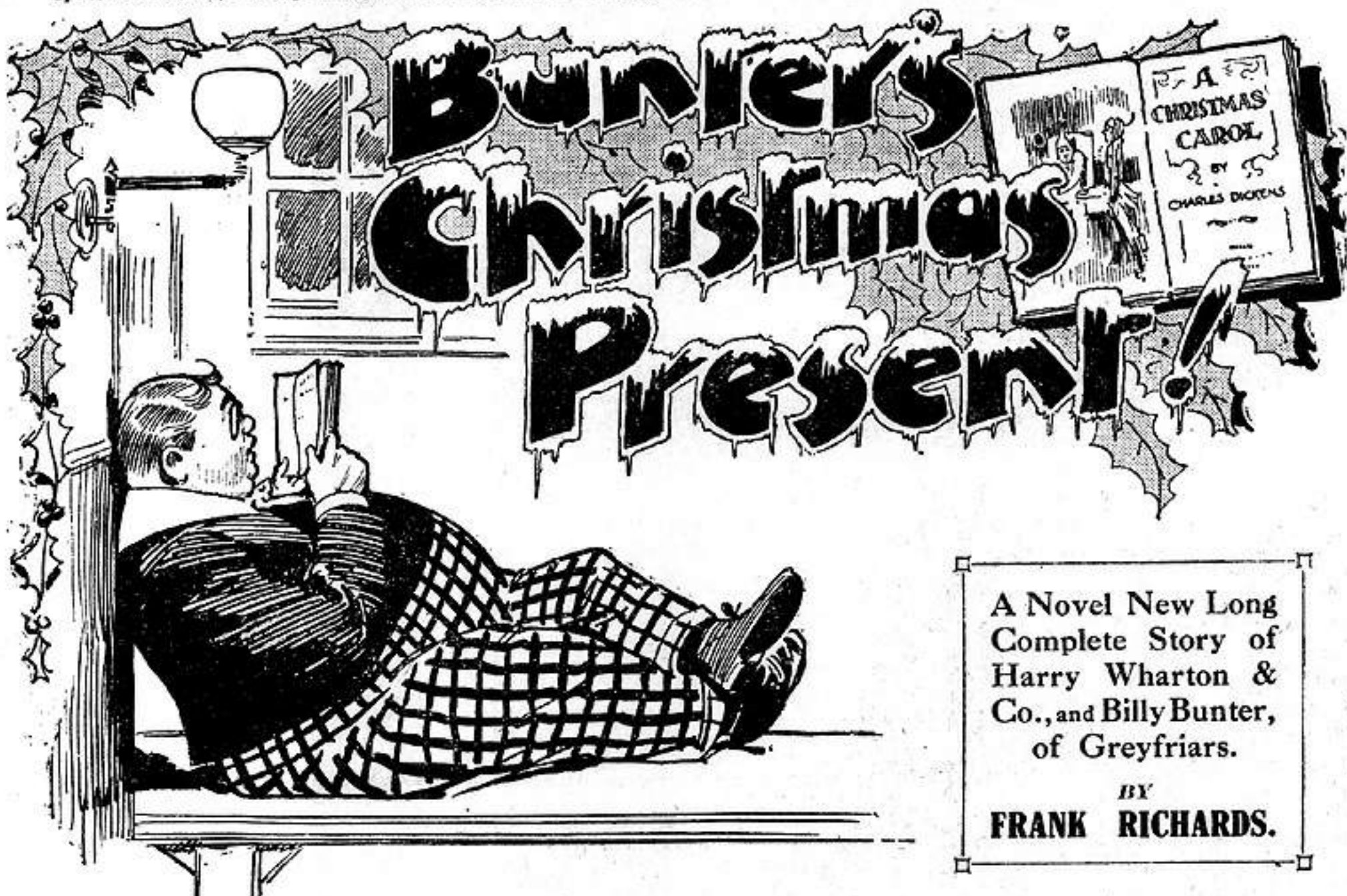


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A DIFFERENT BUNTER! Selfish, mean, boastful—these are just a few of the unpleasant traits in the character of William George Bunter. And yet, as Christmas draws nigh, a sudden and remarkable change comes over the Owl of the Remove; he reforms, and his reform is really genuine! How does it come about?



A Novel New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., and Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars.

BY
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Glorious News!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER smiled.

He smiled expansively.

Anyone who had observed that expansive smile on the fat face of William George Bunter, would have guessed at once that he had received good news—might even have supposed that his celebrated postal-order had arrived at last!

Bunter's certainly was not the only smiling face in the Greyfriars Remove. The near approach of the Christmas holidays caused many faces to wear extremely cheerful expressions.

But the mere approach of the festive season would not have caused Billy Bunter to smile so expansively.

In fact, the coming holidays gave Billy Bunter food for thought rather than for satisfaction. For it was not yet settled where Bunter was to pass the Christmas vacation.

Bunter Court, with all its glories, did not seem to attract him somehow. Fellows in the Remove, who knew what a fascinating fellow Bunter was, and ought to have realised that no Christmas party could be really complete without him, still did not seem anxious to take him home with them. In fact, they seemed anxious not to do so.

It was not the approach of Christmas and its merry-making, therefore, that caused the fat face of the Owl of the Remove to expand joyously. Neither was it the arrival of the postal-order which he had been expecting so long and so hopefully; for there was no enclosure in the letter he had just opened. Evidently it was the letter itself that had caused the irradiation of Billy Bunter's plump countenance.

"Oh, good!" ejaculated Bunter.

He blinked at his letter again through

his big spectacles, and smiled still more radiantly.

"I say, you fellows, this is all right!" he said.

Bunter was not the fellow to keep good news to himself—or anything else, that was not of an edible nature.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Something good, fatty?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather," answered Bunter complacently.

"Not your postal-order at last?" asked Bob. "If it's that, break it gently, old bean. Don't give us too much of a shock all at once."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"The shockfulness would be preposterously terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Tell us the good news, old fat bean," said Harry Wharton, laughing. Bunter was evidently bursting with it, and the captain of the Remove was good-naturedly prepared to listen.

"It's ripping," said Bunter.

"Good!"

"This letter is from my uncle," went on Bunter.

"Your uncle?" asked Skinner. "Is the ticket up at Christmas?"

"Eh?"

"You've been raising three-and-six on your thirty-guinea gold watch?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! This letter is from my Uncle George," snorted Bunter. "I was named after him, and he's awfully fond of me."

"Must be a queer old codger," remarked Skinner. "Still, there's no accounting for tastes."

"Shut up, Skinner," said Johnny Bull. "Go ahead, Bunter! Has Uncle George come down handsome for Christmas?"

"Yes, rather."

"Congrats, old scout."

"My uncle's awfully rich, you know," explained Bunter. "Rolling in it, in

fact. More money than he knows what to do with."

"You should write and tell him what to do with it," suggested Skinner. "Tell him to send you some. Then you could settle up the fourpence you owe me before we break up for Christmas."

"Oh, cheese it, Skinner," said Bob Cherry, laughing.

"Oh, let him run on," said Bunter disdainfully. "Fellows who have rich relations have to get used to this sort of jealousy. My Uncle George is the uncle who sends me lots of postal-orders, you fellows."

"Oh!" said the fellows.

"Must be a very careless old gent," said Skinner, shaking his head.

"Eh! Why?"

"Well, he must address the letters awfully carelessly. Otherwise, some of them would get as far as Greyfriars."

"Beast!"

"Skinner, old man, keep your little jokes for Christmas," said Frank Nugent. "Tell us the glad news, Bunter."

"I'll read out the letter if you like," said Bunter, with a disdainful glare at Harold Skinner.

"Oh, do!"

"The hearfulness will be an esteemed pleasure."

Bunter gave a fat little cough, and started.

The Remove fellows gave him their best attention.

They were not particularly interested, as a matter of fact, in William George Bunter's letter from his Uncle George. Still, the matter had a certain amount of interest.

Bunter's rich relations had been heard much of in the Remove. Uncles and aunts in the Bunter clan rolled in lucre, according to William George. But for some reason they rolled in it only in their own palatial residences, and never

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sent any of it along to Greyfriars for their beloved nephew to roll in. If one of Bunter's wealthy relations had, at long last, made an exception to this invariable rule, the Removites were quite willing to hear all about it.

"Dear William," began the Owl of the Remove. "It is a considerable time since I have written, and you may have supposed that I had forgotten you. But this is not the case."

"Hear, hear!" said Skinner. "He's only forgotten to send those postal-orders."

"Shut up, Skinner."

"I have selected a Christmas present for you, my dear nephew, with some care, and with a view to your needs," Bunter resumed, after a glare at the scoffing Skinner. "I shall not wait till Christmas to send this to you, but shall dispatch it to you at school. I have every hope that the benefit you will derive from it will be very great. Indeed, if it has the effect I hope, it may prove an inestimable treasure to you. You may look for its arrival in a day or two."

"Your affectionate Uncle."

"GEORGE BUNTER."

"There!" said Bunter, his fat face expanding once more. "What do you fellows think of that? Some uncle, what?"

"The somefulness is terrific."

"Uncle George wouldn't say all that if it was simply a postal-order, or a pound note, such as you fellows sometimes get," said Bunter.

"Oh!"

"It wouldn't be merely a fiver—hardly even a tenner. What price getting a cheque for fifty pounds?" grinned Bunter.

"Phew!"

"I think it will be cash," said Bunter. "When I write to my people, you know, I often mention that I prefer presents in the form of cash."

"They don't seem to play up!" remarked Skinner.

Bunter ignored that remark.

"Of course, it might be a motor-bike," said Bunter. "I remember telling Uncle George that I should like a motor-bike. Coker of the Fifth has one. Of course, mine will be a better one than Coker's. But I think it will be a cheque. He says he's selected my present with a view to my needs. He knows that I need cash—I've told him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He uses the words 'inestimable treasure,'" said Bunter, blinking at the latter again. "That sounds like something a bit gorgeous, what? Might be a hundred pounds."

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

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Well, even fifty would be handsome," said Skinner. "You'd be able to pay me that fourpence—"

"And I guess you could settle up the shilling you've owed me for two terms," said Fisher T. Fish.

"And my seven-and-six," suggested Peter Todd.

Bunter's fat lip curled.

"I believe I owe a few small sums up and down the Remove," he said.

"I believe you do," grinned Toddy.

"The believfulness is terrific."

"I shall settle up those trivial matters when my cheque comes," said Bunter disdainfully. "Any fellow to whom I owe some little sum may trot it out when my uncle's present comes. I hope I'm not the kind of fellow to leave for the holidays owing any chap anything."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Congratters, anyhow, old fat man,"

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said Bob Cherry. "Your uncle could hardly have written like that unless he was sending something really handsome. You're the lucky man to-day, Bunter. I've had three letters and every one a blank."

"I've had two, and nothing but good advice in them," said Nugent.

"Well, what do you fellows expect?" said Bunter. "Your people are not wealthy like mine."

"Oh!"

"I dare say you fellows would jump for joy at getting a tenner or so," said Bunter loftily.

"I know I should," grinned Bob.

"The jumpfulness would be great."

"I quite understand that," said Bunter. "With a fellow accustomed to large sums of money it's quite different. Well, ta-ta! I'm afraid I can't waste any more time on you chaps!"

And Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving the juniors staring.

He seemed to be walking on air as he rolled.

Exactly how much Billy Bunter believed of his tales of untold wealth in the Bunter tribe it would have been difficult to say. But it was probable that, like many fibbers, he deceived himself more than he deceived others.

Certainly he was now revelling in the anticipation of a great and glorious supply of that necessary article—cash. His uncle had plainly stated that he had selected that Christmas present with a view to Bunter's needs, and there was no doubt that he needed money. On that point there was no shadow of doubt—no possible probable shadow of doubt—no possible doubt whatever. And he was going to get what he needed, to such an extent that it might be regarded as an "inestimable treasure." No wonder William George Bunter seemed to be walking on air—no wonder his fat little nose was elevated even more than Nature had elevated it, and no wonder that, like the classical gentleman of old, he seemed like to strike the stars with his sublime head.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bad for Bunter!

MONSIEUR CHARPENTIER was pleased.

Likewise, he was surprised.

In his French set that afternoon there was one face that was so beaming with satisfaction that Mossoo could not help feeling surprised, pleased, and flattered.

Often there were smiling faces in the junior French sets. Monsieur Charpentier was not a strong character, and he was very good-natured and forgiving. The result was that he was perpetually ragged in class. Boys will be boys, and there were few Greyfriars juniors who were thoughtful enough not to take advantage, more or less, of the French master's amiable weakness. Fellows who walked in fear and trembling under the gimlet eye of Mr. Henry Samuel Quelch, were as bold as brass in dealing with the French master. Bolsover major had been known to catch him actually on his Gallic nose with an inky pellet, and set the whole class in a roar with his pretended apologies.

Skinner and his friends enjoyed French. They did not work, they slacked as much as they liked, and they made Mossoo perspire with worry. But Billy Bunter, though the laziest slacker in that class or any class, did not rag. Even ragging required some exertion, and Bunter was opposed to exertion on principle. So when his fat face beamed in the French set, Mossoo did not surmise that he was planning some jape, as

he would have surmised in the case of almost any other Lower Fourth man.

He supposed that the beauties of the beautiful French language must have dawned upon Bunter at long last, and that the Owl of the Remove was keen on French. It was quite a pleasure to Mossoo to see any fellow keen on French. It delighted him to see any man look as if the lesson was anything but a bore and a worry to him. On the part of the Head and the staff, there was a belief that fellows came to Greyfriars to learn things. Fellows who had heard of this belief regarded it with tolerant amusement.

Certainly Billy Bunter was not there to learn anything if he could help it. He had a rooted objection to the acquisition of knowledge. Yet now, sitting among a crowd of careless fellows who were talking, and did not cease talking when the master came in, Bunter's face was so irradiated with good-humour and satisfaction that Mossoo could not help noticing it at once. Here was one fellow, at least, who was glad to find himself in the French class. Mossoo resolved to give this enthusiastic pupil unusual attention. He was rather accustomed to passing Bunter over; the fat junior's laziness and obtuseness tried his patience very hard. But if Bunter was turning over a new leaf, as seemed to be the case, Mossoo was ready to play up.

"Silence, mes garçons," said Monsieur Charpentier mildly. "Sherry, will you stop to shuffle ze feet?"

"Certainly, sir," said Bob cheerily.

"Skinnair, you are talking."

"Swat that fly," said Skinner, without turning his head.

"Vat! Vat you say, Skinnair?"

Harold Skinner glanced round.

"Oh, did you speak, sir? I thought it was a bluebottle buzzing, sir! My mistake, sir."

A chuckle ran along the class. Skinner could hardly have thought that a bluebottle was buzzing in the classroom in December; but anything was good enough for Mossoo.

"Zat you be silent," said Monsieur Charpentier.

Crash!

"Bolsovair, you drop somezing?"

"Yes, sir—dropped an inkpot," said Bolsover major cheerily.

Crash!

"Vat—vat is zat?"

"Dropped a book, sir," said Ogilvy.

"Zat you stop to drop zings," said Monsieur Charpentier. "I vill keep ordair here. Zere is mooch to mooch noise in zis class. It is like ze garden of ze bear. Wharton!"

"Oh! Yes, sir," said the captain of the Remove.

"You talk viz yourself, isn't it?"

"No, sir. I was talking with Nugent," said Wharton demurely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You make one choke viz me, n'est-ce-pas?" said Monsieur Charpentier angrily. "You are one bad boy, Wharton!"

"Sorry, sir," said Wharton, colouring a little. "I really beg your pardon, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier was placated at once.

"C'est bien—c'est bien."

"What rot!" yawned Hazeldene, loud enough for the French master to hear.

But Mossoo decided not to hear that remark.

The French lesson pursued its accustomed course. At the back of the class a group of slackers talked, hardly subduing their voices, and gave little or no heed. A few fellows, like Mark Linley, gave attention because they really wanted to learn; other fellows gave attention from sheer good-nature,

because they regarded Mossoo as a good little ass, and tolerated him kindly. But most faces were bored, one fat face shining out as a rare exception. It was really a pleasure to see one thoroughly happy and satisfied face in class, and Mossoo, of course, was quite unaware that Bunter's beaming satisfaction was due to the letter from Uncle George now reposing in his pocket.

He discovered his mistake when he rewarded Bunter with his special attention.

Even the letter from Uncle George failed to make Bunter's fat face beam when he found that he was expected to work.

It was rotten, in Bunter's opinion. Not only was French rot in itself, but this was the last French set before the holidays, and therefore it was a sheer waste of energy to exert his fat intellect. In the holidays it was Bunter's happy custom to forget all that he had learned during the term, and he had a natural objection to burdening his podgy mind, at the last moment, as it were, with a lot more to forget. So William George Bunter was even more idle and obtuse than usual, and he soon had Mossoo in a frame of mind to tear his scanty hair.

"Mon Dieu!" said Monsieur Charpentier, when Bunter told him that "il fouettait ses chevaux" meant "he scratched his hair." "Mon Dieu! You are one such stupid garçon as never was before, Buntair. You shall not have prepare zis lesson."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Bunter. "I fairly swotted at it, sir. I worked at it with a wet towel round my head, sir."

"I believe you not, Buntair. You speak not truth, you are idle you are thick!" Mossoo meant dense, but in his excited moments his English bore a resemblance to Bunter's French. "Ecoutez! If you will not give your attention, you shall be detained. Now, I will give you one tres simple piece, and if you do not translate him on ze spot, I will demand of Monsieur Quelch zat you be detained one holiday."

Bunter groaned. Monsieur Charpentier proceeded to chalk up a "tres simple" sentence on the blackboard. Any fag in the Third Form could have translated it at a glance; but it was too much for Billy Bunter. The French master indicated it with the pointer.

"Voila! You traduce him, Buntair." "Avez vous l'argent de votre oncle?" mumbled Bunter.

"Traduce him!" snapped Mossoo.

"Avez vous—have you—" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, what's argent? I know it means something. I've come across it before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Drole!" hooted Monsieur Charpentier. "Have you the money of your uncle?"

"No, sir."

"Vat? Vat?"

"Not yet, sir," answered Bunter.

"Mon Dieu! Vat does zat stupid garçon mean?"

"It's coming, sir," explained Bunter. "I had a letter from him this morning, but the money wasn't in it. He's sending it later."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the whole class.

"Vat is it zat you say, Buntair?" shrieked Mossoo. "Is it zat you make one choke viz me?"

"Eh, no!" gasped Bunter. "You asked me if I had my uncle's money, sir, didn't you? I haven't got it yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, there's nothing to cackle at," said Bunter, in surprise.

"Ciel! Zere never was such a garçon!" groaned Monsieur Charpentier. "Zat which I say is ze traduction of ze sentence on ze blackboard."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in ze class! Buntair, I shall make one example of you. You are detained for Saturday afternoon, and you shall write out ze exercises in French. Now you may be silent."

"I—I say, sir—"

"Silence, mes garçons," said Monsieur Charpentier. A chuckle rang through the class. Crash! "Vat—vat is zat?" "Dropped! a book, sir," said Ogilvy. "Zat you stop to drop zings," said the French master. "I vill keep ordair here. Zere is mooch too mooch noise in zis class!"

(See Chapter 2.)



"Tais-toi!" hooted Monsieur Charpentier.

"Oh dear!"

Bunter was not sorry to be silent. Silence was not his strong point; but in class, at least, Bunter was always willing to be seen and not heard. But he was worried. Mossoo, in moments of wrath, often inflicted dire penalties which he forgot, or affected to forget, afterwards. But sometimes he remembered, and Bunter had a feeling that Mossoo would remember this time. Bunter did not want to be detained on Saturday afternoon. He expected to hear from Uncle George before Saturday, and on Saturday afternoon Bunter wanted to be free to expend some of his enormous wealth. His fat face no longer beamed, and he was looking very serious when the French set came to an end and the juniors trooped out of the class-room—to the equal relief of master and pupils.

"Mossoo's a beast!" muttered William George Bunter, as he rolled along the Remove passage. "It beats me why they didn't drown all Froggies at birth!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Great Expectations!

"I SAY, you fellows!" Billy Bunter put a fat face and a pair of glimmering spectacles in at the doorway of Study No. 1 in the Remove, where the Famous Five had gathered to tea.

A chuckle greeted him.

"Avez vous l'argent de votre oncle?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Having tea?" asked Bunter, as he rolled in. "I didn't know you had a spread here, but I don't mind joining you."

"Does it matter if anyone else minds?" inquired Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"The mindfulness is terrific, my esteemed and execrable Bunter!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky! I say, you fellows, I want you to come to my spread," said Bunter. "I'm standing a huge spread on Saturday, and I want all my friends to rally round me. Something a bit better than this," added Bunter, with a disparaging blink over the tea-table in Study No. 1. "You fellows don't do yourselves very well in this study. But, of course, you never get much in the way of remittances. Still, this isn't a bad cake."

"Glad you like it," said Harry Wharton sarcastically.

"Not like the cakes I get from Bunter Court, of course. Still, not bad. I'll help myself—don't bother." Bunter helped himself to half the cake. "Look here! It's a bit rotten that little beast Mossoo detaining me for Saturday, which I'd fixed for the spread. You see, I want to wind up the term with a really good thing—something for all my friends to remember in the Christmas holidays. When my magnificent present comes from Uncle George—"

"When!" murmured Nugent.

"The whenfulness is terrific!"

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"You heard what he said in his letter," said Bunter. "It can't be less than twenty pounds—more likely fifty. He's rolling in money, you know."

"We don't know!" pointed out Bob. "You know now I've told you. I say, you fellows, I've got to get off that detention. You might put in a word for me with Mossos, Wharton. He rather likes you—goodness knows why!"

"What I like about Bunter is his tactful way of asking a favour," remarked the captain of the Remove.

"Of course, you needn't mention that it's for a spread. Tell him I'm playing for the Remove in the last football match before we break up," suggested Bunter. "That ought to work the oracle. I could tell him, you know, but he mightn't believe me. It's a bit sickening for a master to doubt a fellow's word; but there you are. He's no gentleman. You won't forget to tell Mossos that, Wharton?"

"I rather think I shall," answered Harry, laughing.

"Don't be a rotter, you know. If I'm detained on Saturday, the spread is off."

"Is it on, if you're not?" grinned Bob.

"Certainly! I'm bound to hear from my uncle before Saturday."

"Et vous aurez l'argent de votre oncle—peut-être!" chuckled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With the accent on the peut-être!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, don't sling rotten French at a chap!" said Bunter testily. "We get enough of that in class. If you fellows aren't having any cake, I don't mind finishing it. You'll all come to the spread, won't you? I really want you to come. After all, we're pals, aren't we, though you've always treated me rather meanly."

The Famous Five watched Bunter as if mesmerised, as he disposed of the cake. That cake had been intended as wind up tea for five fellows. It was vanishing so rapidly that it really was a little difficult for the eye to follow it.

"I dare say you've got another cake in the cupboard, Wharton," Bunter remarked, with his mouth full.

"Wrong!"

"My hat! Is that all you had for tea in this study?"

"That was all."

"Must be beastly to be so hard up," said Bunter sympathetically. "I assure you I can feel for fellows whose people are too poor to send them anything decent in the way of tips. It's a bit difficult for me to realise it, you know, having so many wealthy relations myself, and always getting remittances. But I do feel for you. Measly feed! How the poor live, and all that! He, he, he!"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter.

"Well, I must be getting along. I've got to speak to Smithy," said Bunter. "I didn't come in to tea—lucky I didn't with such a measly spread, what? Hardly the sort of spread to ask a fellow to."

"The askiness was not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

Johnny Bull glanced round. It occurred to Bunter that he was looking round for a missile, and the fat junior rather hastily stepped into the Remove passage.

"Nice chap!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "How they must love him at home, and how glad one would be if they had him there!"

Heedless of the opinion of the Famous Five, Billy Bunter rolled along to Study No. 4, where he found the Bounder and Tom Redwing.

No. 4, where he found the Bounder and Tom Redwing.

"I say, you fellows, you're coming to the spread on Saturday?" asked Bunter, as he blinked into Study No. 4. "Terrific spread—everything of the best, and tons of it! I want you to come, Smithy! And, dash it all, you, too, Redwing! I'm no snob! You can come! I— Yaroooooh!"

There was half a loaf on the Bounder's tea-table. Vernon-Smith picked it up and hurled it with the same movement.

It landed with a crash on Bunter's watch-chain, and the fat junior sat down, with a roar.

According to the proverb, half a loaf is better than no bread. In the circumstances, however, William George Bunter most decidedly would have preferred no bread. He sat down and spluttered.

"Kick him out, Reddy!" said the Bounder.

"Certainly!"

Tom Redwing jumped up. Billy Bunter departed from Study No. 4 much more rapidly than he had departed from Study No. 1. The door slammed after him.

"Beast!" roared Bunter through the keyhole. "You jolly well shan't come to my spread now! You're a low, purse-proud rotter, Smithy, and you're a common, low longshoreman, Redwing, and I couldn't possibly have you!"

There was a sound of a chair moving, and Billy Bunter hurriedly departed from the door of Study No. 4. He vanished into No. 7, his own study. Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were at tea there, and Bunter sat down to the table, with a dissatisfied blink at what it held.

"Pretty measly tea!" he remarked.

"Tuckshop's not yet closed!" suggested Peter. "Cut down and get anything you like, old fat man!"

"Oh, really, Peter—"

"If you're not standing your whack, be glad of what you get, and shut up!" further suggested Peter.

"I happen to be short of money at the present moment, owing to a postal-order being delayed!" said Bunter, with dignity. "But I shall be rolling in it in a day or two, as you jolly well know. If you don't treat me decently, Peter, you can't expect to share when the remittance comes! I was going to ask you to my spread on Saturday."

"You're detained on Saturday, old bean, and I've got a sort of suspicion that your remittance may be detained too!" grinned Peter.

"Beast!"

"Et vous n'aurez pas l'argent de votre oncle!" chuckled Peter.

"Oh, cheese it!" grunted Bunter.

"I say, Peter, about getting me off detention on Saturday—that cad Wharton refuses to put in a word for me, after all I've done for him! You'd hardly think that when he first came to Greyfriars I was the chap who stood by him through thick and thin, would you?"

"Hardly!" agreed Peter. "In fact, not at all! Not the least little bit in the world!"

"So I did for you!" hooted Bunter. "I was kind to you, Peter; you can't say I wasn't. I never told you what I thought of the Head letting in a poor blighter of a solicitor's son into a school like this! Now, did I?"

"You did not," assented Peter. "You might have expected a kick if you had—just like you're getting now!"

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter. "Why, you cheeky beast— Yoop! Leave off kicking me, Peter Todd, or I'll mop up the study with you!"

"Go ahead!" grinned Peter.

Billy Bunter did not go ahead; he rolled out of Study No. 7.

In the passage he came on Fisher T. Fish.

"Say, kid!" called out Fishy.

Bunter glared at him.

"Go and eat coke!" he snarled.

"About that bob you owe me—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Bunter was not in a good temper, and he did not want to hear about that ancient bob. He had heard quite enough about that during several terms. That Billy Bunter had ever succeeded in borrowing a shilling from Fisher T. Fish was a very remarkable circumstance. Fishy never parted with money if he could help it, unless it was for value received, and Fishy always expected at least twice the value of the money he parted with, and even then it gave him a pang to part.

It was owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding that he had lent that shilling to Bunter; and he had never been able to collect the debt, and it had weighed on his mind for terms. It was very painful to Fisher Tarleton Fish to be done as he did others.

"You and your bob!" said Bunter contemptuously. "Go and eat coke! I've a jolly good mind to punch your nose!"

"I guess I was going to say—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Let a galoot speak!" urged Fisher T. Fish. "I was going to say—"

"Shut up!"

"I was going to say, don't you worry about that bob, Bunter."

"Eh?"

"Let it stand over!" said Fisher T. Fish generously. "Leave it till after the Christmas holidays, old scout! See?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter

Fisher T. Fish walked on, leaving the Owl of the Remove staring after him blankly. Bunter was absolutely astounded. When Fisher Tarleton Fish became indifferent to the sum of a shilling it was time for the skies to fall. But the explanation dawned on Bunter at last. It was the letter from Uncle George that had done it.

Bunter chuckled. Evidently there was at least one other fellow in the Remove as well as himself who believed in his great expectations.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Fishy Takes the Plunge!

BILLY BUNTER was very eager for the postman the following day.

Bunter generally blinked very keenly at the letter-rack in morning break, in the undying hope that his celebrated postal-order might have arrived.

Now he was keener than ever.

But the postman came and went, and there was nothing for the Owl of the Remove.

His long-expected postal-order was still delayed, and the magnificent present from Mr. George Bunter had not arrived.

Bunter turned away in disappointment, with a grunt. Really, Uncle George might have bucked up a little. He had stated plainly in his letter that he was sending that present to reach Bunter at school before Greyfriars broke up for the Christmas holidays. It was not long now to breaking-up. Bunter felt that his uncle might have got a move on. Great expectations were all very well in their way, but

Bunter would have preferred something a little more solid. A bird in hand was worth many in the bush.

"Avez vous l'argent de votre oncle?" asked Skinner, as Bunter grunted with dissatisfaction.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Combien d'argent votre oncle a-t-il?" went on Skinner humorously. "Dix centimes, ou peut-être vingt centimes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! You'll sing to a different tune when it comes!" said Bunter. "I jolly well shan't ask you to the spread, Skinner!"

"What a lot I shall miss—I don't think!" sighed Skinner.

"Oh, give your chin a rest, Skinner!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess it's coming all right. A galoot's uncle wouldn't write like that unless he was coughing up something handsome, it stands to reason."

Skinner chuckled. He admitted that Uncle George's letter might reasonably lead his nephew to expect something handsome. But

Skinner did not believe that there was anything handsome, in the financial line or any other, in the Bunter clan at all.

Fisher T. Fish, however, was giving the matter a great deal of thought. He walked away, with a wrinkle of reflection in his transatlantic brow.

Hitherto Fishy had looked on Bunter as a fat clam, a pesky mugwump, a gink who owed him a shilling and was insolvent. But he was realising now that Bunter was not, after all, such an all-fired geek as he had calculated.

That letter from Uncle George seemed the goods, to Fishy's calculating eye. No galoot would write a letter like that to his nephew at school without meaning business, unless he was plumb loco, in Fishy's opinion.

Bunter, the impecunious, Bunter who owed a bob, and could not or would not square, was one fellow; but Bunter on the eve of receiving a handsome sum in hard cash was quite another. Bunter without cash was only worthy of Fishy's derision; but Bunter with cash was a man whom Fishy delighted to honour. Fishy's thoughts ran wholly upon cash; he had never heard of anything else that was worth serious attention.

If Bunter was going to have a large sum in cash, it was certain that he would make the money fly; a fool and his money were soon parted, and there was no doubt that Bunter was a fool.

Even an invitation to his spread was something; it would save a fellow something at the tuckshop. But that was not all. Fisher T. Fish had things to sell—pocket-knives and cameras and other articles, which he had bought for next to nothing from fellows in a hard-up state. A duffer like Bunter was the very customer Fishy wanted to meet—if he had any money. With cash in hand—plenty of cash—Bunter might prove

an extremely valuable acquaintance to a businesslike galoot like Fishy.

But was there anything in it? That was the problem that worried Fisher T. Fish. He guessed that there was, but he could not be sure. He had gone so far, on mere spec, as to tell Bunter to let that ancient bob stand over. That had cost him a pang, but not a very deep pang, because that ancient bob was at best a very doubtful asset. But was it worth while to lend Bunter half-a-crown, to stand him a feed in Study No. 14? It would be more than worth while, if a big remittance from Uncle George was coming. But was it coming? The doubt was almost anguish to Fishy. There was still time to get on the right side of Bunter—to make a pal of him—to get in on the ground floor, as Fishy expressed it.

Once the cash had arrived, Bunter would have plenty of friends, so long as it lasted. Skinner & Co. would rally round him as one man. But the fellow who stood by him while he was impecunious would obviously be in a better

said Fisher T. Fish eagerly. "It cost Wilkinson of the Fourth two guineas."

"How much did it cost you?" grinned Bob.

"I guess that cuts no ice," answered Fishy. "I'm selling it cheap. You can have it for thirty bob, Cherry."

"You really want to part with that camera?" asked Bob.

"Sure."

"Well, I want one," said Bob. "If you're giving it away as a Christmas present—"

"What?" yelled Fisher T. Fish. He seemed quite thunderstruck at the suggestion that he might be giving anything away.

"I'll take it off your hands," said Bob cheerily. "I've always wanted a camera."

"You pesky gink!" said Fisher T. Fish in disgust. "Don't you give me any of your little jokes. You can have that camera for twenty-seven-and-six."

"Not as a Christmas present?"

"Nope!" roared Fisher T. Fish.

"Then you can keep it, old bean; or, better still, give it back to the owner," suggested Bob.

"Oh, come off!" growled Fisher T. Fish, realising that Bob had been pulling his Transatlantic leg. "Look here, you geeks. I wanted to ask you about Bunter. You've been home with that fat clam?"

"We have had that terrific and distinguished honour," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, I guess you kept your eyes open," said Fishy. "Has he really got any rich relations? Is there anything in that letter he had, or is it only gas?"

The Famous Five looked at Fisher T. Fish. Why the youth from New York was interested in Bunter and his relations rather

puzzled them for a moment or two. But they very soon guessed. A glimmer of fun came into Bob Cherry's eyes.

"You heard Bunter read that letter out?" he asked.

"Yep."

"Well doesn't it speak for itself?" said Bob. "It sounded to me as if Uncle George was fairly rolling in oof."

Bob's chum stared at him for a moment, and then they caught on.

"Millionaire, I should say," remarked Johnny Bull.

"I hardly think a man would send fifty pounds to a kid at school, as Bunter expects," remarked Harry Wharton gravely. "More likely twenty."

"Much more likely," murmured Nugent.

"I don't see how it could be less than a tenner," said Bob. "Your bob will be safe, Fishy."

"My esteemed chums, there is the excellent Bunter," exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Let us speak to the esteemed and admirable Bunter."

"Come on," said Bob.

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Christmas 1927



And may it be a Merry One for all "Magnetites."

position to profit by the big remittance when it came. That was clear. Only friendship with Bunter was expensive. That was clear, too, and that was what got Fishy's goat.

It really was a very painful state of dubiety. Fisher T. Fish remembered that he had heard that Harry Wharton & Co. had been home with Bunter. They were the galoots who ought to know whether there was likely to be anything in it. Fisher T. Fish, thirsting for information, bore down on the Famous Five in the quad.

"Say, you ginks—" said Fishy agreeably.

Harry Wharton & Co. were discussing a football match that was to come off on Saturday, but they politely suspended that discussion and gave Fisher T. Fish their attention.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You've got a camera to sell, I hear?" said Bob Cherry.

"Yep!" Fisher T. Fish forgot Bunter for the moment. "Some camera, I'll tell the world. You want a camera, Cherry?"

"I do—I does," assented Bob.

"I can recommend that camera."

And leaving Fisher T. Fish quite abruptly, the Famous Five rushed across to greet Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Got that whacking remittance from Uncle George, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Not yet," answered Bunter. "It's coming, of course."

"Don't forget your old pals when it comes," said Bob, with great gravity. "We've always been friends, haven't we, Bunter?"

"We have always regarded the execrable Bunter as the esteemed apple of our eye," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You fellows have often heard me say what a nice chap Bunter was," observed Johnny Bull.

"It would make Bunter blush if he knew all we'd said about him," said Bob. "Let's know when that letter comes, Bunter. Remember your old pals."

"Jolly friendly all of a sudden, ain't you?" sneered Bunter. "You can be jolly civil now you know I'm going to have a lot of tin. Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

"Oh, Bunter!"

"Dear old chap!"

"Billy, old fellow——"

"Yah!" was Bunter's elegant rejoinder. And he rolled away, with his fat little nose in the air.

Fisher T. Fish was after him like a shot. Fisher T. Fish had heard enough. If it was worth the while of the Famous Five to suck up to Bunter in this way, obviously it was worth Fisher T. Fish's while. His doubts were resolved now. The fellows who knew Bunter's people evidently believed in the great expectations, and that was enough for Fisher T. Fish.

Five minutes later Fishy was seen walking arm-in-arm with Billy Bunter, and their footsteps led them in the direction of the school shop.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched them with much interest.

"Buns for Bunter," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder what that giddy letter from Bunter's uncle really meant, though?" said Bob thoughtfully. "He can't really be getting any cash, because there isn't any cash in the Bunter family."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there's no reason why Fishy shouldn't stand him buns. I'm afraid Fishy is on the make, you men," said Bob, with a shake of the head.

"Just a few!" chuckled Nugent.

"But it will do him good to part with a little money. A thoroughly new experience is good for any fellow."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled the Co.

When the Remove came into Form Fisher T. Fish walked in with Bunter. There was a smear of jam on Bunter's fat face, and he was evidently on the friendliest terms with Fishy. Keeping a smiling face over his inward anguish, Fishy had expended no less than eighteenpence on tarts and ginger-pop for Bunter. It was a sprat to catch a whale; and though Fishy was sure of the whale now, it gave him a pain to part with the sprat. Skinner & Co. eyed them, rather thoughtfully and suspiciously. If a keen, cute, business-like youth like Fishy believed in Bunter's expectations, to the extent of standing treat at the school shop, it dawned on Skinner & Co. that there might be something in it. When the Remove came out of Form Skinner & Co. made it a point to be very civil to Bunter.

William George Bunter was feeling

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very bucked that day. His enormous remittance had not yet arrived, but he was making friends fast.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Feed with Fishy!

"A VEZ-VOUS——"
"L'argent——"
"De votre oncle?"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

That absurd sentence seemed to have caught on among the Removites. Quite a number of them fired it at him, as it were, when the Owl of the Remove looked for letters by the afternoon's post. There were no letters yet for Bunter; the enormous remittance had still not arrived. And some of the Remove fellows seemed to find entertainment in that circumstance, apparently discerning some resemblance between that present from Uncle George and the celebrated postal-order which Bunter was perpetually expecting.

"Trouvez-vous l'argent de votre oncle?" chuckled Squiff.

"L'oncle a oublié d'envoyer l'argent, encore une fois!" chortled Tom Brown.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On trouvera jamais l'argent de son oncle!" said Peter Todd, shaking his head.

"Mais c'est son oncle qui va se rouler dans l'or!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monsieur Charpentier would have been pleased and gratified had he heard his pupils doing these French exercises all of their own accord. Billy Bunter was neither pleased nor gratified, and he rolled disdainfully away, leaving the juniors laughing.

"Ou est l'argent de ton oncle?" yelled Bolsover major after him.

"Cet argent n'existe pas!" chortled Hazeldene.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you take any notice of that rot, Bunter!" said Skinner to the Owl of the Remove, in the passage. "Just envy, that's all, old chap."

Bunter nodded. Evidently Harold Skinner was beginning to believe that the enormous remittance was a possibility, at least.

"I say, Skinner, old chap——"

"Yes, old fellow?" said Skinner amiably.

"I'm a bit short of cash till I get that remittance from my uncle——"

"Coming!" called out Skinner. And he hurried away in response to an imaginary call.

Skinner's faith was not yet strong enough to make him feel justified in lending Bunter anything. Civility cost nothing; but shillings and half-crowns were shillings and half-crowns.

Bunter gave a snort and rolled on. But his fat face cleared as he came on Fisher T. Fish.

Fishy's faith was strong, as he had already proved.

The little joke of the Famous Five had completely taken in the cute and businesslike junior from New York.

Fishy was so exceedingly smart, so exceedingly spry, that he sometimes took himself in with his own wonderful sharpness.

Fishy was always on the make; and he had a deep and fixed conviction that everybody else was always on the make. But for that fixed belief, Fishy might have known that Harry Wharton & Co. would never have dreamed of "sucking up" to any fellow because he had money.

Any fellow less cute and spry and smart and sceptical of human nature than Fisher T. Fish would have

tumbled to the fact that the chums of the Remove had been pulling his leg and had affected to be impressed by Bunter's coming wealth simply to take a rise out of the Yankee junior.

But Fishy was not at all surprised, as any other fellow would have been, to see them "after" Bunter for his money; it was what he would have expected of them, or any other fellows. So he had fallen blindly into the trap. He was absolutely convinced now that the cash was coming, believing that the fellows who knew Bunter's people believed so.

Fisher T. Fish greeted Bunter with an amicable grin. He was really feeling friendly. All the cordiality of which Fishy was capable was brought to the surface by the thought of money.

"Just the galoot I've been looking for," said Fishy, linking a bony arm in Bunter's fat one. "You haven't had your tea yet?"

"Not yet," admitted Bunter.

"Then you're jolly well going to tea with me!" said Fishy. "Don't say no, old chap!"

Bunter had no intention of saying no. He never gave an answer in the negative to an invitation of that sort.

"I know a lot of fellows are always asking you to tea," went on Fishy, with a slight cough. "But you must come to my study this time, Bunter. I insist upon it, old fellow!"

"Well, if you make a point of it, Fishy——"

"I guess I do, just a few! Six o'clock in Study No. 14," said Fisher T. Fish. "You won't be late, old chap?"

"No fear—I mean, I'll try to give you a look-in at six!"

"Right-ho!"

Fisher T. Fish paid a visit to the school shop next. Judging by the expression on his face when he arrived there he might have been paying a visit to the dentist's.

He was casting his bread upon the waters, with the confident expectation of seeing it come back buttered.

But it was a painful operation.

Having Bunter to tea, if the fat junior was to be satisfied, was not a light matter.

It entailed expenditure; and Fishy hated expenditure.

He almost groaned as he gave his orders to Mrs. Mumble.

Keenly as he desired to propitiate Bunter, it was difficult for Fisher T. Fish to screw up his courage to sticking-point. It was useless to offer Bunter a few sardines and a shilling cake. Bunter had a healthy appetite—an appetite that it almost terrified Fishy to think of, in the circumstances.

Bunter, who was careless with money—especially when he hadn't any—had already agreed to buy a camera from Fishy, the camera which had cost Wilkinson of the Fourth two guineas new, and Fisher T. Fish ten shillings secondhand. That alone made Bunter worth Fishy's while; and then there was the great spread, at which all Bunter's friends were to figure. If Bunter was in great funds, that spread was certain to be on a lavish scale: a guest with an eye to business would not only be able to fill himself up to the chin, but slip a few unconsidered trifles into his pocket, to save expenditure for tea the next day.

Bunter, undoubtedly, was worth cultivating, and the most effective way of cultivating Bunter was to feed him. Fishy knew it, and he was assured that every shilling he expended on Bunter would come back in the shape of half-a-crown, at least. Still, it was painful to part.

But, with heroic resolution, Fishy parted.

It was quite a handsome spread that Fisher T. Fish conveyed to Study No. 14 in the Remove. Johnny Bull and Squiff, who had the doubtful honour of sharing that study with Fishy, stared at the parcels he landed on the study table.

"Hallo! You standing a spread?" exclaimed Johnny Bull, in astonishment.

"Time you did!" remarked Squiff. "It's never too late to mend, Fishy! We were going along to Study No. 1, but—"

"Don't let me stop you!" said Fisher T. Fish hastily.

"Eh? Isn't that a spread?"

"I've got a man coming to tea," answered Fisher T. Fish, "If you galoots don't mind, I'd be sure glad if you'd tea out."

"You've asked a man to tea?"

"Yep!"

"Fan me!" murmured Squiff.

"Hold me while I faint!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Oh, come off!" growled Fisher T. Fish. "Absquatulate, do, and don't be funny! Shut the door after you!"

Johnny Bull and Sampson Quincy Ifley Field left the study, laughing. It was absolutely unheard-of for Fisher T. Fish to ask a fellow to tea; Fishy did not like spending money even on himself, and spending it on anybody else appeared to him the height of folly. Only for a very powerful motive could Fishy be breaking the record like this.

Squiff and Johnny Bull went into Study No. 1, where the rest of the Co. had gathered.

"Fishy's got a man to tea!" announced Johnny Bull.

"Impossible!"

"Terrifically impossible!"

"What ass said that the age of miracles was past?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows," Billy Bunter blinked in at the doorway. "Don't think I've come to tea—I can't stand your measly teas in this study! I'm going to tea with a friend up the passage!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

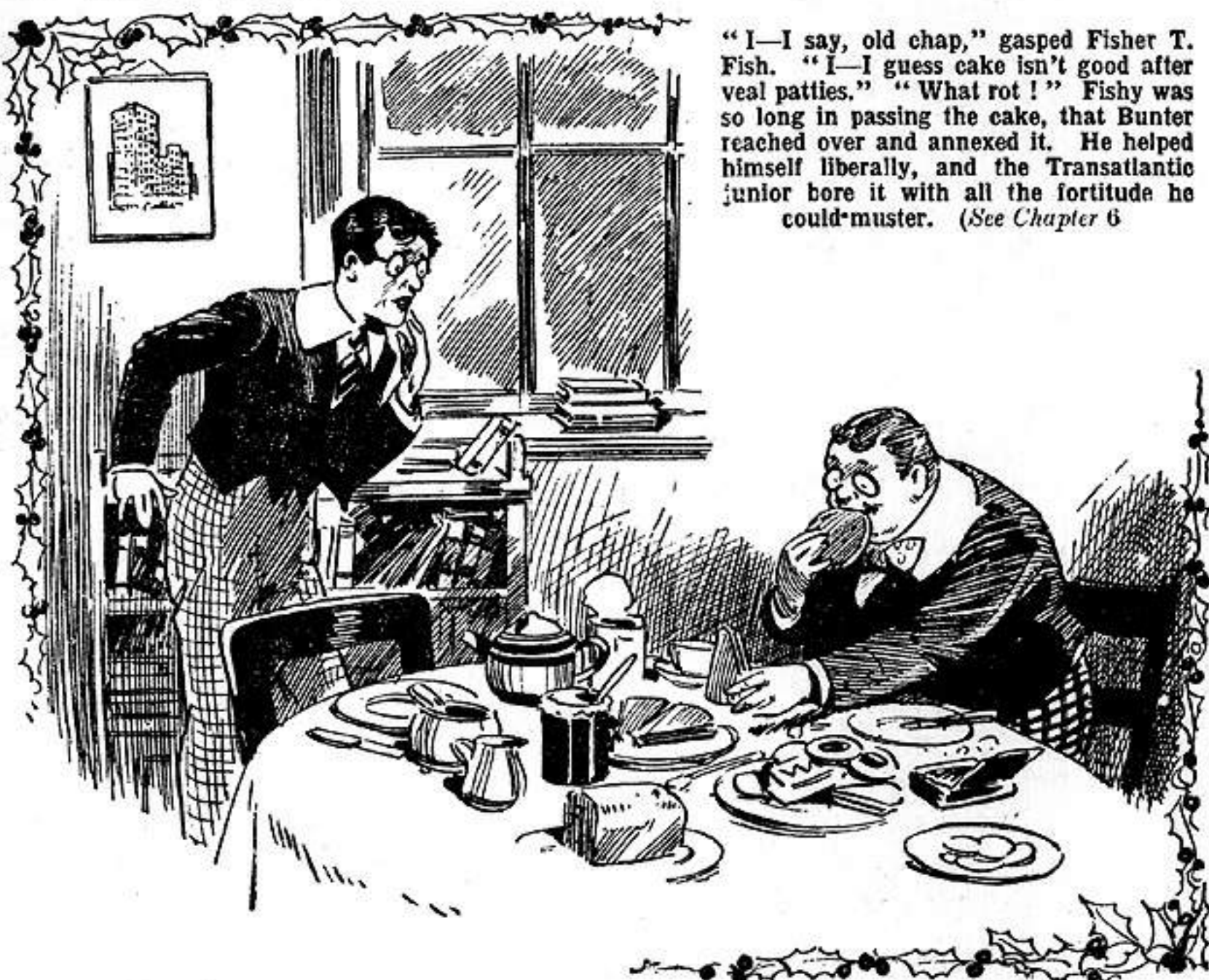
"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "Some fellows know how to treat a fellow decently. If you want me to tea in this study, you'll have to spring something a bit decent. When my big remittance comes, I shall treat fellows as they've treated me. That's a tip. I may be able to come to tea with you to-morrow. I can't say for certain—I've so many engagements. I'll try."

"Kick him, somebody!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Avez vous l'argent de votre oncle?" demanded Bob Cherry. "Ou est-il vrai que cet argent n'existe pas?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"I—I say, old chap," gasped Fisher T. Fish. "I—I guess cake isn't good after veal patties." "What rot!" Fishy was so long in passing the cake, that Bunter reached over and annexed it. He helped himself liberally, and the Transatlantic junior bore it with all the fortitude he could muster. (See Chapter 6)

"Don't be cheeky!" said Bunter darkly. "I can tell you that if you're cheeky, you won't get a look-in when my big remittance comes!"

"Won't you be pally if I chuck this cushion at you?" asked Bob.

"Eh? No, you ass."

"That does it, then."

And the cushion flew.

"Yaroooh! You cheeky rotter, I'm done with you now!" roared Bunter.

"I'm done with the lot of you!"

And Bunter departed in wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. sat down to tea in Study No. 1, seemingly not in the least disconcerted by the fact that Billy Bunter had done with them. In fact, the only fault they had to find with that state of affairs was, that it was too good to be true.

in the preparation of that feed. Parting with a shilling cost Fishy a pang, so that spread on the table represented seven pangs and a half, as it had cost Fishy seven-and-sixpence. He had nourished a faint hope that Bunter, for once, might not be ravenously hungry, and that there might be something left after his guest had departed. But that hope had been very faint, and such as it was, it died a sudden death as he saw Bunter glance over the table.

Fishy had already suffered severely in parting with the cash for that spread. Now he had to suffer again in seeing it devoured under his eyes. Really it was a day of suffering for Fishy, and he felt like a member of the noble army of martyrs.

"Tuck in, old fellow," said Fishy, suppressing a groan.

"What-ho!" grinned Bunter.

He proceeded to tuck in.

That his appetite was in its usual robust state was soon evident. The more solid portion of the spread vanished at a great rate. Fishy watched him with almost haggard eyes.

Fisher T. Fish ate little himself. Bunter's appetite had the effect of taking Fishy's appetite away.

"I say, this isn't a bad spread, old fellow," said Bunter, with his mouth full.

"Glad you like it," faltered Fishy.

"You ain't half so mean as the fellows make out, you know," said Bunter agreeably.

"Oh!" said Fishy.

"The fellows think it gives you a pain to give away an aniseed ball," remarked Bunter.

"D-d-do they?"

"Yes. Now, this is quite a good spread," said Bunter.

"Sure you've had enough?" gasped Fishy.

"Eh? No fear! Shove the cake over this way."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Put to the Torture!

"TROT in, old chap!" said Fisher T. Fish, with effusive hospitality.

Billy Bunter trotted in.

"I hope you've brought a good appetite with you, old fellow," said Fisher T. Fish, departing a little from the strict truth.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter. "The fact is, I've had nothing since dinner and—"

"Oh!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Except a few tarts and a bun and a packet of toffee and a pie, you know. So I'm pretty sharp set."

"Sit down, old scout," said Fishy, with a diminution of enthusiasm which he really could not help.

Bunter sat down.

He blinked over the festive board through his big spectacles, and was satisfied with what he saw.

Fisher T. Fish had undoubtedly spread himself to an uncommon extent

Fisher T. Fish hesitated over the cake. He meant to be hospitable; he was determined to be hospitable. He was resolved to send Bunter contented away, even if the fat clam wolfed the whole of the spread. But the sight of the good things vanishing at this rate was more than flesh and blood could bear.

"I—I say, old chap, don't overdo it!" gasped Fishy. "I—I guess cake isn't good after veal patties."

"What rot!"

Fishy was so slow in passing the cake that Bunter reached over and annexed it. He helped himself liberally, and Fisher T. Fish bore it with all the fortitude he could muster.

The cake disappeared. Where Bunter put it all was something of a mystery, but he must have put it somewhere. It went.

Having demolished the cake, the Owl of the Remove looked round, like Alexander of old, for fresh worlds to conquer.

The supply was thinning out now.

Fisher T. Fish had eaten almost nothing. But even so, he began to doubt whether there would be enough for Bunter.

As for the hope of saving anything from the wreck, that was entirely gone now—gone from Fishy's gaze like a beautiful dream.

"Well, if you're finished, old chap, I'll—"

"Not at all," said Bunter cheerfully. "I'll try the tarts, old chap. Shove them this way."

Lingeringly Fisher T. Fish passed the tarts.

They were soon out of sight.

Nothing remained now but a packet of chocolates and a bag of whipped-cream walnuts. Fishy hoped desperately that Bunter would overlook them. It was a delusive hope.

Bunter started on the chocolates.

He did not waste much time in conversation. His jaws were too busy for idle speech. The chocolates vanished.

"Any more tarts, old fellow?" asked Bunter.

"Nope!" gasped Fishy.

"Another cake?"

"Oh dear! Nope."

"What's in that bag?"

"Cream walnuts," gasped Fisher T. Fish. "But—but—but I'm afraid they ain't quite fresh, Bunter."

"Let's see."

Fisher T. Fish suppressed his feelings and tendered the bag of whipped-cream walnuts for Bunter's examination.

His fear that they were not quite fresh proved to be unfounded. At all events, they were fresh enough for Bunter.

One by one they disappeared.

Fisher T. Fish watched them as they went with a fascinated gaze. When the last one had gone Fisher T. Fish heaved a deep sigh.

Bunter blinked round the table. It was bare now, save for the crockery. There was nothing of an edible nature on the table, save a few lumps of sugar left in the sugar basin. Fishy's guest helped himself to those lumps of sugar.

Fisher T. Fish had wondered sometimes what people felt like when they were put to torture. He knew now. He knew what those ancient pioneers in his own country must have felt like when the Indians bound them to the stake. Only this was worse than that!

Bunter rose to his feet.

He was going.

There was a certain amount of pleasure in seeing Bunter go. But that

pleasure was turned into pain by the reflection of what Bunter was taking away inside him.

"Thanks for the feed, old bean!" said Bunter carelessly.

"G-g-glad you liked it," moaned Fisher T. Fish.

"On, it was all right!" said Bunter indifferently. "Not like the spread I'm standing on Saturday, of course." He gave a last blink round the table to make assurance doubly sure that there was nothing left uneaten. "Well, I must be going now—some friends expecting me, you know."

And Bunter rolled out of Study No. 14.

Fisher T. Fish sat where he was, and gazed at the table that had been so effectually cleared, and wiped the perspiration from his brow. When Johnny Bull and Squiff came back to the study they found Fisher T. Fish still sitting there limply, gazing at the ruin with lack-lustre eyes. Like Rachel of old, Fisher Tarleton Fish mourned for that which was gone, and could not be comforted.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Present from Uncle George!

"FOR Bunter?"

"Yes."

"At last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Roll up, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter rolled up.

It was Saturday morning, and in break the juniors were looking for the postman.

There was something for Bunter.

Friday had passed without anything arriving for the Owl of the Remove, and Billy Bunter was beginning to feel decidedly ratty with his Uncle George. The pleasures of expectation had palled on him; and he was strongly of opinion that it was high time that the magnificent present put in an appearance. It was bound to come; Mr. George Bunter had stated that it was coming, and he could not have spoken idly. No doubt Bunter was feeling grateful to his Uncle George for remembering him at Christmastide. But he was feeling annoyed, too—perhaps more annoyed than grateful. Really, it was time that Uncle George played up. Now, at long last, he had played up.

Bunter came rolling along at a great speed as Bob Cherry's shout reached his ears. His little round eyes gleamed behind his glasses.

"Is it there?" he gasped.

"Something for you, Bunter."

"Oh, good!"

"Maintenant, vous aurez l'argent de votre oncle!" grinned Peter Todd.

"Hand it down, you fellows!"

Bob Cherry handed it down.

It was a small packet, tied with string, and addressed to William George Bunter in the handwriting of his Uncle George.

Bunter blinked at the little parcel.

Evidently this was "it."

But it was not quite what Bunter had looked for.

Obviously, it was not a stack of banknotes. The most careless uncle would have registered a consignment of banknotes. And this parcel was not registered. A cheque, certainly, did not require to be sent by registered post; but then a cheque could have been sent in an ordinary envelope, not in a parcel. Really, the whole thing was a puzzle.

Bunter turned it over in his fat hands.

Judging by the size and feel of the parcel, it contained a small book; but that, of course, was impossible. His munificent uncle could scarcely be sending him a book.

"This—this can't be it!" ejaculated Bunter, blinking at the parcel in surprise and dismay.

"That's the same fist that was on your letter the other day!" grinned Skinner.

"Yes; it's from Uncle George," said Bunter. "But—"

"Open it!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Open it, you fat clam! See what's inside, you jay!"

Fishy's voice was husky.

If this was the long-promised present from Uncle George, it did not look as if it took the form of cash or anything very valuable. The idea that he had been "done," after all, made Fishy feel quite faint.

Suppose it was, after all, a catch; suppose it was spoofo; suppose Fisher T. Fish had expended seven-and-sixpence on Bunter for nothing! The thought was agony.

Bunter would not be able to buy that camera, or any of the other articles Fishy had intended to land on him. He would not even be able to stand the promised spread; even that small consolation would be wanting. There would be nothing—absolutely nothing—to show for the expenditure of seven-and-six in hard cash! Fisher T. Fish had guessed that he had reached the limit of human suffering when he had seen Bunter clear the table in Study No. 14; but he realised now that things could be worse. There were deeper depths of misery, and Fisher T. Fish was now sounding them.

"Open it!" he gasped.

"Turn out the wads of notes, old fat pippin!" chuckled Skinner. "Laissons voir l'argent de votre oncle."

Bunter unfastened the string.

He unwrapped the brown paper.

Perhaps up to the last moment he nourished a hope that his uncle might have been so careless as to send him banknotes in a parcel.

If so, that hope evaporated now.

The parcel contained a little book; as all the fellows had already guessed from its outward appearance.

There was not even a letter with it. Just the book—and a small one at that!

Bunter gazed at it.

With trembling fat fingers he opened it.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast; and Bunter may have hoped to find a banknote slipped among the leaves, or at the very least a single solitary currency note.

But there was nothing.

His uncle had sent him a book—after that letter which had raised such extravagant hopes, he had sent him a book—a shilling volume!

Bunter read the title without interest. "A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens.

Bunter had never even heard of that famous book before. He was not in the slightest degree interested in Charles Dickens, or in Christmas Carols; so far from wanting that volume, he would willingly have consigned all Christmas Carols to the dickens!

He gazed at it.

On the title-page was written, in the well-known hand of his esteemed avuncular relative:

"To my Nephew, William George Bunter."

Obviously, this was the long-expected Christmas present from Uncle George. Underneath was written:

"Read, and reflect."

This seemed to indicate that Uncle George supposed that his nephew, William George Bunter, might derive some benefit from the perusal of the work by Charles Dickens.

Bunter gazed, and gazed, his fat jaw dropping, his eyes large and round behind his big glasses.

"So that's all?" sniggered Snoop.

"Uncle George must have gone specially to the bank, and taken a lorry with him, to get out enough cash for that Christmas present!" remarked Skinner.

"Must have cost a bob!" observed Bolsover major.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter groaned.

His groan was echoed by Fisher T. Fish.

It was a frightful disappointment for Bunter. But it was worse than that for Fisher T. Fish.

Bunter had only lost his expectations. Fishy had lost seven-and-six!

Seven shillings and a sixpence had to be counted as a dead loss; and the loss of seven teeth could hardly have distressed Fishy more.

"That's a jolly good book, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, by way of comfort.

Groan!

"Might do Bunter a lot of good to read it!" chuckled Bolsover major.

"He might turn good like Scrooge."

"Not likely!" said Skinner.

"Bunter's a bit tougher than old Scrooge."

Groan!

A bony hand fell on Bunter's shoulder. A bony face glared into his fat countenance.

"Is that all?" hissed Fisher T. Fish.

Groan!

"You fat mugwump! You've taken me in!"

"You've taken yourself in, Fishy!" said Bob, with a chuckle. "Serve you jolly well right!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. "There—there's some mistake, of course. Uncle George has sent me the wrong present—he must have meant this for some other nephew—Sammy, perhaps. Of course, this can't be what he meant for me. It's all a mistake."

"Oh!" said Fisher T. Fish. A faint hope revived in his Transatlantic breast.

"I'll jolly well get my uncle on the phone, and ask him!" exclaimed Bunter. "If my money has gone astray, the sooner it's looked for the better. I'll ask Quelch to let me use his phone."

Bunter jammed the book into his pocket, and rolled away towards his Form master's study. He left most of the fellows grinning. Only Bunter believed that there had been a mistake, and that there was still an enormous remittance to come from Uncle George. But Billy Bunter was clinging to that belief like a drowning man to a straw.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Not a Mistake!

MR. QUELCH glanced sharply at Bunter.

He did not seem glad to see him in his study doorway.

In morning break, the Remove fellows were relieved of their Form master, and the Form master naturally expected to be relieved of the Remove fellows.

"If you please, sir—" began Bunter.

Mr. Quelch raised his hand.

"If you have come here to speak about your detention this afternoon, Bunter, you may save your breath," he said coldly. "Monsieur Charpentier has complained very seriously of your idleness and inattention, and, from my own knowledge of you, I am only too well aware that his complaint is well founded. You are detained until five o'clock, Bunter."

"I—I—I—"

"That will do, Bunter! Monsieur Charpentier is preparing some exercises for you in French irregular verbs. You will go into the Form-room at half-past two."

"I—I want to telephone, sir," gasped Bunter.

"What?"

"Tut-tut-telephone."

"You do not mean to imply, Bunter, that you have the impudence to come here and ask permission to use my telephone!"

"If—if—if you please, sir—" stammered Bunter.

"You may leave my study, Bunter."

"A lot of money—"

"What?"



Here's a caricature of Mr. Shields, who illustrates the Greyfriars stories in the MAGNET. Mr. Shields is acknowledged to be one of the cleverest artists in the Amalgamated Press, and he's a very busy man. But he's not too busy to wish you chaps "A Merry Christmas." We wish him one, too, don't we?

"A lot of money has been lost in the post—"

"Nonsense!"

"It's true, sir!" gasped Bunter. "My Uncle George was sending me a lot of money, sir, and the wrong letter's come, and I'm afraid it's been lost in the post, sir. I—I want to tell my uncle, sir, so—so—"

Mr. Quelch looked at him grimly and doubtfully.

"If you are sure of this, Bunter—"

"Oh, yes, sir. My uncle wrote that it was coming, and now the wrong letter's come, and—and it may be lost if—"

"In that case, you may use the telephone."

"T-t-thank you, sir!"

Bunter staggered to the telephone. Mr. Quelch still regarded him rather suspiciously. Bunter rang up the exchange and gave his uncle's number. Mr. George Bunter was a City gentleman, and was always at home on Saturdays, so William George had no doubt of getting through to him. He was not disappointed; Mr. George Bunter was at home.

"Billy speaking, from Greyfriars," said Bunter into the transmitter. "Is that you, Uncle George?"

"Your uncle speaking. For what pos-

sible reason can you have called me up on the telephone?" demanded Mr. George Bunter testily.

"About the mistake—"

"What mistake?"

"My Christmas present, uncle."

"What? What mistake is there?" asked Mr. George Bunter. "Have you not received what I sent you?"

"Ye-e-es; but—"

"There was some little delay in obtaining the book," said Mr. George Bunter. "I did not care to pay two shillings for so small a volume; but after some delay I discovered a shilling edition."

Bunter gasped.

"If you have now received it safely what do you mean by mistake?" demanded Uncle George.

"Oh, dear! It's a book—"

"Exactly!"

"Some rot written by some beast named Dickens—"

"A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens," said Uncle George. "Did I not tell you, in my letter, that I had selected your Christmas present with a very careful view to your needs?"

"Ye-e-es," gasped Bunter. "I—I thought—"

"I desire you to read that book, William, very carefully," said Uncle George. "Peruse it with the greatest attention, and you may, as I stated in my letter, derive great benefit from it and find it an inestimable treasure."

"Oh, dear!"

"In that book," went on Uncle George, "is portrayed the character of a mean, selfish, self-centred man—your character precisely, William."

"Eh?"

"Dickens explains how, under the influence of Christmastide, this mean and selfish man turned to better thoughts," went on Mr. George Bunter. "You will read how this man, Scrooge, began to think of others, how he realised his own selfish faults and amended them. I am not without hope, William, that you may do likewise."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You are doubtless aware, William, that you are absolutely selfish—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"That you never give a thought to others—"

"I—I say—"

"That you disgust your relatives by a base and undivided attention to your own selfish interests—"

"Oh!"

"Read and reflect," said Mr. George Bunter, kindly. "No doubt, William, you would have preferred me to send you a present in money."

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter.

"Or a motor-cycle—"

"Yes! Yes!"

"I have no doubt of it. Yet this book, if you derive from it the lesson it can teach, will be worth more to you than a large sum of money, or a whole fleet of motor-bicycles. Read it, William, ponder upon it, absorb its lesson, and become a better boy."

"Ow!"

"Good-bye, William!"

"I—I—I say, uncle—" shrieked Bunter.

But it was useless to shriek into the transmitter. Mr. George Bunter had rung off.

Bunter stood and gazed at the telephone, quite overcome. There was no mistake in the matter; he knew that now. His uncle had really played this sorry trick on him; the "inestimable treasure" he had been promised was the amendment of his own character, the benefit he was to derive from Uncle George's Christmas present was his own.

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improvement! Bunter's feelings were too deep for words.

"Bunter!"

"Ow! Yes, sir!" groaned Bunter.

"Have you finished telephoning?"

"Yes, sir," groaned Bunter.

"Then kindly leave my study."

"Oh, dear!"

Bunter kindly left the study.

At the end of the passage a crowd of Remove fellows were waiting for him. The Remove were quite interested in Bunter's Christmas present from his Uncle George. Bunter had talked so much of his great expectations that the fellows were naturally interested when those great expectations materialised.

"All serene, old fat bean?" asked Peter Todd.

Groan!

"Was it a mistake?" asked Fisher T. Fish, eagerly.

"Ow! No! Ow!"

"Oh, jumping Jehosaphat! You're getting nothing but a god-darned bob book from your pesky uncle?"

"Ow! Yes! Ow!"

"The benighted mugwump!" yelled Fisher T. Fish. "What do you mean by it? What the thump do you mean by it? What the—"

Fisher T. Fish was interrupted.

Bunter's fat face was so hopelessly woebegone that all the fellows felt sympathetic. Bunter had not been exactly nice while he was revelling in his great expectations. But he was down on his luck now—deep down, and even Skinner forbore to gibe. Only Fisher T. Fish, driven to exasperation by the loss—the dead loss—of seven-and-sixpence, raged with fury. But the Famous Five interrupted Fishy. They collared the exasperated, bony youth from New York and lifted him off the floor, and bore him away in the frog's march; and Fisher T. Fish forgot even the appalling loss of seven-and-sixpence as he went.

Billy Bunter rolled away dismally.

He was in the depths of woe.

His great expectations had materialised at last—in the form of a shilling volume, to which Bunter attached no value whatever. He did not even think of making an attempt to derive from it the benefit which Uncle George hoped he might derive from it. In third lesson that morning Billy Bunter sat with a fat face that was the picture of dismal woe, and in his pocket reposed the present from Uncle George, unheeded and forgotten.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Reads and Reflects!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were playing football that afternoon. It was the last football match before breaking up, and, naturally, the chums of the Remove gave all their thoughts to it, even to the extent of forgetting William George Bunter and his uncommon woes. When Billy Bunter rolled into the Form-room for his detention at half-past two he rolled unregarded.

Monsieur Charpentier had prepared some nice little exercises in French irregular verbs for Bunter. Mr. Quelch set Bunter to the task and warned him that if he left the Form-room before five o'clock he would be flogged. Then the Owl of the Remove was left to the irregular verbs.

Verbs, regular or irregular, never had appealed to Bunter. He hated them in English, he loathed them in French. Of all the nine parts of speech, there was not one that Bunter liked. Certainly he did not hate grammar quite so bit-

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terly as he hated maths. But his animosity towards it was deep. Gladly would Bunter have consigned all grammar, English and French, and Latin to the bottom of the sea, and it is much to be feared that he would have been willing to consign all grammarians to the same place.

Instead, therefore, of devoting his attention to the French exercises, Bunter sat and groused.

He had not recovered from his disappointment yet. His feelings towards his kind Uncle George were not those of an affectionate nephew just at present. No doubt Uncle George was right in thinking that William George Bunter might have derived more benefit from the careful perusal of "A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens, than from a large remittance in cash. But William George did not see it. William George was just the fellow to benefit by the careful perusal of that excellent story. That he needed improvement as much as Scrooge did was quite certain—everybody but Bunter himself was aware of that.

Bunter himself could see no room for improvement. Everybody else could see lots. Bunter's opinion was that his uncle was doing the Christmas present on the cheap, and adding insult to injury by throwing in a moral lecture. If he had been going to send Bunter a book he might, at least, have sent him one of those fat, gilt-edged volumes such as other fellows' uncles and aunts sent them—one of those handsome, unreadable, ten-shilling volumes which Bunter might have been able to sell for sixpence. Bunter's sense of injury was deep, and his feelings towards his uncle at present were a good deal like those of Hamlet towards a similar relative.

He had one consolation in detention. He dared not leave the Form-room, because Mr. Quelch had ordered him there, and Mr. Quelch was not to be trifled with. But his exercises were to be shown up to Monsieur Charpentier—and anything would do for Mossoo. So there was no need to trouble about getting his work done. That was so much to the good.

Bunter scribbled out a few lines, full of errors, and then gave it up. If he told Mossoo that he had had a headache, the good-natured little gentleman was certain to take that as an excuse. Bunter was not trammelled by any undue regard for the truth.

Not to work was something. But it was a weary business sitting in the dusky old Form-room with no occupation. Many fellows would have preferred work to the utter boredom of idleness. Not so Bunter. Boredom was better than work in his estimation. Still, it was very tiresome.

He sat and groused, and he walked about the Form-room and groused. He hunted through the other fellows' desks in search of a stray stick of toffee or a chocolate. Still the time hung heavy on his hands. If only a fellow had had a book to read—

As that thought came into his fat mind he remembered the volume of Dickens that was still in his pocket.

It was a little pocket volume—not worth, in Bunter's opinion, the shilling his uncle had given for it. He was not in the least curious as to its contents; in fact, knowing that the story had a moral made him hate it without even having looked at it. But it was a case of any port in a storm; after an hour of miserable boredom he would have been willing to read the works of a modern minor poet, or of an American humorist, rather than nothing. So he

fished out his uncle's present at last and opened it.

Bunter was not much given to reading. English literature was a subject in the curriculum at Greyfriars—it was, therefore, work—for which reason Bunter had a strong antipathy for English literature. He did not expect to derive much enjoyment from reading the "Christmas Carol." He had no expectation of finding a murder in it, or even a long-lost lad who, in spite of a wicked uncle, came at last into the title and estates.

Certainly he did not find anything of that kind.

But, to his own astonishment, he found himself interested.

Scrooge interested him.

He found that he was quite keenly following the remarkable apparitions of the Ghost of Christmas Past and the Ghost of Christmas Present and the Ghost of Christmas Future.

The slow but sure change in the character of that unpleasant old gentleman, Scrooge, interested him.

Sitting on a form with his back to a wall and his feet on a desk, Bunter read and read and read, amazingly engrossed in a story which did not contain a single murder or even a long-lost heir.

He forgot the Form-room and his detention task; he even forgot his disappointment of the morning.

For once, Bunter was taken out of himself, and forgot even William George Bunter—hitherto a person who had been incessantly in his thoughts.

He read eagerly.

His anxiety for the ultimate fate of Tiny Tim was intense.

For the first time on record, Bunter actually thought with deep solicitude of a person whose initials were not W. G. B.

The magic of the Master enthralled him.

He felt that he would gladly have stood Bob Cratchit a roaring fire in the Tank, and would have expended his celebrated postal-order for that good object.

He had an intense desire to kick Mr. Scrooge.

His eyes and his spectacles were fairly glued on the book, and he read it breathlessly.

The minutes passed unheeded.

When he came to the end of the story Bunter heaved a deep, deep sigh. He wished it had been longer.

Laying down the book, Bunter leaned back and pondered.

His uncle had told him to read and reflect. He had read, and now he was reflecting.

His uncle fancied there was some resemblance between his own character and Scrooge's. That was absurd, of course. Scrooge had been a thoroughly selfish fellow, thinking only of himself—a mean, grasping fellow, like Fisher T. Fish, or Skinner, for instance—not like Bunter.

But—

Amazing to relate, Bunter's reflections were going deeper. It was dawning upon him that there was something in what his uncle had said!

He pondered and pondered.

Was he really the selfish, greedy fellow that Uncle George supposed? He could not help reflecting that Greyfriars fellows agreed with Uncle George in that opinion. He could not help realising that if he had asked any Remove man, that Remove man would have answered at once that Uncle George was right on the wicket. His brother Sammy thought—and had told him many times—that he was a pig—actually a pig. His sister Bessie had borne testimony to the

A bony hand fell on Bunter's shoulder, and a bony face glared into his fat countenance. "You fat mug-wump!" cried Fisher T. Fish. "You've taken me in." "Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. "There's some mistake, of course. Uncle George has sent me the wrong present—he must have meant this for Sammy. It's all a mistake!" (See Chapter 7.)



same effect. His father never seemed to enjoy having him home for the holidays. Hitherto Bunter had attributed that to a want of proper appreciation on his father's part. The thought came to him with quite a shock that possibly some of the fault was on his side. If, indeed, he was anything like Scrooge then—

Was he?

Five o'clock chimed out from the clock-tower. Bunter did not even hear it, so deeply plunged was he in these unusual reflections.

There was a step in the Form-room doorway.

Monsieur Charpentier looked in.

Mossoo blinked round the Form-room for the detained junior. Mossoo's kind heart had relented long ago, and he was prepared to let Bunter off, though he was fully prepared to find that he had neglected his work. But even the good-natured French gentleman was irritated when he saw the fat junior sitting idly, with a book on the desk before him, and his exercises almost untouched.

"Buntair!" he rapped out.

Billy Bunter started.

"Is it zat you have done nozzings?" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier.

"Oh!" Bunter jumped up. "I—I had a fearful headache, sir! I—I tried hard, sir—very hard. But—but I couldn't get those exercises done, sir. My head's aching like—like anything!"

"I hope zat you tell me ze troof, Buntair?"

"Oh, yes, sir—word of honour, sir!"

"Verree well, Buntair, you may go,"

said Monsieur Charpentier, taking up the exercises. "I excuse you, mon garçon."

Bunter blinked at him.

He had lied instinctively; it was his way of dealing with any difficulty. He had got away with it, so to speak; he was excused, and he was free to go.

To his own astonishment, he did not feel satisfied.

Never before had his fat conscience troubled him in such circumstances. But he was in a new mood now.

"I—I say, sir!" he stammered.

"Vat is it, Buntair?"

"I—I haven't had a headache, sir."

"Vat?" ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier.

"I—I've been slacking, sir," confessed Bunter.

Monsieur Charpentier gazed at him almost in stupefaction.

"Mon Dieu!" he ejaculated. "Vat you tell me? I zink zat zis time you tell me ze troof, Buntair. I am astonish! I am amaze! Buntair, it is verree wrong to neglect your task and to tell one falsehood."

"I—I know, sir," gasped Bunter. "I—I'm sorry, sir."

"Verree well, I excuse you," said Monsieur Charpentier. "I am verree glad to see you sorree zat you tell one mensonge. You may go, Buntair."

"Thank you, sir!"

Gladly enough Bunter rolled out of the Form-room. His first essay in telling the truth had not, after all, cost him dear. But he was almost as astonished and amazed as Mossoo, as he rolled away from the Form-room. What had

come over him? He felt like quite a different Bunter. The Owl of the Remove did not realise it yet; but he was, in point of fact, deriving the benefit for which Uncle George had hoped from the perusal of that wonderful book.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

Bunter Astonishes the Natives!

"WHERE are you going?"

"Hall."

"What for?"

"Tea."

"What about tea in the study?"

"I'm stony."

"What difference does that make?"

"I can't stand my whack."

Peter Todd almost fell down.

"You can't stand your whack?" he repeated faintly.

"No." Bunter shook his head. "I've been disappointed about a postal-order, Toddy."

"Well, you never do stand your whack, do you?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"What do you mean?" demanded Toddy. "Is this a joke? If it is, bless my little heart if I can see the point. Explain it."

"I'm not joking," said Bunter calmly. "I'm not going to sponge on you for tea in the study, Peter."

"Why not?"

"Oh, really, you know—"

"You've been sponging on one fellow or another all through the term," said

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(Continued from page 13.)

Peter Todd. "Turning over a new leaf?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my hat," gasped Peter. "My only summer bonnet. It's time you did, of course—high time. But what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, Peter. You see, I've been disappointed about a postal-order—I mean, I haven't been disappointed about a postal-order."

"What?" ejaculated the amazed Toddy.

"I wasn't really expecting a postal-order," said Bunter.

"Oh, my sainted Sam!"

"I was expecting a big remittance from my Uncle George, as you know. But he sent me a book instead, so I'm stony. So I'm going to tea in Hall."

Peter Todd seemed to experience some difficulty in breathing. He gazed at Bunter spellbound.

Bunter rolled on his way, leaving Peter still spellbound. He joined the throng of stony fellows who tea'd in Hall because funds would not run to tea in the study.

Harry Wharton tapped him on the shoulder. The football match over, the Famous Five had remembered the existence of W. G. Bunter. They agreed that, in view of Bunter's awful disappointment that day, it would be only kind to ask him to tea in Study No. 1. With that charitable object in view the captain of the Remove stopped Bunter on his way to Hall.

"Winther bound, old fat man?" he he asked.

"Tea in Hall," answered Bunter.

"Famine in Study No. 7?" asked Wharton, with a smile.

"Oh, no! But I'm not going to sponge on Toddy."

"Eh?"

"I can't stand my whack in the study," explained Bunter, blinking at the astounded captain of the Remove through his big glasses, "so it's tea in Hall for me, you see."

"Great Christopher Columbus! I—I mean, quite right, old bean," gasped Wharton. "Look here, we've got rather a spread in Study No. 1. Come up to tea with us."

Bunter hesitated.

The temptation was strong, even to a reformed Bunter who had resolved to turn over a new leaf—a much-needed new leaf. Tea in Hall was rather bare, and a spread in Study No. 1 was very attractive.

"Come on, old fat man," chimed in Bob Cherry.

"Do you really want me to come?" asked Bunter, wavering.

"Eh?"

"What?"

This was the first time that Bunter had ever been known to care whether he was wanted or not at a spread. The Famous Five gazed at him.

"You see a chap isn't supposed to go to other fellows' feeds unless he stands a feed himself now and then," said Bunter. "I don't want to sponge on your study."

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"Ye gods!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I—I—I mean, all serene, old fat bean," gasped the captain of the Remove. "We really want you to come."

"The wantfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

"It will be a treat for us!" said Nugent solemnly.

"You know what fascinating company you are, Bunter," said Johnny Bull.

"Besides, you can stand us a feed, if you like, when your postal-order comes."

"I'm not expecting a postal-order," answered Bunter.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

"Help!"

Billy Bunter gave the Famous Five a disdainful blink and rolled on his way to Hall, leaving five astounded youths rooted to the floor. Billy Bunter disappeared into Hall.

Harry Wharton & Co. almost tottered away to the Remove passage. The spread in Study No. 1 was duly disposed of, without Bunter. Every moment the Famous Five expected him to butt in; but he did not butt in.

After tea, Harry Wharton looked in at Study No. 7.

"What's the matter with Bunter, Toddy?" he asked.

Peter shook his head.

"Don't ask me," he answered. "I haven't recovered yet. He's refused to tea in the study because he won't sponge. It's never worried him before. It seems to have struck him all of a heap all of a sudden. Wandering in his mind, I suppose, though this is the first time he's given any hint of having a mind to wander in."

"He's not ill, I hope," said Harry.

"Must be—ill in the brain," answered Peter. "That's the only way of accounting for it. I dare say he will recover by supper-time, though."

"Very likely," assented Wharton, with a laugh.

Billy Bunter passed the captain of the Remove in the passage. He knocked at the door of Study No. 4 and entered.

Wharton smiled.

His natural impression was that Bunter had already repented of his remarkable new leaf, and was seeking to plant himself on the Bounder for tea, and Wharton kindly lingered on the spot to pick him up when the Bounder kicked him out, and take him along to Study No. 1 for the remnants of the spread. But the captain of the Remove was under a misapprehension. Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing were just finishing tea when Bunter blinked in, and the Bounder glanced round for a missile.

"I haven't come to tea, Smithy," said Bunter hastily.

"You haven't," agreed the Bounder. "You think you have, but you haven't. You've come to get this cushion on your boko, if you don't take it out of this study sharp."

"I want to speak to Redwing."

"Eh?" said Tom Redwing, looking round. "You can go ahead, Bunter."

"It's an apology," explained Bunter.

"Wha-a-at?"

"I've sneered at you a lot of times, old chap, for being the son of a seafaring man, and made out that you weren't good enough for Greyfriars," said Bunter. "I was a silly snob, and rather a beast. I can see it now. I ought to have been jolly glad to see any fellow get a chance in life. If it happened over again, I'd help you, if I could. I'm sorry, Redwing."

Redwing gazed at him blankly. The Bounder stared.

"What on earth do you mean, you fat idiot?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Have you gone off your dot?"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"If you mean that, Bunter, I'm glad to hear you say so," said Tom Redwing, at last.

"I do mean it, old fellow. I hope you don't bear me any grudge for having been such a beast to you?"

"Not at all," said the amazed Redwing. "If you mean it, all serene."

"That's all, then," said Bunter, stepping back into the doorway.

"And now you are going to stay to tea, what?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"No."

"I mean you think you are?"

"No."

And Bunter stepped out into the passage and closed the study door.

Harry Wharton tapped him on the shoulder gently.

"Bunter, old man—" he murmured. Bunter blinked at him.

"You're not ill?" asked Harry.

"Eh? No!"

"Then what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

Wharton gazed at him. There was a change in Bunter, a remarkable and astounding change. On that point there was not a shadow of doubt. The captain of the Remove could not understand it—it was quite beyond him.

"There's something left in the study. Bunter, if you haven't had enough in Hall," he said at last.

Bunter shook his head.

"The fact is, tea in Hall is really enough for any fellow," he said. "I'm afraid I've been rather greedy, and lots of times I've eaten more than was good for me. Lots of fellows have thought me greedy."

"Have—have—have they?" gasped Wharton.

"Yes. You have, you know," said Bunter.

"Oh! Hem! You—you see—"

"You were right," said Bunter calmly. "I was greedy—in fact, a greedy beast. I see it now. I'm going to chuck it up. Think what a fellow might grow into if he starts being greedy and selfish when he's a kid. Might grow into a grasping and unscrupulous hunk like old Scrooge. You mayn't have noticed it, Wharton, but I've been a selfish chap."

"Oh dear!" As a matter of fact, Wharton had noticed it—not once, but many times. He had never expected Bunter to notice it, however.

"I have!" said Bunter firmly. "But I'm chucking it. I'm turning over a new leaf."

"There's a bag of jam-tarts in the study."

"Oh!"

"And some doughnuts."

Bunter wavered.

But he shook his head.

"Thanks, all the same. I won't come!" he answered. And he rolled hurriedly away, as if to escape from temptation.

Harry Wharton almost tottered back to Study No. 1 in a state of amazement, from which he was a long time recovering.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Brotherly!

DICKENS had done it.

The great master, who has moved generations to laughter and tears, had moved William George Bunter to reform!

No doubt many a hard and selfish man had been stirred to a sense of his

shortcomings by reading the story of Scrooge.

But its effect on Bunter was really astonishing.

There was good in Bunter somewhere. Doubtless it was deeply hidden under layers of fat. But it was there—it must have been there, or Bunter could not have been so deeply moved by the story of Scrooge and Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim.

Bunter was an imaginative fellow. His stories of Bunter Court and the vast wealth of the Bunter tribe proved that. Now his imagination was at work on different lines.

Like an actor who "sees" himself in a new role, Bunter "saw" himself in a new character entirely.

Whether this was likely to last was, perhaps, doubtful.

But so long as it lasted Bunter was the fellow to go the whole hog, as it were, throwing himself into his new part with all his enthusiastic imagination.

A root-and-branch reform is, indeed, easier than a slower and more steady and lasting amendment of character. Thus a drunkard will find it easier to give up drink entirely than to drink moderately. A smoker will find it easier to banish tobacco completely than to limit himself to a fixed number of cigarettes a day. A provaricator will find it easier to stick to the frozen truth than to tell only a half-dozen fibs a week. "Going the whole hog" is the easiest and simplest way of reform; it has a sort of dramatic effect which pleases the imagination. Billy Bunter had gone the whole hog—the entire unicorn, so to speak.

It made him quite an interesting character in the Greyfriars Remove.

The next day was Sunday, and instead of seeking to devise all sorts of excuses for cutting chapel, Bunter was ready at the first jingle of the bell. Mr. Quelch did not have to tell him to go back and wash his face, or change his soiled collar for a clean one. Bunter was newly swept and garnished.

After morning service the school shop was open for an hour. Bunter did not approach it. He did not seek to raise a little loan anywhere in the Remove.

At dinner it was remarked in the Remove that he ate enough for only two or three fellows. Either he was losing his appetite, or he had made a firm resolution to be moderate.

After dinner he tucked "A Christmas Carol" under his fat arm and went for a walk by himself. He was going to read that wonderful book again. As the gates his minor, Sammy, encountered him. Sammy of the Second, quite unaware of the great change that had come over his major, gave him an indifferent blink, and was quite surprised when Billy stopped, with an engaging smile.

Bunter minor wasn't really a prepossessing fellow. He was too like his elder brother.

But William George realised that if he was going to follow the new path he had marked out for himself Sammy came into the picture.

"Let brotherly love continue," was a text that was hardly useful in the Bunter family. It could not continue without beginning, and it had not begun.

Bunter was going to change all that. Sammy was not really a promising subject to begin upon. But Bunter resolved to begin.

"Hallo, Sammy, old chap!" he said affectionately.

"Stony!" answered Sammy Bunter dismally.

"You young ass, do you think I want to borrow something?" snapped Bunter.

"Don't you?"

"No!"

"Then what did you call me old chap for?" asked Sammy, naturally surprised.

Billy Bunter breathed rather hard. But he was not to be daunted.

"The fact is, Sammy, I've been thinking," said Billy gently.

"Come off!" said Sammy incredulously.

"I have, really, Sammy!"

"What did you do it with?" asked Sammy.

"You cheeky little beast!" roared Bunter, forgetting for the moment the benign influence of the Christmas Carol.

Sammy grinned.

"That sounds more like you, Billy," he said.

Bunter made another effort.

"Look here, Sammy, old fellow," he said gently. "we don't see enough of one another at school. I mean to keep an eye on you in future. I'm going to help you with your lessons."

"You're jolly well not!" answered Sammy. "I get into rows enough with old Twigg already. You'd make it worse."

"I could help you a lot with your Latin, Sammy, being in the Remove," said Bunter patiently.

"I don't think!" retorted Sammy. "If my con were anything like yours old Twigg would scalp me."

Really, it was not easy for a reformed elder brother to display fraternal affection to a fellow like Sammy Bunter.

"But if you're feeling so jolly brotherly all of a sudden," went on Sammy, "you can lend me a bob."

"I'll lend you a bob, with pleasure, Sammy—"

"Good!" Sammy Bunter extended a fat and grubby paw. "Hand it over."

"When I get one—"

"You silly owl!"

"I haven't any tin at present, Sammy."

"Fathead!"

"But I'll tell you what I'll do," exclaimed Bunter. "I've got a jolly good book here. I'll lend it to you to read."

"Detective story?" asked Sammy, with a faint show of interest.

"Nunno!"

"Pirates in it?"

"Hem! No; it's a Christmas story."

"Keep it!" said Sammy disdainfully.

"It's a jolly good story, Sammy, and very moral. It may help to make a better chap of you. You know you're a greedy, selfish little beast, don't you, old chap?"

Sammy Bunter glared. He did not seem to recognise the description as fitting himself.

"You know you're a really detestable little rotter in a lot of ways," continued Bunter. "Well, this book may make you see it. See?"

"You blithering idiot!" gasped Sammy.

"Now, look here, old fellow—"

"Cheese it, you maundering duffer!"

"Look here, I'll give you the book," said Bunter. "I was going to read it again myself, but I'll give it to you, Sammy. Here it is."

Sammy Bunter eyed the pocket volume as his major extended it to him. It did not look very valuable to Sammy. Still, it must have had some value, however small, and so he was surprised and suspicious.

"Whose is it?" he asked.

"Mine!" yelled Bunter.

"You haven't priggled it?"

"No, you little beast—I mean, old fellow."

"Then what are you giving it to me for?"

"It may do you good, Sammy."

"Oh, my sainted Sam!" ejaculated Sammy. "Has this been coming on long?"

"Eh? Has what been coming on?"

"You're potty, ain't you?" asked Sammy.

Billy Bunter's good resolutions nearly vanished. Sammy Bunter had an
(Continued overleaf.)

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awfully narrow escape, at that moment, of having his head jammed against the gate-post in an unbrotherly and unreformed manner.

But Bunter manfully restrained his wrath.

"Take it, kid," he said. "It's yours."

Sammy Bunter took it. It was only a shilling volume, but it looked almost new. He considered that he might be able to sell it in the Second Form for perhaps twopenco.

"I hope it will do you a lot of good, Sammy, old fellow," said Bunter affectionately, and he rolled out of gates, leaving the fat fag with the volume in his hand.

Sammy blinked after him, and blinked at the book, and blinked after Billy again. He could not understand it in the least. The only reasonable theory he could form was that Billy had "prigged" that book and wanted to get clear of the stolen goods. He gave up that theory when he found his major's name on the title-page. It was just like Uncle George to send a fellow a book for a Christmas present, Sammy reflected. Naturally, Billy had been fed up. Still, that did not explain why Billy had given the book away instead of selling it for what it would fetch. That remained a mystery to Sammy.

The fat fag rolled away in search of his acquaintances in the Second Form. He came on Gatty, and Myers, and Nugent minor in the quad.

"You fellows like a book?" he asked. "My major's sick of it and he's shoved it on me. Must have cost a bob, I think. Who says twopenco?"

Nobody said twopenco.

"Penny!" said Sammy.

Dicky Nugent sorted out a penny.

"I don't mind," he said. "It will do to give my brother Frank for a Christmas present. Here you are!"

A penny was not a large sum. But it was a penny, and worth, in Sammy Bunter's estimation, all the works of Charles Dickens, from "Sketches by Boz" to "Edwin Drood." A small amount of toffee could be purchased for a penny, which Sammy could dispose of internally; and the works of Charles Dickens could not be disposed of in the same way. So Sammy Bunter was satisfied, though he still wondered why Billy had given him that volume, and suspected incipient insanity.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Play Up, Bunter!

"POOR old chap!"

Billy Bunter murmured that remark.

It was called forth by the sight of an old gentleman plodding along the snow-swept Friardale Lane.

Rain had come on—a thin drizzle—and Bunter was about to turn back to the school when he sighted the old gentleman.

Bunter had an umbrella with him—it had looked like rain when he started on that Sunday walk, although the snow lay thick about. He stopped and regarded the old gentleman. The old gentleman had no umbrella. He was obviously getting wet.

In ordinary circumstances, the fact that an entire stranger was getting wet would not have affected Bunter.

Probably he would not have noticed it; and, had he noticed it, he would have given the matter no thought. Getting wet was only a serious matter when it was William George Bunter who got wet.

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But it was a new and changed Bunter who was now blinking at the old gentleman through his big glasses.

Bunter not only noticed that the old gentleman was getting wet, but he felt quite concerned about it.

The old gentleman looked poor.

He had rather a chubby face, which looked well fed, but his clothes were very old, his boots shabby, and he was without an umbrella on a rainy day.

Judging by his clothes, he was frightfully poor, and poor people never had appealed to Bunter. He had always had a strong scorn and distaste for poor people.

Now he stopped in the muddy lane and regarded the poor old gent with compassionate eyes.

He hesitated—long.

He was a reformed Bunter; he was going to keep turned the new leaf he had turned over. But—

Old manners and customs were not dropped in a day. Getting into touch with poor people was, as Bunter knew, injudicious. You helped a poor person, and that person immediately fancied he had a claim on you. Bunter knew this, though not from actual experience, as he never had helped a poor person.

He blinked at the old gentleman in the rain with an inward struggle. Powerfully he was tempted to pass unseeing on.

But it would not do. He had resolved to discard all resemblance to Scrooge in his earlier period, and to model himself upon Scrooge in his later, reformed, and benevolent period. Bunter knew well enough what a reformed and benevolent Scrooge would have done in these circumstances. He would have shared his umbrella with that shabby old fellow; he would have given him the umbrella, at a pinch. He would have asked the old gent if he was hard up, and given him a banknote. Bunter, certainly, would not emulate a reformed Scrooge to that extent; he hadn't any banknotes. But he could do what lay in his power.

He hesitated long; but the better Bunter won the contest, and the worse Bunter had to hide his diminished head.

Feeling rather bucked by that victory over himself, but rather dismayed by the prospect of getting wet while the shabby old fellow was sheltered by his umbrella, Bunter bore down on the unlucky one.

"Excuse me, sir!" he said tactfully.

Respect was due to age, but it was the first time on record that William George Bunter had ever spoken respectfully to a person who was obviously and painfully poor.

The shabby old man glanced at him. "You're getting wet, sir," said Bunter.

"Dear me! Yes; quite so!" said the old gentleman, still blinking at Bunter. "I have, unfortunately, no umbrella."

He coughed.

Bunter had always detested poor people who coughed. There was danger that a fellow might catch something.

Now the cough only added to his concern for this poor old fellow. His fat heart expanded with benevolence.

"Please take my umbrella, sir," he said.

"Eh? What?"

Bunter held out the umbrella.

The raindrops fell, unheeded, on his own head.

The old gentleman gazed at him in amazement.

"Bless me! Bless me!" he ejaculated. "Do I understand you aright, my boy? You are offering me your umbrella?"

"Yes, sir! Please take it!" said Bunter.

"But you will get wet yourself, my dear lad."

"That doesn't matter, sir."

"Bless me—bless me!" said the astonished old gentleman. "You are a very kind-hearted boy, to be sure!"

Bunter felt a little thrill of satisfaction. Nobody had ever called him a kind-hearted boy before.

"If you are going my way, my good boy, I will gladly share your umbrella," said the old gentleman.

"I'm going the other way, sir," said Bunter. "I've got to get back to the school. Take the brolly."

"But you will get wet."

"I don't mind, sir."

"Bless me—bless me! I cannot take advantage of your kindness, but I thank you, all the same, my good boy!"

"I really wish you'd take it, sir," said Bunter. "You can leave it at the school for me afterwards, if you like."

"You are a schoolboy?" asked the old gentleman.

"I belong to Greyfriars, sir."

"And you will trust a stranger with your umbrella?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The old gentleman smiled.

"I would accept your offer with pleasure, my dear boy," he said, "but I cannot deprive you of your umbrella."

"Well, look here, then, I'll walk your way," said Bunter. "I can get back to the school afterwards. I'm not bound to get in till dusk."

"I am going to Friardale," said the old gentleman. "Will it not be rather a long walk for you, there and back?"

"I don't care, sir!" said Bunter heroically.

As a matter of fact, Bunter did care—very much indeed. He was not much of a walker, and he was already getting tired. It was half a mile to the village from where he stood, and a whole mile back to Greyfriars afterwards; and apart from the exertion involved, it was extremely disagreeable to slog along in slush and rain under half an umbrella. But Bunter was on his mettle now, and he was going the whole unicorn.

The old gentleman regarded him very attentively.

"I will not put any obstacle in the way of a kind-hearted lad who desires to be charitable to the poor and afflicted," he said. "I will accept your offer, my kind young friend."

Bunter suppressed a sigh, and turned back towards the village. He held the umbrella over the head of the little old gentleman. Amazing to relate, he gave his companion more than half of it, protecting him carefully from the rain, heedless of the drops that spattered on his own devoted head.

Two Greyfriars fellows, hurrying back towards the school with their coat collars turned up, stared at him. They were Skinner and Snoop. They were so astonished that they forgot the rain and stopped to stare.

"My hat! What's that game, Bunter?" asked Skinner.

"Who's your prosperous friend?" sniggered Snoop.

"One of your rich uncles?" grinned Skinner.

"Looks the part!" chortled Snoop. "He, he, he!"

Bunter crimsoned with vexation. The old gentleman turned a quiet and grave glance upon the two outsiders of the Remove.

"My young friends," he said mildly, "you should not make fun of the poor and destitute! There is nothing comic in a man of my age being exposed to poverty and want!"

"Your mistake, old bean!" said



So astonished were Skinner and Snoop that they forgot the rain, and stopped to stare at Bunter and his companion. "One of your rich uncles?" grinned Skinner. "He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop. "I never knew what Bunter's relations were like. I know now. Buy him a new pair of boots when your postal order comes, Bunter!" (See Chapter 12.)

Skinner. "If you could see yourself in a glass, I'm sure you'd agree with me! Where did you get that hat?"

"And that coat?" sniggered Snoop. "Off a scarecrow when the farmer wasn't looking—what?"

"You rotters!" shouted Bunter. "Shut up! By gum, I'll jolly well punch you if you don't shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner. "Bunter on the warpath! Ha, ha, ha! Bring your uncle up to the school, Bunter!"

"He's not my uncle!" snapped Bunter. "If he were, I'd bring him up to the school fast enough. Do you think I care what a sneaking cad like you thinks about his clothes? Go and eat coke!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop. "I never knew what Bunter's relations were like. I know now! Buy him a new pair of boots when your postal-order comes, Bunter!"

"Hold this umbrella a minute, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I'll jolly well pitch into them!"

"No, no!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "Nothing of the kind, my dear boy! These lads are only thoughtless."

"Pair of rotten cads!" said Bunter.

"We must forgive others their offences if we expect to be forgiven our

own," said the old gentleman mildly. "Let us go on!"

And Bunter and his strange companion progressed on their way through the rain, leaving Skinner and Snoop chuckling and staring.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Going Strong!

BILLY BUNTER was in the full tide of benevolence. But the meeting with Skinner and Snoop had disconcerted him extremely. It would be really horrid if those two rotters told the tale at Greyfriars, and made out that that shabby, down-at-heel old gentleman was a relation of Bunter's. Also, it was very wet. The rain was coming down harder, and Bunter was getting most of it. He was glad when Friardale was reached at last.

The village being reached, Bunter was tempted to bid his charge a curt good-day and scurry off. He had done what he had undertaken to do, and he was wet and tired and muddy and rather miserable. But he resisted that temptation. The unreformed Bunter, so to speak, was tugging hard at the reformed Bunter, seeking to drag him

back into his old selfish way; but the reformed Bunter meant business.

"Here we are, sir!" he said, as cheerfully as he could. "Let me see you as far as your house."

"I am going to the station," said the old gentleman.

"Oh! This way, then!"

The village street was almost like a water-course now. The station was at the other end of the village. Bunter's heart sank, but he bore up manfully.

For a fellow like Bunter, much given to snobbishness, it was not exactly enjoyable to walk the whole length of the village street on a Sunday afternoon with a shabby, dilapidated old gentleman who looked like—Bunter hardly knew what he looked like, except that he gave the impression of dire poverty, if not of actual want. The doleful old fellow might be taken for a relation of his—his uncle, even his father! But Bunter was going the whole unicorn, and he firmly suppressed those unworthy misgivings.

He plugged on up the village street, with the umbrella still held generously over the poor old gentleman's grey head and battered hat, and the rain-drops trickling most uncomfortably down his own neck.

They reached the station at last.

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Near the station Police-constable Tozer glanced at Bunter and his companion, and Bunter avoided his glance.

Inside the station, a number of people had assembled to escape the rain. A dozen pairs of eyes turned on Bunter and his charge curiously, and one or two persons smiled. Bunter's face was crimson. It was just his luck for a crowd to be there, he reflected. The old gentleman glanced round him, with such a manner of quiet dignity that the thoughtless persons who had smiled at his terrible clothes turned their faces away and became grave at once.

"Here we are, sir!" said Bunter, with determined cheerfulness. "Are you going to take a train?"

"Yes, my boy."

"Just step this way a minute, sir!" said Bunter.

He drew the old man aside, out of hearing of the little crowd in the vestibule.

"Look here, sir! I—I suppose you've got the money for your ticket?"

"Thank you! I have enough."

"I'm glad of that, because I haven't any," said Bunter. "I wish I could jolly well help you, sir, but I'm hard up."

"I will take the will for the deed, my dear boy!"

"I—I say, I wish I had something!" mumbled Bunter miserably. He felt that it was hard on a fellow who had determined to play Scrooge in his reformed state to be lacking in Mr. Scrooge's financial resources. "Look here, sir, I know you're jolly hard up, if you don't mind my saying so—"

"Not at all, my dear boy! I fear that it is only too obvious."

"Well, then, look here, take this!" said Bunter, with a desperate effort. "It's only rolled gold, but you can sell it to-morrow for five bob. It will be something."

The old gentleman gazed at him fixedly.

"My dear boy, I could not think—"

"I insist!" said Bunter firmly.

"But—"

"Take it. I wish it was something better; but you'll get enough for it to stand you something for dinner to-morrow."

"My dear boy," said the old gentleman, in a deeply-moved voice, "I will accept your generous offer. I think you will never be sorry for having befriended a poor and destitute old man. I am sure of it. God bless you, my boy!"

The watch and chain disappeared into a tattered pocket.

It cost Bunter a pang to see them go. But he nobly suppressed that pang.

"Good-bye, sir!" he said.

"One moment! Your name?"

"William George Bunter, sir."

"And you belong to Greyfriars School?"

"Yes, Lower Fourth."

"I shall remember," said the old gentleman.

Bunter felt a twinge of dismay. He could only suppose that the old fellow's meaning was that he would remember the name and address to write a begging letter. But he drove away the twinge. It was neck or nothing now for Bunter in his new role.

"Look here, sir! If you write and send me your address later, I may be able to send you something," he said. "Not much, because I don't have much pocket-money. But I'll send what I can."

"Thank you, my boy. You will hear from me."

The old gentleman held out his hand.

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It was a nice clean hand, rather at variance with the rest of the old gentleman. Bunter shook it.

Then he rolled out of the station into the rain, his umbrella over his own damp head at last.

He tramped up the village street, and out into the lane in the downpour.

It was wet, it was muddy, it was miserable, and Bunter was tired. But he felt the glow of a good deed.

The man he had helped was wretchedly poor; there was absolutely nothing to be expected from him but a begging letter. Scrooge at the topmost point of his regeneration could not have chosen a more suitable object for kindly charity. Bunter was wet and muddy, but he was glad that he had done as he had done.

He reached Greyfriars at last, and tramped on.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You look dampish, old bean!" greeted Bob Cherry, as Bunter tramped into the House.

"Ow! I'm awfully wet!" mumbled Bunter.

"Where did you leave your relative, Bunter?" called out Skinner, and some fellows laughed. Evidently Harold Skinner had told the tale.

"Beast!" retorted Bunter.

"Here, come and dry yourself, old fat man," said Peter Todd. "You'll be catching a cold at this rate."

And Bunter went to dry himself.

He rolled up to the Remove passage afterwards, and found a crowd of fellows there, kept indoors by the rain. Many of them stared at the Owl of the Remove, and there were some chuckles.

"Left your uncle out in the rain, Bunter?" yelled Snoop.

"Yah!"

"What's this yarn that Skinner's brought home, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, with a curious look at the fat junior. "He says he saw you piloting some fearfully shabby old beggar-man along—"

"That's what the johnny looked like," chuckled Skinner. "His hat would have been dear at twopence, and his coat at a penny. A Greyfriars man's relations ought really not to dress like that when they come around the school."

"He wasn't a relation, you beast!" hooted Bunter.

"Who was he, then?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" exclaimed Wharton.

"How should I know?" snapped Bunter. "I'd never seen the man before, and I don't expect ever to see him again."

"Then what on earth were you doing with him at all?"

"Lending him my brolly."

"What for?" shrieked Peter Todd.

"To keep the rain off him, of course, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner. "Bunter wants us to believe that he has been befriending the poor and needy! So like Bunter, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Really, it was not like Bunter—as the Remove fellows knew him. But it was like Bunter as the Remove fellows did not know him!

"I say, you fellows, Skinner's an awful cad!" said Bunter, with an indignant blink at the cad of the Remove. "He jeered at the poor old chap for being ragged. I think it was filthy mean!"

"Just like Skinner, if he did," grunted Peter.

"Well, the old merchant was such a

sketch," said Skinner. "He looked as if he had dressed up purposely to look like an awfully sad case of destitution. Humbug, of course, after charity!"

"He wouldn't get much change out of Bunter, if that was his game!" grinned Bolsover major.

"Ha, ha! Not much!"

"He fell in a stony place when he fell in with Bunter!" chuckled Snoop. "Not that Bunter would have given him anything, even if he'd had whacking great remittances from Uncle George."

Bunter opened his lips to speak.

He closed them again.

He had been about to tell of the watch and chain that he had given to the poor old gent. He refrained. Half measures were not good enough for Bunter in his new strange state. To do a good deed, and to brag of it afterwards, was rotten, and Bunter was done with rotten things. He said nothing.

"I'm dashed if I can make all this out!" said Bob Cherry. "If Bunter really lent his brolly to an old man in the rain, it was jolly decent of him. Did you really, Bunter?"

"Yes, you ass. And he wasn't a spoofing sort of chap either," said Bunter. "I offered to give him the brolly, and he refused."

"You offered to give something away!" yelled Skinner.

"Yes, you beast!"

"My hat! We shall hear of Fishy offering to give something away next!"

"Bunter, old man, you're too jolly surprising," said Frank Nugent, with a laugh. "If you really did this trick, what did you do it for?"

"Well, a chap ought to be kind-hearted, and kind to the poor, and all that, at Christmas-time," said Bunter.

"Ye-es! But this isn't your first Christmas, is it? You've had some before, and they never had this effect on you."

"Never!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, hardly ever," chuckled Peter.

"You can jaw," said Bunter. "I dare say I deserve it. I see that! Jaw as much as you like, and be blowed to you. I wish I had a punch like Bob Cherry. I'd wallop Skinner for jeering at that poor old chap."

"If Skinner jeered at a poor old man my punch is at his service," said Bob Cherry. "Did you, Skinner?"

Harold Skinner hastily retired from the scene without answering that question. He had no use for Bob's hefty punch.

"Hyer, you glass-eyed mugwump!" Fisher T. Fish came along the passage. "You pie-faced clam, you owe me a bob. I hear that you've been helping the poor. I guess you'd better settle up what you owe a galoot before you start giving thing away."

"Well, that's right," admitted Bunter. "But I haven't a bob, you see. I'll settle up after Christmas. I'm going to settle up all my debts after Christmas."

"Christmas, 1990?" asked Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This Christmas!" roared Bunter. "I'm expecting a lot of postal-orders—I—I—I mean, I ain't expecting any postal-orders—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"But I shall get some tips this Christmas, and I'm going to save them up to square all round," said Bunter. "I owe nearly all you fellows money, and I'm going to clear it all off at the beginning of next term."

"The justfulness before the generosity!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "My esteemed Bunter, the



The old gentleman's enery, chubby face lighted up with a smile at the sight of William George Bunter. "This is my young friend," he said. "A lad of whom this school should be proud, Mr. Quelch." "Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch, while Billy Bunter blinked like a fellow in a dream. (See Chapter 15.)

gentle breakfulness is the proper caper. If you settle up all your esteemed debtfulness at once, the shockfulness to our esteemed selves will be terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

And he rolled away, leaving the Remove fellows laughing, and prepared to believe that he was going to settle up all his debts, when they should see him doing it! As Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked, the seefulness was the believfulness, and really this wanted some believing.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Amazing!

"WHAT'S the time, Peter?"

Thrice already, that Monday, Bunter had asked that question, and Peter had told him the time.

On this occasion, Toddy did not reach for his watch. He glared at Bunter.

"New joke?" he asked.

"Oh, really, Peter—"

"Well, if it isn't a joke, what is it?" demanded Peter. "What do you mean by asking a fellow the time all day long. That rolled gold turnip of yours keeps time. Has it stopped?"

"Nunno."

"Well, then, don't be a funny idiot," said Peter. "If your uncle the marquis really gave thirty guineas for that watch, you don't want to keep on worrying my Waterbury."

"It never cost thirty guineas, Peter."

"I know it didn't—but you always said it did."

"I'm afraid that was rather an

exaggeration, old chap. I—I think it cost about fifteen shillings."

"Dear at that!" said Peter. "Anyhow, it tells the time, so don't play the goat."

Billy Bunter blinked at Peter. Peter observed him rather curiously, and observed that Bunter's watchchain was not visible.

"Oh!" said Peter. "You've parted with it, what?"

"Yes," admitted Bunter.

"O my prophetic soul, my uncle!" quoted Peter.

"I haven't popped it, Peter."

"Sold it to Fishy?" asked Peter, with a grin.

"Nunno."

"Has it rolled away?" asked Peter humorously.

"Look here, Peter, don't ask questions," said Bunter peevishly. "Just tell a chap the time. I've got to take my lines in to Quelch at five."

"Five to five," said Peter, looking at his watch at last. "I didn't know your watch had gone, fathead. Look here, ass, if you've sold it, you can't have got much for it—I'll stand you the tin to get it back, if you like. I've had a Christmas tip."

Bunter shook his head.

"Thanks all the same: can't be done," he answered.

"Look here, why can't it be done?" demanded Peter, his curiosity really aroused now. "If you've sold it, you must have sold it to some fellow in the school, and he can't be keen on keeping it."

"I haven't sold it."

"My hat! This is a case for Sherlock Holmes or Ferrers Locke. You haven't

sold that watch, or popped it, or lost it, and yet it's gone. Don't tell me you've given it away."

"I wasn't going to tell you."

Peter jumped.

"Great pip! You've given it away!" he yelled.

"I'm not going to tell you, Peter!"

And Billy Bunter rolled hastily out of the study, with his lines for Mr. Quelch. Peter stared after him blankly.

Bunter presented himself in Mr. Quelch's study with his lines. Mr. Quelch glanced at them and raised his eyebrows.

"These lines are written unusually well, Bunter," he said. "For once, you have brought me an imposition without a single smear or blot."

"I—I tried to do it well, sir."

"Oh! I am glad to see, Bunter, that on one single occasion, you have taken the trouble not to be idle and slovenly."

"Thank you, sir."

"A parcel has arrived for you, by registered post, this afternoon," added Mr. Quelch. "It is here, and you may take it, Bunter."

Bunter's fat face brightened. He almost clutched the parcel. It was a very small one, but it was registered: and it could hardly have been registered unless it contained something of value. Apparently one of Bunter's relations had remembered him at last.

Bunter rolled away with his parcel. He rolled into the Rag with it, and the beaming smile on his fat face drew attention upon him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Postal-order come?" called out Bob Cherry.

"A registered parcel," said Bunter.

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carelessly. "I expect it's something pretty decent for Christmas from one of my titled relations, you know."

"I don't think!" remarked Skinner.

"I—I—I mean—" stammered Bunter. Rome was not built in a day; and the leopard could not change all his spots at once. Bunter, reformed as he was, was always making these little slips. "I—I mean, it isn't from a titled relation. I—I haven't any titled relations, you know."

"Tell us something we don't know," suggested Skinner.

"Beast!"

"I guess if that's a Christmas tip, you're settling up that bob you owe me," said Fisher T. Fish, hovering round Bunter as he opened his parcel.

"Go and eat coke."

There were a good many Remove men in the Rag before tea; and some of them looked on with interest as Bunter opened his packet. Registered packets did not often arrive for the Owl of the Remove.

"My hat! A watch and chain!" ejaculated Skinner. "The Marquis of Bunter-de Bunter is playing up at last! How unfortunate that it would only run to rolled gold."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter stared at the watch and chain in blank amazement. He knew that watch and chain! It was his own!

His amazement was so great that he could only stare at it. Some of the other fellows recognised it, too.

"Lost your watch, and some honest man picked it up and sent it to you?" said Bob Cherry. "Very decent of him, whoever he was."

"He mightn't have been awfully honest," remarked Skinner. "If he had kept it, it wouldn't have made him very wealthy. The temptation can't have been very strong."

"Oh, dry up, Skinner."

"It—it—it's my watch!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I can't understand this. What has he sent it back for?"

"Did you lose it?" asked Wharton.

"Nunno."

"There's a letter with it," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh!" Bunter picked up the letter that had been enclosed with the watch. He blinked at it, and gasped.

"Oh, crumbs! Who'd have thought it?" he ejaculated.

"I say, this is getting jolly mysterious," said Bob. "Bunter says he never lost the watch, yet it comes back to him by registered post. You surely haven't been ass enough to pop your watch, Bunter?"

"Nunno," gasped Bunter.

"That's it—and uncle's found out that it's no good," grinned Skinner. "Mr. Solomon Isaacs wants his money back."

Bunter was still blinking dazedly at the letter. The amazement in his fat face caused general interest among the juniors. Evidently something of a very surprising and unexpected nature had occurred. Peter Todd came into the Rag, and he glanced at the watch on the table.

"Oh, so you've got it back, have you?" he asked. "Where has it been, Bunter?"

"I can't make it out," gasped Bunter. "I thought he was frightfully hard up—fairly on the rocks. Skinner thought so, too."

"He—who—which?" asked Peter.

"That old gent," gasped Bunter. "It beats me. I gave him the watch because I hadn't any money to give him, you know."

"What?" roared a dozen Removites.

"You can read the letter, if you like,"

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said the astounded Owl of the Remove.

"I can't make it all out. It beats me."

The juniors were quite eager to read the letter. Peter Todd took it, and read it aloud, with astonishment growing on his countenance.

"Dear Master Bunter,—I am returning you your watch and chain, with heartfelt thanks for your kindness and noble charity. Appearances are sometimes deceptive, my dear boy, and I am not in need as you supposed. I accepted your kind and generous gift, because I would not disappoint a noble lad who desired to help, as he believed, a poor and distressed old man. I confess, also, that I wished to put your generosity to a thorough test, and by accepting your gift to ascertain that you were really in earnest. I am satisfied—more than satisfied—and I now return you the watch. You will hear from me again, my dear boy, and in the meantime, accept an old man's thanks and blessing."

"Your friend,

"SEMPRONIUS SKELTON."

There was silence in the Rag when Peter finished reading out that remarkable letter. The juniors stared at one another and at Bunter blankly.

"My only chapeau!" ejaculated Bob Cherry at last.

"Bunter gave his watch and chain to a giddy beggar-man!" said Peter Todd dazedly. "Were you wandering in your mind, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Gammon!" said Skinner.

NOTE!

The next issue of the MAGNET will be on sale—

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23rd.

DON'T FORGET, CHUMS!

"But the letter says—" exclaimed Bob.

"It's spoof of some sort," said Skinner. "We all know Bunter."

"Gammon!" agreed Hazeldene.

Billy Bunter jerked the letter away from Peter, and crumpled it into his pocket. He gave the doubting Removites an indignant blink. Then he rolled out of the Rag.

The Owl of the Remove was glad to get back his watch and chain. There was no doubt about that. But he was quite puzzled and mystified.

The Remove fellows were mystified, too. Bunter had played many parts in his time, and the fellows were used to all sorts of spoof from him. Bunter the Benevolent was quite a new character for him, and really put a heavy strain upon the credulity of the other fellows.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Reward!

"I WISH—"

"Um!" said Peter Todd absently.

Breaking-up day at Greyfriars was, of course, a busy day. That day Peter had little time or inclination for Billy Bunter's conversation.

In fact, he rather desired to give Bunter a wide berth that day.

Bunter was not "fixed up" for Christmas.

Wonderful to relate, during the past few days he had done nothing in the line of fishing for holiday invitations.

And as nobody was likely to ask Bunter home, except under very strong pressure from Bunter, the fat junior's affairs were still unfixed.

Bunter Court seemed his only refuge. Most fellows preferred to spend Christmas at home with their people; but that had never appealed to Bunter. He enjoyed Christmas more away from his people; and perhaps his people also enjoyed it more in those circumstances.

As Bunter was not landed on Harry Wharton & Co., or Lord Mauleverer, or Smithy, Peter Todd feared that he was intended to be the victim. Of course, he could say no. But he did not want to say no if he could help it; he preferred to part with even Bunter on amicable terms when he was going home for Christmas. Still, he was prepared to say no, with any amount of emphasis that was required, if it came to the point. But he hoped that Bunter would keep off the subject.

Now he feared that it was coming.

"I wish—" repeated Bunter wistfully.

"Um!"

"I wish I was a millionaire!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Peter. "Is that all?"

"That's all," said Bunter.

"Well, that's not much to wish!" grinned Peter. "I wish I was a multi-millionaire, or a billionaire, if you come to that!"

"But wouldn't it be ripping?" said Bunter. "Think of what I could do during the Christmas holidays!"

"A fat turkey every day regularly, and a goose every evening, and a Christmas-pudding to take to bed with you every night?" asked Peter.

"No, you ass! I was thinking of the good I might do!"

"Eh!"

"Going round among the poor, you know, and standing them turkeys and coals and blankets and Christmas-puddings, and all that!"

Peter Todd almost fell down.

"Think of the happiness a millionaire could bring into any number of poor homes!" argued Bunter.

"Oh dear!"

"If somebody would die and leave me a million pounds!" sighed Bunter.

"If somebody would leave me a million pounds, I'd be willing to let him live!" grinned Peter.

"But it's no good wishing," said Bunter. "I'd like to have a million pounds this Christmas, but I've only got fourpence—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peter. "There's a bit of difference, certainly!"

"You can't do much good with fourpence," said Bunter sorrowfully. "Still, I can keep it and give it to a blind man."

"Oh, my hat!"

Bunter rolled away, leaving Peter staring after him. Peter was a perspicacious youth, but he really failed to understand Bunter now; the Owl of the Remove seemed to be getting beyond him.

Several fellows, when they saw Bunter, moved away rather quickly. Lord Mauleverer almost ran for it.

But, for once, there was no occasion for alarm. Billy Bunter was not, on this occasion, like a lion seeking what he might devour.

And when Harry Wharton, moved to heroic self-sacrifice by the genial influence of Christmastide, tapped him on a fat shoulder, and said, "Look here, Bunter, like to come home with me?" the Owl of the Remove shook his head.

"Thanks, old fellow!" he answered. "You're awfully good, but I'm going home."

"Merry Christmas, then!" said Harry, with a smile.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry roared along the passages. "Anybody

seen Bunter? Bunter's wanted! Somebody wants Bunter!"

"Extraordinary!" remarked Skinner. "How can anybody possibly want Bunter?"

"Bunter! Bunt! Bunt!" roared Bob.

"Here I am——"

"You're wanted, old fat bean!" said Bob Cherry. "Old gent in a fur coat—one of your titled relations, I suppose—what?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Old gent in a silk topper and a fur-lined coat, in a car that's a real whacker," said Bob. "One of your millionaire uncles that you've forgotten, I suppose."

"Look here, don't you try to pull my leg!" said Bunter. "There's nobody calling for me—I'm going home by train——"

"Honest Injun!" said Bob. "I tell you, the gilt-edged johnny is waiting for you, and Quelch sent me to find

you. Half Greyfriars is staring at the car—it's the whoppingest Rolls-Royce that ever rolled or roysced."

Billy Bunter, in utter amazement, followed Bob. A crowd of fellows who had heard the announcement followed on.

There was no doubt that it was a magnificent car that was standing before the House. A magnificent liveried chauffeur stood by it. Billy Bunter caught a glimpse of it as he rolled up to the little old gentleman who was talking with Mr. Quelch just inside the big doorway of the House.

Bunter blinked at that little old gentleman.

His jaw dropped in sheer astonishment. In spite of the fur-lined coat and the other evidences of wealth, Bunter knew that little old gentleman at a glance.

It was the dilapidated old gentleman he had befriended on that rainy Sunday afternoon!

The change in appearances was amazing; but it was the same old gentleman.

Bunter blinked at him like a fellow in a dream.

The old gentleman's cheery, chubby face lighted up with a smile at the sight of William George Bunter.

He shook hands cordially with the fat junior.

"This is my young friend," he said. "A lad of whom this school should be proud, Mr. Quelch!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch.

"We're dreaming this!" murmured Skinner to his friends.

"Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, in a gasping voice, "this is Mr. Sempronius Skelton, whom, it appears, you met on some occasion—under different circumstances. Mr. Skelton has seen your father, and obtained his permission to take you with him for the Christmas holidays, if you care to go."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

(Continued on page 28.)



An Interesting Article of Topical Interest.

CHRISTMAS is, of course, the time of all times for ghosts to furbish up their rattling accoutrements and walk in the manner generally expected of them. But they do not all make themselves up as more or less visible shadows, as several very credible newspaper reports have put on record.

These are airy spooks which, if they walk at all, first put on an invisible cloak and haunt something or somebody until they are successfully "laid." They make their presence known and their actions felt—but no human eyes ever see them.

So far there has been no explanation forthcoming other than "haunted" to account for the startling series of events which occurred at a well-known art school in London in connection with a picture that on three successive occasions was removed completely out of its frame, without any human at any time approaching it.

The picture was that of a former art student of the school who had died. It was painted on canvas which was tacked to a stretcher that slid into the back of the frame. The frame itself fitted flush into a recess in the wall. Secure enough, one would have thought, but a few days after being placed in position the frame was discovered to be empty. The picture was lying on the floor, at the foot of the wall!

The frame still rested in its niche, and apparently had been untouched by mortal hands. Again the picture was placed in its frame. Again it was found on the floor, and replaced. When the same thing happened a third time the people concerned looked round for some possible explanation. It came in a flash to one of them—the dead student had always hated that type of frame, hated it heartily, and apparently had haunted the portrait completely out of it, three times! The ghost was allowed to have its way, and so it was "laid," the frame hereafter remaining empty.

THE FIGHTING PHANTOM!

A ghost that fought and inflicted resounding blows, but was never seen, was once encountered by a famous woman writer. It happened in the West Country, at the house of a doctor who had once taken mental patients. The woman writer, with companions, went there specially to tackle the rowdy and quarrelsome ghost which rumour had planted in the house.

They took with them a medium—one of those people who act as intermediaries between the unseen world and this—and the ghost waited for no formal introduction. At once he set about the medium in true pugilistic style. Nothing was seen of the spook, but a good deal was heard! Whacking blows were delivered at the medium out of nothingness and, unbelievable as it may seem, the medium presently found herself fighting for her very life.

She was having a very bad time of it when the woman writer in question—she afterwards related this thrilling and eerie experience before a distinguished assembly at the Lyceum Club in London—went to the rescue. Placing herself between the medium and the invisible fighting ghost she at once became the latter's "punching ball." She not only felt the savage blows but heard them. And she, too, started to fight against this terror unseen.

So it went on, until apparently the vicious spook grew weary, and ceased to scrap. If any reader of the MAGNET has any explanation to offer for this amazing experience, doubtless the big London newspaper which reported it would be glad to listen!

THE HAUNTED MUMMY!

Fortunately these pugilistic spooks have their "opposite numbers"—phantoms whom the families "owning" them are glad to greet almost as old pals! At one time it was extremely fashionable for people to be able to lay claim to proprietorship of a real, "live" ghost of their own, who would whisper warnings when anything was about to go wrong! There

is reputed to be in Thanet a member of this tribe which is spoken of in the family which it has adopted as "a dear old thing!"

He is a hooded monk, in sandals, and he shuffles about the rambling corridors in an old oak-timbered house towards Christmas-time, offering offence to no one! He is too calm a type to offer much appeal to the sort of ghost-seekers who themselves almost haunt the mummy galleries at the British Museum. Their imaginations fired with eerie stories of the ghosts which were supposed to haunt the Valley of Kings at the time of the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb, these sensation-seeking folk are flocking to the Museum mummies in increasing numbers.

Who else but a rampant ghost enthusiast would want to visit there on Christmas Eve? But they do it, and stare happily at the reputed haunted mummy-case there in the Egyptian gallery. That mummy-case certainly has been connected with some very remarkable happenings. The natives who brought the mummy from the place where they found it, in Egypt, were attacked and eaten by lions. That so upset the man who had bought it that, to remove the evil influence, he had the mummy itself burned, being content to bring the mummy-case alone to England.

TRAIL OF DISASTER!

The ship in which he sailed with it was wrecked. He himself was drowned; the mummy-case was saved! Then the train in which the mummy-case was doing its final trip to London came into collision with another, head-on! But there was more to happen yet, before the mummy-case was safely deposited in its present show-place in the British Museum. The two men who carried it in slipped. One broke an arm, the other a leg!

Perhaps you will say that only those who expect ghosts see or experience them. There is at least one man who would unreservedly agree with you. He was a Guardsman, on sentry in a lonely cloister of Windsor Castle. Full of ideas of ghosts, it was no more than he expected when, towards midnight, a ghostly arm and hand shot out of a slit in the wall, almost by his ear. He scuttled like billy-ho back to the guard-room, preferring punishment to more ghost!

Investigations revealed, long afterwards, that the "ghostly" hand and arm belonged to a Dean of the Castle who had, in his goodness of heart and without thinking to give previous warning, proffered the cold and lonely sentry a steaming glass of Christmas cheer!

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THE DOG DERBY! They don't think young Jack Orchard stands a chance in a thousand of winning the 400 miles dog race across the snow-swept wastes of Alaska. But that only makes Jack all the more determined to win the coveted trophy. See how he fares in the race, boys!

GOLD FOR THE GETTING!



A Rousing
Story of
the Yukon.
By
**STANTON
HOPE.**

A Great Race!

MORGAN crooked his finger, and there was a stunning report as the revolver spat flame and death across the white desolation. Morgan, however, had miscalculated the speed of the two sledges, and the bullet, flying wide of Jack, buried itself in the "yaller" dog's heart!

"You skunk!" howled Jack. "You unspeakable brute!"

For some yards the carcass of poor Ribbons was dragged in the snow by the other dogs. Then the sledge stopped, and Jack, with rifle in his grip, dropped down beside it to fight for his life against his would-be assassin.

Bull Morgan, though, did not fire again, for the simple reason that he was on his back and kicking his legs in the snow, with his revolver lost somewhere in the whiteness about him. The sudden shot had startled his dogs into a swerve, and he had been flung headlong from the sledge.

Now, the huskies, relieved of the additional weight, were racing from their former course and heading among a number of great rocks and pine-trees.

Vainly Morgan bawled orders after them. The dogs dashed on, and running between a rock and a tree-stump, ripped a runner completely off the sledge and got the thing firmly jammed. Thus, finding themselves caught, the savage huskies started a free-for-all fight among themselves.

Muttering fiercely, Bull Morgan turned his attention from his dogs back to the boy he hated. His chance in the dog Derby was gone, and red fury blazed in his heart. But the anger was swiftly replaced by deathly fear as he saw the muzzle of Jack's rifle aligned on his breast.

"Don't!" he howled with sudden frenzy. "Don't shoot! For the love of Heaven, don't shoot!"

The abject terror of the man brought a contemptuous smile to Jack's lips, and he slowly lowered the butt of his gun.

"Get back to those other dogs, you skulking coward!" he cried. "I'll have it out with you in Nome—that is, if you ever dare to show your face back in the place."

Fearful even yet that Jack might take a pot at him, Bull Morgan went on hands and knees through the snow like some slinking animal, ever and anon glancing over his shoulder and emitting howls each time Jack made a movement.

The boy watched him until he was among the rocks and trees, and then quickly cut the carcass of Ribbons out of the traces and laid it across the front of his sledge.

The dog was dead, and, thanks to Morgan, would give no more trouble. Viewed only from the standpoint of the race, it was a piece of sheer good fortune. But Jack, an ardent dog lover, was sad at heart as he hit the trail again with the fast-stiffening form of the husky laid out before him.

There was no doubt that Bull Morgan was definitely out of the race. He could never extricate that sledge without chopping it free, and it was unlikely that he could repair the runner at all on the trail. Moreover, his huskies were still fighting madly among themselves, and one unfortunate animal became a meal for its half-starved companions.

Although a dog short, Jack made better progress during the next few miles than he had for many miles previously. The bad temper of Ribbons had been contagious, but now the dogs responded whole-heartedly to the enthusiastic leadership of the magnificent Skookum. It was as though every animal had determined to win or die in the attempt.

During the short afternoon, while the sun like a disc of shimmering pale gold

swung down towards the western hills, excellent progress was made.

At sunset Jack stopped and encamped for an hour and a half, chopping up frozen moose meat with an axe to give to his panting huskies.

On again he went, and reached Council very late at night, there to learn that Shorty Gibbs, with Jock McLennan hard at his heels, had passed through two hours earlier, racing for Topkok. The temptation to push on was great, and it was a credit to Jack's judgment that he resisted it and gave himself and his dogs three solid hours of rest before taking up the arduous pursuit.

Before he left, Lord Charles and two others reached Council. The Englishman, who looked hollow-eyed and fagged out, pluckily set off at the same time as Jack after only an hour's rest when Nature was crying out for him to take a twelve-hours' sleep.

In an almost eerie silence the two teams raced on through the crackling Yukon night, with only the stars to witness the titanic struggle.

Shortly before dawn Lord Charles swung his wolfish dogs across towards Jack's sledge. The tongues of the animals lolled out like red ribbons, and the white saliva froze as it dripped from their panting mouths.

"Well, I reckon it's up to you to keep the old flag flying, dear boy!" gasped the Hon. Charles. "My dogs are about done, and so'm I. Best of luck!"

He himself halted his dogs and prepared to encamp, while Jack, shouting back a cheery word of encouragement, rushed steadily on.

Daylight dawned. At times Jack took brief rests, husbanding the strength of his depleted team for a great final effort. It was encouraging that no one else passed him. On the other hand, Shorty Gibbs and Jock McLennan were still ahead, and by the account he got at Solomon and Fort Davis, still going

strong. The greatest encouragement of all to him was that because of the enforced rests of the leaders, he had gained considerable time on both of them.

All along the peninsula coast was bad weather again. The snow, like crystal powder, was whipped into his face until he could scarce breathe, and the dogs themselves suffered severely from the lash of the biting cold. The only comfort was—if comfort it could be called—that Shorty Gibbs and Jock were finding things just as bad.

Suddenly Skookum gave tongue to an exultant bark. His keen sense had discerned the presence of another dog team ahead several minutes before Jack began to get glimpses of it in the swirling snow-powder. He altered course towards it, and drew up within twenty yards of Jock McLennan who had stopped his team.

The old prospector, who was striving to unhitch two dogs from the double traces, stared in open-eyed surprise at the youngster.

"Waal, this licks creation!" he ejaculated. "If there'd been takers in Nome, I'd have backed a thousand dollars against a malamute pup that you'd ha' never got farther than Council on the trail back. And one o' your dogs gone west, too! Boy, those other huskies must sure be in grand condition!"

Jack looked affectionately at his dogs, now stretched full length in the snow, and rubbing their black muzzles in the powdery whiteness.

"It's Skookum, the dog I got from you, Jock," he answered, smiling. "He's got the strength of a bear, the courage of a lion, and the intelligence of a human being."

"Gosh! That dog has developed some since I had him!" grunted Jock, as he tugged viciously at the stiffened buckskin traces with half-frozen fingers. "Back in Nome, I'll buy him from you at your own price."

To this Jack shook his head.

"You couldn't have him back, Jock, for his own weight in gold!" he stated. "Old Skookum means more to me than money, and I shall never part with him. How far is Shorty ahead, d'you think?"

"Not more'n three or four miles, I should gather," replied the old prospector. "You'll have to burn the wind to catch him, unless, like myself, he's struck a wad o' trouble. I'll be two dogs short myself when I start again. The poor brutes have gone so lame I've got to carry 'em, and I guess it's cooked my chance o' lifting the loving cup."

The delay to Jack was not time wasted, for when he hit the white trail again his dogs, to Skookum's encouragement, went on at a clinking pace.

That good old sportsman, Jock McLennan, cheered on the plucky boy as the beaten Englishman had done, and, full of grit and optimism, Jack went hard at it to cut down the crack musher's lead. Because there was the additional weight of the dead dog on his sledge, he himself plodded gamely alongside on his snowshoes. And, bone-weary though he was, his youth and fine constitution enabled him to keep up without his having to check the madly straining huskies.

Mile after mile rolled back beneath his steel sledge-runners, and so, after several rests, he came within easy distance of Nome. By luck he had come across Jock farther back, but owing to the swirling snow it had been impossible to know whether any other sledge

had passed his, or even whether he had passed Shorty's.

He took a final twenty minutes' rest before making the last great effort to reach the city. Then again he went on, occasionally riding himself, and sometimes plodding with bowed head beside his big-hearted dogs.

Swinging round a copse of dark spruce, his heart gave a mighty leap. Within shouting distance of him was Shorty Gibbs and his resting dogs.

"By the great Panjandrum!" gasped Shorty.

Secure in the belief that he had gained a commanding lead on all other competitors, Shorty was taking a brief respite before making the city. With almost ludicrous haste, he now got his snarling dogs going again, and Jack whooped exuberantly and crackled his long whip in the air as he came hotly in chase.

For three miles to the outskirts of Nome Jack never let the crack musher of the Klondike gain a yard on him. Yet he made no call on his huskies, knowing that he could rely on the intelligent Skookum to run this last phase of the great four-hundred-mile race to the best advantage. It was clear that, though Shorty had one more dog, the animals, as a team, had not got the stamina of Jack's.

Already news had been received in Nome by telephone of the departure times of the various competitors from Fort Davis. It was now nearly noon on the third day since the race had started, and once more the grandstands were packed near the winning post in the main street.

And how the waiting crowds were thrilled by the electric announcement that Shorty Gibbs, the brilliant musher of the Northland, was speeding into the city with young Jack Orchard, the English boy and rank outsider, hard at his heels!

Knowing the distress of his dogs, Shorty had hoped for an easy run through the town, unoppressed by any

other outfit. Now, with the breath of Jack's leader almost on the back of his sledge, he lashed the tired huskies into a great last effort. The speed was too great for him to run beside the sledge, and the weight of his body added to the strain on the dogs.

Once inside the city, Jack leaped on to his own sledge. Perched there, with the snow-rimed carcass of Ribbons before him, he loudly crackled his whip in the air and called on Skookum for the first time to "win or bust."

His own eyes, red and almost blinded with the glare of the snow and the bite of the frost, saw in a fantastic dream the stores and dwellings and the gathered crowds of people slipping by in mad procession. He heard, like the dull beat of many waters, the babble of the throng, and sensed rather than saw that Shorty and his sledge were slipping back—back towards him.

"Shorty! Shorty!"

"Mush, y' son of a gun—mush!"

"For the love of Mike, bring 'em along!"

The frantic yells of the favourite's many supporters were almost drowned in the thunderous cheers for the gallant English lad whose marvellous driving was making a brilliant page of history in the great Dog Derby.

Amid the swirling snow of the main street the madly-straining dog teams swung hard up towards the crowded stands and the winning-post which marked the end of the long trek. Little by little Skookum's vulpine head crept up beside the flank of Shorty's panting leader. Now the dogs were level and the sledges runner to runner.

"Skookum! Skookum!" gasped Jack hoarsely.

The stands, crowd, and winning-post were being swamped in a blood-red mist. The whip dropped from his mitted hand into the glistening white of the frozen roadway. He reeled from side to side, his face white with frost and haggard beyond description, his eyes red-rimmed and glazed.

In an excess of madness, Shorty curled the lash of his whip over the steaming back of one of his huskies which stumbled in its stride. But it was too late! Jack's team, led by the heroic Skookum, shot ahead, to win by half the length of a sledge!

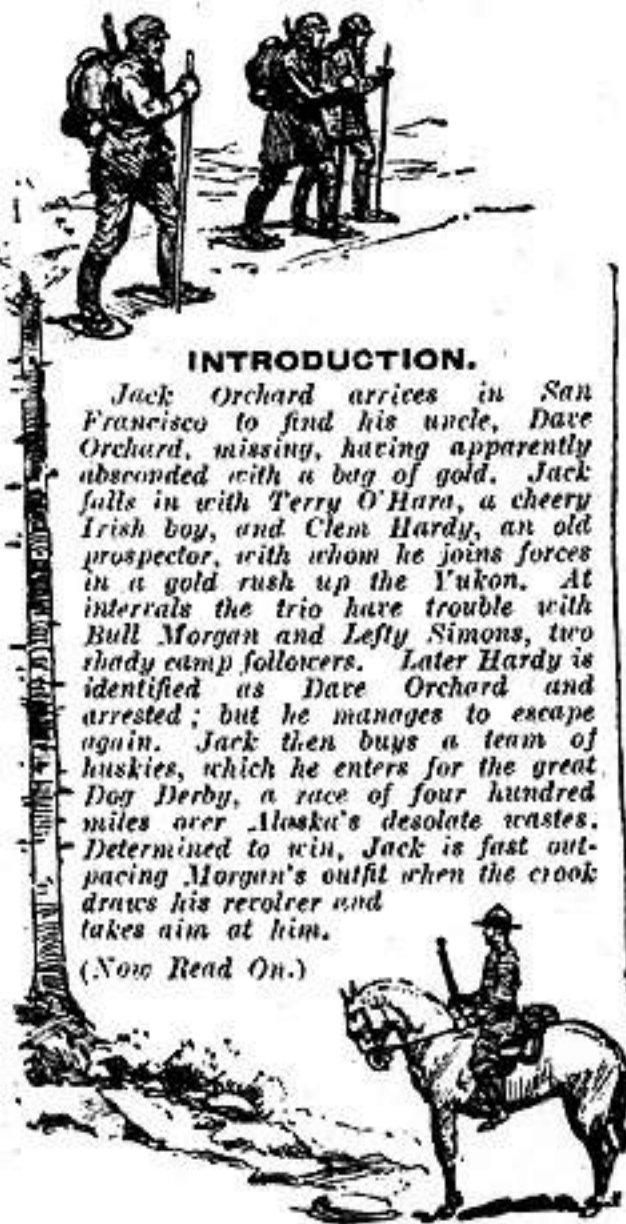
A few seconds later two teams of huskies were stretched out in the snow, dead beat and choking for breath. Jack stumbled off his sledge, utterly unconscious of the roar upon roar of cheers which greeted his amazing victory.

He had won! Of that he was aware in a dizzy sort of way. He had broken no record—that was impossible in such weather conditions—but he had provided the most exciting dog race ever witnessed in the Northland.

The beat of his own heart was like a hammer pounding within him, and he blindly groped his way round in a small circle, vainly seeking Skookum. It was the devoted dog, his friend as well as companion through the last strenuous and terrible days, whom he sought in this, the moment of his greatest triumph and distress.

Men came running towards him, but he neither saw nor heard them. He seemed to be slipping from the whitened earth—slipping away into some abysmal black void. Two lusty arms were flung about him and momentarily held him in a fierce grasp. A familiar voice, speaking as though from some distant, happy past, drifted to his reeling brain.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,036.



INTRODUCTION.

Jack Orchard arrives in San Francisco to find his uncle, Dave Orchard, missing, having apparently absconded with a bag of gold. Jack falls in with Terry O'Hara, a cheery Irish boy, and Clem Hardy, an old prospector, with whom he joins forces in a gold rush up the Yukon. At intervals the trio have trouble with Bull Morgan and Lefty Simons, two shady camp followers. Later Hardy is identified as Dave Orchard and arrested; but he manages to escape again. Jack then buys a team of huskies, which he enters for the great Dog Derby, a race of four hundred miles over Alaska's desolate wastes. Determined to win, Jack is fast outpacing Morgan's outfit when the crook draws his revolver and takes aim at him.

(Now Read On.)

"Me bhoi—me bhoi! Ye've done it! Arrah! Yaroogh! Hiven be praised!" And, with a faint flicker of a smile on his cracked and swollen lips, Jack slipped down, still with Terry's arms about him, beside his victorious huskies.

In the Shade of the Pine-tree!

IN Kettle Creek, the latest district to be opened up by the gold-getter, men were weary and disheartened. Those who had worked steadily on, burning holes in the frozen muck, had scarce found paying quantities of the precious metal. Some had abandoned their claims; others had sold them for a new song to those more optimistic than themselves.

Among the latter were Bull Morgan and Lefty Simons. Morgan, after the dog race, had not returned to Nome, where Jack had told of his treachery, and, instead, had waited at Council until his unscrupulous pard had joined him. Then the two rogues had hit the trail back for Dawson where they had met the American youth, Washington K. Gellibrand, who had abandoned his own claim on Kettle Creek.

Believing that there was more chance of making a strike higher up the creek, Gellibrand had inquired rather facetiously if claims five and six were still in the market.

Glad to get rid of their property at any price, Morgan and Simons had transferred the claims to him for one hundred dollars each, which was considerably fairer than their former demand. After that, "Wash" had returned to the diggings, and taken up his abode in the rough shelter made by the two pards, and Morgan and Simons had gone off to make a precarious living by touring the various camps in the role of faro dealers.

Jack and Terry arrived back at Kettle Creek shortly after Wash had installed himself as their neighbour. They had tarried only long enough in Nome to thoroughly rest the dogs, and had left the spoils of victory—the loving cup and the £2,000 prize money—at a Nome bank for safe transference to Dawson.

Their welcome at Kettle Creek was madly boisterous. From unknown nobodies they had become famous characters in the Yukon, and even old sourdoughs accorded them homage.

A few days after they had set to work again on the task of burning their ground, the American youth, who had been cutting cordwood, strolled across to them.

"Say, you fellows," he remarked, "there's an Indian looking for you. I directed him to your shack, but he said he'd wait beyond the woods. There have been several thefts by Indians around the creek, and I guess this tough-looking guy might have had something to do with them."

"I wonder if it's Lone Bear?" murmured Terry, glancing towards his chum.

Jack looked thoughtful, and asked the American youth:

"Was he a Chilkoot Indian, by any chance?"

"There you've got me beat," Gellibrand answered. "They all look much the same to me, and the only difference I noticed was that this Indian was dirtier than most. I guess, maybe, that, knowing you've just pulled down a wad of dollars over the dog race, he's going to pitch a sob yarn in the hopes of lifting a grub stake."

As Wash staggered away with his bundle of cordwood, Jack turned to Terry.

"We'll see what this Indian wants, Terry," he whispered. "This may be something important."

They got a fresh bonfire, and went off together through the cold of the late afternoon to the woods. Reaching the far side, they heard a low call, and saw a bent figure crouched beside the trunk of a pine-tree, a dirty-coloured blanket wrapped about him.

Their hearts beating fast, Jack and Terry hurried towards the man, for in him they recognised the same figure who had appeared to them on the night of the great glove fight in Dawson.

"Uncle Dave!" whispered Jack eagerly.

The returned fugitive raised a hand from under the folds of his blanket.

"I am Nak-Ta, of the Chilkoot tribe," he mumbled; "remember that, Jack. It is safe here to speak together, but think of me only as an Indian should anyone approach. Sergeant Curtis and his bloodhounds have been hot on my trail—so hot that I had to leave the wigwams of the Chilkoots. Not that



HOW DID HORACE COKER GET HIS REMOVE?

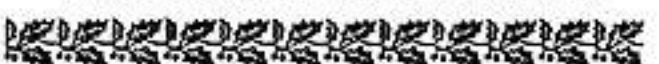
How many of you Magnetites, I wonder, can answer that question? How many of you remember the one and only Horace Coker when he was in the Shell Form? And as Coker is such a complete duffer, and always was, why is it that Dr. Locke moved him up into the Fifth Form? Ah! Therein lies a tale, and that tale is told in Frank Richards' own inimitable style in

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they knew of my disguise, or it would have been all up long ago. I've given them the slip now, and I'm safe for a time.

He greeted Terry affectionately, and proceeded to congratulate Jack on his brilliant victory in the great Dog Derby, the finish of which he had witnessed from among the crowd.

Naturally, the boys were delighted to see him and hear his voice again, though both felt a heart-pang at his wretched clothes and the haggard appearance of his face beneath its stain and dirt.

"Do you think it's safe for you to be back here so near to Dawson?" asked Jack. "There are so many folk in this district that know you, and if you got sick, or met with an accident—"

"I know, Jack—I know!" mumbled their old pard. "But it was absolutely necessary for me to find you. I've been having a mighty rough time, and I'm sorely in need of money. There's my share of the Yellow Horseshoe gold in the bank at Dawson, but I can't get it myself. What I want you to do is to go to Dawson, cash a cheque for five hundred dollars, and pass the money on to me at a rendezvous outside the city which I shall name."

"Why, shure!" cried Terry. "We'll do all that for ye, and more!"

A faint smile lighted Uncle Dave's drawn face.

"I know you would, boys," he said, with emotion, "and it's a deal I'm asking you to do to make the trip back to town with the dogs, for the weather's as bad as it's been in the depth of winter. The money is essential, for begging adds to the risk of my discovery, and I'm madly keen to get on the trail of Bull Morgan and Lefty Simons again. I've had news which has raised my hopes of proving my innocence of the theft of Simpson's gold."

"You've heard of the Bear's Claw nugget?" asked Jack excitedly.

Uncle Dave nodded.

"Yes," he replied. "You remember that Indian whom Morgan had in tow for a while—Lone Bear? Well, both Morgan and Simons treated him mighty shabbily, or so the Indian regarded. And when thieves fall out, honest men sometimes come into their own. In this case, Lone Bear told another Indian that Bull Morgan had got a golden talisman in the shape of a claw. The other Indian happened to be one of the men who gave me shelter in the Chilkoot tepees, and he passed on the information to me."

"You mean, uncle," muttered Jack, "that Lone Bear claims to have seen Bull Morgan actually with the nugget?"

"So he reported. If that's the case, I figure it that Morgan reckons the danger to himself is over. No doubt he cached the nugget somewhere after the burning of the High Life, and now he's recovered it again. You yourself said, boys, that he carried it as a mascot, and it's quite likely that a superstitious fellow like Morgan thought he might change his luck by wearing it again."

"Bedad, is there any way for us to help you get on the trail of the spalpeens?" inquired Terry.

"Only by the way I've suggested, my boy—getting the money in Dawson?"

"We'll set off to-night," said Jack; "it will be pitch-dark in half an hour. You stay here awhile, uncle, and we'll pick you up here with the dog-team."

Thus it was arranged, and Jack and Terry hurried back into the mining camp, little guessing the night of terror on which they were about to embark!

Quickly Jack and Terry got together a few provisions in their cabin in Kettle Creek Camp. These, together with a few necessary cooking utensils and so forth, they put on their sledge, and having harnessed their dogs, they set off back to the pines where they had left Uncle Dave.

So cold had it become that work on the claims had stopped earlier than usual, and the miners were now huddled round red-hot stoves in their poorly lighted cabins.

No one was abroad to question the boys as they hit the white trail out of the camp under the wintry moon. Thus without difficulty, they met Uncle Dave, who was disguised as a Chilkoot Indian, at the rendezvous as arranged, and settled him on the sledge.

Skookum, knowing by instinct that the trail was for Dawson, set out in that direction without a word from Jack. And thus commenced a journey that was to have an astonishing result!

(Now look out for next week's thrilling instalment of this amazing adventure serial, boys.)

**This Week:****Preston North End
F.C.**

The popular club in the Second
Division of the League.

THE story of the Preston North End Football Club is really very much like a fairy tale. So much so that it begins like this. Once upon a time—long before you were born, and even before I was born—certain footballers began to leave their native heath in Scotland to take up residence near to Preston. Now, Preston is a very nice place, but the world is full of suspicious people. Consequently, when these Scottish footballers who had gone to live at Preston began to play football for Preston North End, certain people began to inquire as to the why and the wherefore. It dawned on these suspicious people as possible that the very skilful Scots might not be playing for Preston North End merely because they liked to be in the place. An inquiry was held. It was found that the suspicious people were right. That the Scotsmen were getting paid for playing football for Preston. Then, of course, the fat was indeed in the fire. There was a row.

Proud Preston!

You must remember that in those days—I am going back over forty years—nobody ever dreamt that there would come a time when professionals in football—and in other sports as well—would be generally accepted. However, when these Preston players of other days were found out, there was one of two things to be done. Either throw them out of football altogether, or acknowledge professionalism in the sport. The latter course was taken. Football began to be played by professionals, and Preston was the place where professional football started. Perhaps it was fitting that Preston should also have been the home of a team which made wonderful history. In the first year of League football the Preston North End team won the championship without losing a single match, and in the same season won the English Cup without having a goal scored against them in that competition. "Proud Preston" was the name by which the club was best known. Proud they were, and proud they had a right to be.

Then and Now!

It is a favourite hobby of some people to make comparisons with things of olden times and those of to-day. They try it in football. They tell us that there is no football team to-day which would be able to hold a candle to the Preston North End side of those "proud" days. It is easy to make this sort of statement, because it cannot be proved to be wrong. So I don't propose to pursue the subject.

What we can say is that the pride of Preston has to a certain extent been humbled since those most glorious days. To-day the club is in the Second Division—has been there since 1925-6. And although making a gallant struggle to get back to the top class since then, has not yet succeeded. The team may do it this season, but it is a hard row to hoe.

Though it is silly to try to compare teams of old with teams of to-day, there is one way in which the old Preston North End team and the Preston North End of to-day were similar. Scotland stands well represented in each. Indeed, I heard the other day that the Preston North End club is sometimes referred to as Scotland North End. Anyway, almost a full team of Scots could be fielded.

Sound in Defence!

Whether Scottish players, scientific as they are, should be relied on to bring the side back to the First Division is

a matter of opinion. Some folk think that it is brawn, not brain, which wins the Second Division championship.

Now to get down to details about this English and Scottish mixture which to-day is the Preston North End team. The goalkeeper is Anthony Carr, a lanky sort of lad who went to Deepdale—that's where Preston play their home matches—just over a year ago.

At right full-back there is also an Englishman from Jarrow in William Wade. These are two players who cost Preston very little money. But there are several who cost quite a lot of money. Among them is Tom Hamilton, who can play in either of the full-back positions. When Tom gets his shoulder to an opponent, believe me, that opponent knows about it. He is a Scot from Kilmarnock, said to have cost four thousand pounds. That was some years ago, because I remember him playing at right full-back in the Preston North End Cup Final team of 1922. He it was against whom the referee conceded a penalty kick at Stamford Bridge. From the spot kick Huddersfield Town scored the only goal and walked off with the Cup. That penalty was talked about for weeks. It should never have been given, because the offence against the rules was outside the penalty area.

Musical Talent!

North End have what can be called a musical half-back line, and they often call a pretty tune to which opponents

MEN OF PRESTON—AND PROUD OF IT TOO!

Reading from left to right: (back row) photo shows: Metcalf, W. Scott (trainer), Wade, Carr, Hamilton, Craven, Crawford; front row: Pilkington, Robson, Roberts, Morris, James, Harrison.

have to dance. Right-half Metcalf is the deputy organist at a parish a few miles outside Preston, and Bobby Crawford, the left half-back, is a fine singer with a clear baritone voice. He would certainly sing a song if North End got back to the First Division.

Between these two Englishmen there is David Morris, Scottish International, and another of the men who cost a lot of money. Raith Rovers used to be Morris' club beyond the border, and Raith knows how to turn out the "goods!" It should not be assumed, however, that Preston's officials only think of Scotland when players are wanted.

A Lively Forward Line!

In the usual North End forward line there are three Scots, all big fee men, and all very good. Perhaps they would all be better for a little more "punch," but you just have to admire their pretty football. Alec Reid, a newcomer to the outside right position, had the reputation of being the fastest runner in Scottish football when he left Aberdeen. He can take the ball through with him.

Inside-right William Russell—another Scottish International—is Reid's partner, an Airdrieonian who can juggle with the ball in a truly wonderful way. In the middle of the line is Tom Roberts, the only English International player in the side. He has had rather a strange career. Soon after the War he went to Preston from Southport. Some time later he was transferred to Burnley, but has now found his way back to Preston. He is a goer, and a goalscorer, but has not been as consistent this season as Deepdallians would like.

All that Russell does at inside right, is also done by a Scot of very similar ways in Alec James, the inside-left. He is typical of one of the sayings of his country—"guid gear gangs in little bulk." He is another ex-Raith Rover, and the treasurer of that club must be very glad that there is such a team as Preston North End.

George Harrison, penalty kick expert and former Everton player, is outside-left. Already this season he has one "hat trick" to his credit, so you see he can nip in and shoot.

BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT!

(Continued from page 23.)

He blinked at the fur-coated gentleman, and he blinked at the magnificent car outside. His eyes danced behind his glasses.

"Let me explain, Master Bunter," said Mr. Skelton. "It was my desire to find some truly generous and charitable person to assist me in carrying out charitable works among the poor this Christmas. For this purpose, I assumed a poor garb and an appearance of great poverty, and tramped the countryside for many days. I received many acts of kindness in my assumed character of a destitute old man; but only on one occasion did I encounter the kind of person I was seeking—when a schoolboy befriended me, offered me his own umbrella in a rainstorm, and gave me his watch and chain because he had no money to give. That schoolboy was yourself!"

The Greyfriars fellows crowding round Bunter blinked at one another.

"I knew then that I had found what I sought," continued Mr. Skelton. "It is far from easy for a millionaire to be sure that any person with whom he comes in touch is truly disinterested and kind-hearted. In my assumed character of a destitute old man I placed the matter beyond doubt. If you care to pass your Christmas holidays with me, Master Bunter, you shall have as happy a Christmas as I can give you; but, above all, you will be able to carry out all your charitable desires and make many others happy, which, I am assured, will appeal to you more than any other consideration."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"I have called upon Mr. Bunter, and obtained his sanction," said Mr. Skelton. "He is prepared to forego the pleasure of your society during the Christmas vacation."

Some of the fellows grinned.

That much, at least, surprised nobody.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"I'll come with pleasure, sir! It's

awfully good of you! But—" He hesitated.

"If you have any objection, my boy, state it frankly," said the millionaire.

"I—I was thinking of my brother, sir," said Bunter, to the blank amazement of all hearers. "It's ripping for me, but poor old Sammy—"

Mr. Skelton beamed.

"My dear lad, you only raise my opinion of you still higher!" he exclaimed. "Bring your brother with you."

"Then I'll be jolly glad, sir!" said Bunter.

"It is decided, then," said the millionaire. "I shall wait till you and your brother are ready to depart."

Mr. Skelton walked away with Mr. Quelch.

"Pan me, somebody!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"What ass was it said that the age of miracles was past?" inquired Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton clapped Bunter on the back.

"Good old porpoise!" he said.

"Gratters, old man!"

"The gratterfulness is terrific!"

"Bravo, Bunter!"

For the first time on record, Billy Bunter departed in state when the school broke up.

Sammy Bunter, in an absolutely dazed condition, sat by his major's side in the great car with the little old gentleman.

A crowd of fellows gathered round to see them off.

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Merry Christmas, old bean!"

Bunter waved a fat hand joyously. Many hands and hats were waved after him. The Owl of the Remove, in the seventh heaven of delight, rolled away in the car, booked for a wonderful holiday, which was the unexpected and amazing outcome of Bunter's Christmas Present!

THE END.

(Next week's bumper issue of the MAGNET will contain another magnificent long story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "BUNTER, THE BENEVOLENT!" Order your copy well in advance, chums, and thus avoid being disappointed.)

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Santa Claus at St. Sam's!

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Young Dicky Nugent of the Second Form at Greyfriars sat up all night, with a towel round his napper, writing this special Christmas yarn, and I think you chaps will agree that he's given us a winner!—Ed.



"SIR!" ejaculated Mr. Lickham, bursting into Doctor Birchmell's study like a hurricane.

"Have you forgotten your duties? The Sixth are waiting for you in their room."

Doctor Birchmell was in the throws of toil. His desk was littered with MSS. (which means Many Scratched Sheets). There was a quill pen stuck behind his ear, and a big blob of ink was trickling down his nose. He gave Mr. Lickham a black look.

"Blow the Sixth! I'm too busy to take them this morning, Jackham. Go and set them some simple sums to keep them out of mischief. I am writing a Christmas Pantomime. I was, in fact, working on the hundredth canto of my Panto when you burst in."

"You—you're writing a Panto, sir?" ejaculated Mr. Lickham, in surprise.

"Which one are you cribbing, sir—Dick Wittington, or Cinderella, or Jack the Giant-Killer?"

Doctor Birchmell glared.

"I'm not cribbing nothing!" he cried hotly. "I'm writing a new and original Panto, to be performed at St. Sam's on Breaking-up Night. I'm sick and tired of all the old Pantomimes, such as 'Ali Baba, or the Black Sheep,' and 'Little Red Babs in the Wood,' and 'Sindrella and the Beanstalk.' What we need is something new and novel. As for cribbing, Lickham, I haven't been guilty of that pernicious practice since I sat for my Schoolmaster's Satisfacate."

Mr. Lickham grinned.

"Might I be allowed to see the MSS, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

Doctor Birchmell gathered up the Many Scratched Sheets.

"I'm calling my Panto 'The Coming of Santa Claus,'" he explained. "And I'm giving you a part in it, Licky."

"Me, sir?"

"Yes. The part of Doctor Skinfint, a mean and miserly schoolmaster. It will suit you down to the ground!"

"Really, sir—"

"Doctor Skinfint is the Principle of an Academy for Poor Orphans whose fathers and mothers cannot afford to send them to a public school. He's a frightfully mean old codger. The other people in the Panto are four of the Poor Orphans—Tommy Tuckless, Sammy Skellington, Little Willie, and Little Alfie. These parts will be played by The MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 1,036.

Jolly, Merry, Bright, and Fearless of the Fourth."

"Oh, yes, sir?"

"But, of course, these are merely minor parts," went on the Head. "The Leading Man, the Principle Boy, and the Headcock and Bottle-washer will be Yours Truly! I shall play Santa Claus. With my kindly, benevolent face, and my long, white beard, you must admit I shall make an excellent Father Christmas."

Mr. Lickham looked doubtful.

"I think we ought to swap parts, sir," he said. "You be Doctor Skinfint, the mean and miserly schoolmaster. All you'll need do is to be your natural self on the stage."

"Lickham, you cheeky rotter—"

"And I'll be the beaming, benevolent, bountiful Santa Claus!" went on Mr. Lickham, with a smile.

Doctor Birchmell frowned.

"You'll keep your claws off my Panto!" he said wrathfully. "You'll take the part I've allotted to you or none at all. This is my Panto, and I won't have any interference from anybody, or from a nobody!"

"Very good, sir," murmured Mr. Lickham meekly. "To here is to obey."

"We will now run through the Panto together," said the Head. "When the curtain rises, it will reveal a dormitory scene at Doctor Skinfint's Academy. The time is Christmas Eve. The four pupils—Tommy Tuckless, Sammy Skellington, Little Willie, and Little Alfie, are in the act of retiring."

"But why should they retire before they've started to play their parts?" asked Mr. Lickham.

"Dolt! Imbecile! I don't mean that they retire from the stage. They are in the act of taking off their toggs and turning in. Savvy?"

Mr. Lickham nodded.

"Then they all start yawning," eggs-plained the Head. "Naturally, as it is Christmas Eve, their conversation turns upon Santa Claus. Tommy Tuckless kicks off."

"Tomnie is Christmas Eve, you chaps, and Santa Claus will come—per-haps!"

Before the hour of midnite tolls Santa will roll up in his Rolls!"

"But Santa Claus always rides in a sleigh!" protested Mr. Lickham.

Doctor Birchmell snorted.

"True enough. But I've got to say he comes in a Rolls, so as to make it time. I can't say:

"Before the hour of midnite tolls Santa will roll up in his sleigh."

That isn't poetry!"

"The other isn't poetry, either," said Mr. Lickham.

"What?"

"It's just doggerel. Any fool could write that sort of stuff!"

"Why not try your hand, then?" suggested the Head, with biting sarcasm.

"But enuf of these interruptions, Lickham. Let's get on with the washing. After Tommy Tuckless has spoken, poor little Sammy Skellington, the scraggiest and most miserable young scamp in Doctor Skinfint's Academy, bursts into tears, and replies:

"Doo-hoo. 'This night should be most jolly, I'm filled with merriment. I'm blubbing. Really, it's too bad of me, But since I came to this Academy I've never had enuf to eat— Never enjoyed a Christmas treat, And never had, like other boys, Plum-pudding, turkey, sweets, and toys. Old Doctor, Skinfint is a Tarter, And I'm a half-starved little mackerel! I cannot check these tears of mine; They're splashing down my cheeks like urine!"

seconds the proposal, and it is carried anonymously. The four miserable little brats are in the act of hanging their stockings on the bed-rail, when in comes Doctor Skinfint—that's you, Lickham!"

"And what do I do?" asked Mr. Lickham.

"You frown fiercely at the shivering little wretches, who have scrambled back into their beds, and then you address them thus:

"You little grubs, with griny paws, There's no such bloke as Santa Claus! He is a myth—a fairy-tail! Why are your stockings on the rail? I tell you Santa is a fiction! I will not hear of contradiction! So go to sleep without delay! Nor dare to wake till Christmas Day!"

"The cruel and hard-hearted Doctor Skinfint then withdraws, leaving the poor orphan-boys more miserable than ever. They are in despair of Santa Claus paying them a visit. And they are crying themselves to sleep when the miracle happens."

"En? What miracle?" asked Mr. Lickham.

"Santa Claus arrives!" cried the Head dramatically. "There is a jingling of sleigh-bells behind the scenes and—"

"But you said just now that Santa Claus was arriving in a Rolls!"

"So I did, Lickham, so I did! Well, there is a hoof of a Klaxon horn behind the scenes, and then Santa Claus makes his dramatic day-bo. He dazzenz come on to the stage through the wings, in the usual way. He sort of drops from the clouds, like a bewtiful angel descending."

"How will you wangle that, sir?" inquired Mr. Lickham.

"It's simple enuf, Lickham. I shall be lowered on to the stage by an invisible wire, attached to a belt I shall be wearing. 'The' will be a pulley—hidden from the audience, of course—and operated by a number of boys up aloft. First my feet will come into view, and gradually the rest of my body will follow. I shall appear to be floating down on to the stage."

Mr. Lickham looked dubious.

"Supposing something should go wrong with the works, sir? Supposing the invisible wire were to snap? You would come an awful cropper. We shouldn't like to see Santa Claus land on the stage in an unconscious heap."

"And you won't, either!" said the Head. "Put aside those foolish fears, Lickham. The wire will be strong enuf to bear my wait, and I shall thoroughly test it before the performance comes off."

"Good! And what happens when you make your dramatic day-bo, as you call it?"

"Well, of course, the boys in bed will be aware of my presence, and they will look on spellbound while I fill their stockings with good things from my sack. I shall wish them all a merry Christmas, and warn them not to look in their stockings till the morning. After a jolly little chat with them I shall give the signal to be hauled up, and then I shall float away, like a bewtiful angel."

"My hat!" ejaculated Mr. Lickham.

"As soon as my dangling feet have disappeared from view," said Doctor Birchmell, "the skoundrelly Doctor Skinfint—that's you!—will come sneaking into the dormitory. And he will perform the mean and dastardly action of raiding the boys' stockings—helping himself to the contents."

"I say!" protested Mr. Lickham. "I don't quite relish the prospect of playing the part of a dabbie-died skoundrel!"

"I don't suppose you do," said the Head, "but somebody's got to play it, and you seem to be naturally fitted for the part, Lickham."

"Really, Doctor Birchmell—"

"Well, to return to the Panto. As soon as you have emptied the boys' stockings, and are about to decamp with the loot, I come on the scene again—lowered by the invisible wire—and intercept you. I set about you: with the whip I am carrying, and give you a terrible hiding."

"Yaroooo!" yelled Mr. Lickham, in sudden alarm.

"Don't be alarmed, Licky. It will only be a stage hiding, not a real one. You will be padded out with cushions, of course, to soften the blows."

"Yes, but—but you might catch me in an unprotected part of my person—"

"That will be your funeral," said the Head calmly. "Well, having whipped you off the stage, I shall restore the loot to the boys' stockings, and on Christmas morning they will wake up all merry and bright and empty their stockings and enjoy their treat, and bless the name of good old Doctor Santa Claus Birchmell. The curtain will be rung down on the happy scene, and the audience will shout themselves hoarse with delight at the wonderful success of my Panto!"

Doctor Birchmell jumped to his feet and danced two and two in his ecstatic moment. His enthusiasm was not shared by Mr. Lickham, which was not surprising, for the part of Doctor Skinfint was not at all an attractive one to play. And the prospect of a whipping in the presence of all St. Sam's—was anything but pleasing to the master of the Fourth.

"What do you think of my Panto, Lickham?" chorled the Head. "Great stuff, isn't it? O, course, I shall make a charge for admission. Half-a-crown to the masters, a bob to the seniors, a tanner to the juniors, and threepence to the fags. The proceeds will be devoted to Charity."

Doctor Birchmell nodded.

"I know a most deserving case at this school," he said. "The case of a poor beggar who happens to be on the rox and can't afford to go away for Christmas. Poor, poor fellow! 'The tears well to my eyes whenever I think of him.'"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lickham. "And who might the 'poor fellow' be?"

"The Head winked slyly at Mr. Lickham.

"Between you and me and the gate-post, Licky," he said, "his name is Alf Birchmell! I am the deserving case. But, of course, that fact will be discreetly kept dark. Well, you had better go along and attend to the Sixth. I'd forgotten all about them. Set them some simple sums, to keep them quiet. And hold yourself in readiness, Lickham, for the first rehearsal of my Panto. Chicoro, old bean!"

And the Head, waving Mr. Lickham to the door, resumed work on his Christmas Panto, which was shortly to cause an amazing sensation at St. Sam's.

(Now watch out for "DOCTOR BIRCHMELL'S PANTOMIME," next week's amusing yarn by Dicky Nugent. It's one long laugh from beginning to end.)

THE END.

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