

This Week's Long Laugh! → **INSIDE** ← This Week's Long Story!

No. 1,138. Vol. XXXVI. Week Ending December 7th, 1929.

The MAGNET

2^D

EVERY SATURDAY.



COKER'S CRACKSMAN!

THE JAPE OF THE TERM!

(See this week's amusing and amazing school story of Harry Wharton & Co.)



Come Into the Office, Boys!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address:
The Editor, the "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

NOTE.—All Jokes and Limericks should be sent to
c/o "Magnet," 5, Carnarvon Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

I'VE been taken to task again by one of my readers—a girl reader this time! Ivy Graham, of Barnet, says that the word "talkies" is slang, and ought not to be used—especially in a paper like the MAGNET. Very well, Ivy, I suppose. That instead of saying "talkie" in future I will have to refer to "a cinematograph projection with vocal synchronisation!" Here's an interesting item of news for you! Do you know that the world was once sold to the highest bidder? It's a fact! It happened in ancient Rome when the Praetorian Guards decided that they would sell the world—which they considered was theirs to dispose of!

THE MAN WHO BOUGHT THE WORLD

was a rich Roman merchant, and he paid the equivalent to a million pounds for it, and immediately proclaimed himself ruler of the earth. Unfortunately for him, the Roman legions who were then in Britain did not take kindly to the bargain, went back to Rome, and overthrew the new regime. So the world is not now somebody's private property!

I've just been glancing through my diary, and I find that there are

TWO INTERESTING ANNIVERSARIES

this week. The first is the anniversary of the death of Mercator, the inventor of Mercator's projection, who died on December 2nd, 1594. I expect you will find that all the maps you use at school are based on Mercator's projection, which assumes that lines of longitude are parallel. Of course they aren't, for they run to points at the North and South poles. But map-reading and navigation is easier on Mercator charts than on others, which is why they are more generally used. But here's a strange thing about these charts—a straight line drawn upon one is not the shortest distance between two points!

The reason is that Mercator's charts make the world appear to be flat, and, as it is round, the shortest distance on a Mercator chart is, therefore, not a straight line but an arc!

The second anniversary recalls the days when women were

BURNED ALIVE

in India, following the death of their husbands. Previous to December 4th, 1829, widows in India used to be burned on the funeral pyre of their husbands, and this was known as "Suttee." As many as seventeen widows have been known to burn themselves on the pyre of a rajah, and in one year in Bengal over 700 perished in this manner. The British Government abolished this practice exactly one hundred years ago, but it is said that "Suttees" still occur even to-day, although they are illegal!

Another date that you might notice in your diary this week is December 5th. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,138.

which is the birthday of Admiral Earl Jellicoe—"Jellicoe of Jutland," who commanded the Grand Fleet at that memorable battle.

NOW let me get down to this week's queries. Andrew Croft, of Whitstable, who was very interested in our last French Revolution serial, wants to know "How long did

THE REIGN OF TERROR

last?" For just a little over a year. It commenced with the triumph of Robespierre in June, 1793, and ended with his downfall in July, 1794. In French history this is known as the Red Terror, and after the restoration of the Bourbons in 1815 there was another Terror which is termed the White Terror.

Ready for a laugh now? Right! Here's a yarn that wins a penknife for Edward Keith, "Dalintober," Campbelltown, Argyle.

HAND-Y ADVICE!



An Irishman who was signing his name on board ship began writing with his right hand and finished with his left hand. "I see you can write with both hands," said the officer. "Yes, sir,"

answered Pat. "When I was young my father said: 'Pat, learn to cut your finger-nails with your left hand, because one day you may lose your right!'"



Here's a topical question which should interest those of you who patronise the "talk"—sorry, I was forgetting myself—I mean the "cinematograph projections with etc." Bernard Cosgrave, of Hull, who uses the word which my girl reader deplors, asks me to tell him

WHEN THE FIRST "TALKIE" WAS SHOWN.

This was in New York, as long ago as 1891, when Edison showed his first cinematograph of a scene at a theatre accompanied by the actors' voices and the music. So, you see, there is nothing new in sound synchronisation. But the coming of electrical recording has made a vast improvement. Judging by the "talkie" (I can't help it, Ivy G.—the other way of saying it is too much of a mouthful!) which I witnessed last evening there is still a great deal of room for further improvement!

"M. R. X." has just been in to see me again! He has been dabbling in mathematics once more, and this time he propounded the following poser to me: "If all the Chinese in the world were to march four abreast past a given point, how long would it take them all to pass it?" I gave it up, and

asked him for the answer. To my surprise it was: "Never!"

This is how he works it out. The Chinese population of the world is about twenty-six millions. Assuming that they marched at three miles an hour for fifteen hours a day, they would take nearly twenty-three years to pass the given point. But by that time another generation would have come along, and there would be about thirty millions more Chinese coming along every year! Consequently, if they marched for ever and ever they would not pass the given point!

Phew! After that I think we deserve a little light relief, which will be provided by Norman Pickering, of 76, Lowther Street, York, to whom I have forwarded a pocket wallet.

Said Hunter to Mauly one day:
"O lend me ten shillings, I pray.
For you are a lord
And thus can afford
To give lots of money away!"

I've just got room for a few more "RAPID-FIRE" REPLIES

before we pass on to next week's programme.

Who wrote the "Arabian Nights"? No one knows. They are a collection of ancient Persian legends, and were handed down by word of mouth until they were collected and translated into English and French.

How did a Ducat get its name? Because it was a coin that was first struck by Dukes. What is a Nephoscope? An instrument for measuring the velocity of clouds.

And now comes the GREAT question! What have you got in store for next week? The answer is:

A BUMPER ENLARGED CHRISTMAS NUMBER

that will take a deuce of a lot of beating!

To commence this fine feast of fun and fiction there will be an extra-special long complete yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of Greyfriars, entitled:

"QUELCHY'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT!"

By Frank Richards.

Ripping? Why, it's better than that—gilt-edged, jewelled-in-every-movement, the finest yarn your favourite author has ever written. You'll meet all your old favourites here, chums, among them, of course, being the Famous Five and Billy Bunter. "Nuff said!"

And that's not all the amusement in store for you. Oh, dear, no! Dicky Nugent wades in with another of his "hair-raising" yarns, the second rib-tickler in his new Christmas series, entitled:

"DR. BIRCHEMALL'S BOLT!"

Next comes another thrilling instalment of

"PETER FRAZER—IRONMASTER!"

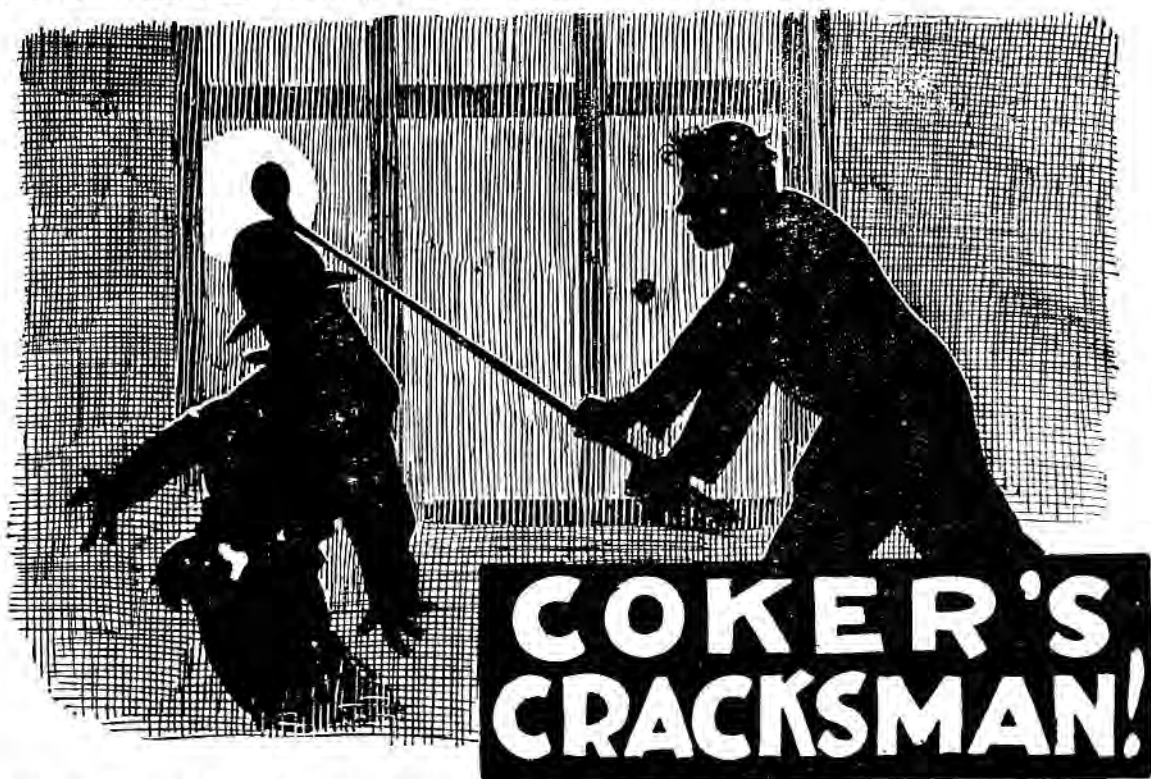
showing the lion-hearted Peter fighting tirelessly and valiantly to restore peace and quietness in his iron foundry.

Ah, and here's an additional extra-special treat for your chums: a full page of easy and amusing indoor tricks to keep you and your chums merry round the Yuletide log.

To complete this well-filled Christmas "stocking" there will be another interesting "footer" talk by 'Old Ref,' and your Editor's Chat to round things off nicely. Is it possible to beat this programme? I don't think so!

All the best, then, until next week.

YOUR EDITOR.



**A New, Long Complete School Story of Harry Wharton & Co.—the Chums of Greyfriars—
"starring" Horace Coker, the Fool of the Fifth. By FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Whose Cake?

"O W! Help!"
"What—"
"Wow! Help!"
There was a pattering of hurried feet in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. They pattered to the accompaniment of Billy Bunter's voice on its top note.
"What the thump!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

He stepped to the door of Study No. 1 and looked out. Across the Remove landing, from the stairs, came William George Bunter, with a bundle under his fat arm, in frantic flight.

Obviously, Bunter was pursued, though his pursuer was not yet in sight on the Remove staircase.

"Help!" spluttered Bunter.
"Rescue! Ow!"

He reached the doorway of Study No. 1 and plunged breathlessly in. Wharton jumped back just in time to escape a collision.

"Ow! Help! Keep him off!" yelled Bunter.

"Who, fathead?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Wow! That beast—Coker!" spluttered Bunter. "He's after me! Oh dear! Keep him off! Ow! Shut the door! Ow!"

Heavy footsteps trampled across the Remove landing.

"He's coming!" yelled Bunter. "Lock the door! Stick the table against it. Oh crumbs!"

"Rats!" said Wharton cheerily.

The chums of the Remove were not likely to barricade the study door because Coker of the Fifth was coming. If Coker came to the Remove passage

in search of trouble he was welcome to all he found there.

Bunter dodged breathlessly round the table as the heavy footsteps rapidly approached the study doorway.

"Keep him out!" he howled. "He's after me—"

"Line up, Franky," said Harry Wharton.

"What-ho!" grinned Nugent.

And the two juniors stood ready, on either side of the doorway, for Coker.

They had only a few seconds to wait. No doubt Bunter's terrified squeak was heard by Horace Coker in the passage, and told him where his quarry was.

Coker's the best scholar, the best footballer, cricketer, boxer—the best all-rounder Greyfriars has ever seen; at least, in Horace Coker's estimation! But when Horace turns his great powers towards crime detection, even he has to admit that here, at anyrate, he is a failure.

The burly form and excited face of Coker of the Fifth appeared in the doorway.

"Yaroooh! Keep him out!" howled Bunter.

Coker charged in.

Two juniors grasped him, one on either side, as he came, and at the same moment Wharton put out a foot for Coker to stumble over.

Crash!

"Oh!" roared Coker. "Ow!"

The burly Horace landed on the study floor with a mighty concussion. He roared as he landed. His prominent nose tapped the floor, hard. Before Coker quite knew what had happened to him a knee was planted in the small

of his back, pinning him down. It was Wharton's knee; and Frank Nugent promptly sat on the back of Coker's head. Coker of the Fifth was a hefty man—big and burly and bulky—and the two juniors, sturdy as they were, would have had their hands very full with Coker if he had been on his feet. It was safer to keep him down.

Billy Bunter blinked at them through his big spectacles, and gasped with relief as he saw Coker secured.

"Keep him down!" he gasped.

"Gurrrrh!" came in suffocating tones from Coker. "Gerroff my head! Gerroff my back! Gurrrrrrrgh!"

Coker heaved under the two Removites like an earthquake.

But the bulky Coker was at a disadvantage, and the two Removites kept him there.

"All serene, old bean," said Wharton, grinding his knee a little harder into Coker's back. "You're safer where you are."

"Grooogh! Lemme gerrup! I'll smash you! I'll pulverise you! I'll mop the study up with you! I'll spifficate you! Gurrrrh!"

"Sit tight, Franky!"

"You bet!" chuckled Nugent.

"Oooogh! Grooogh! Gerroff!" shrieked Coker.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry looked into the study. "What's the jolly old rumpus, you men?"

"Only Coker, hunting trouble," said Wharton cheerily. "Lend a hand, old chap. He's as strong as a horse."

Bob chuckled, and came into the study. Coker's legs were thrashing wildly, and Bob proceeded to tread on them to keep them quiet. Coker heaved

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from the direction of the Remove quarters had to pass that room to get into the Fifth Form passage. So Billy Bunter was glad to see the door closed.

And he was glad to hear the powerful voice of Coker of the Fifth booming through the closed door, startling as was that word that came booming to his ears. It showed that Coker was in the games study—and therefore not in his own study. And it was in Coker's study that Billy Bunter had business—pressing business.

"Burglars!" Bunter blinked along the Fifth Form passage. No man was to be seen in the length of that passage. But he paused to listen for a moment. He wondered what Coker was talking about.

"What about burglars, Coker?" came the voice of Potter of the Fifth—not in interested tones. There were a dozen of the Fifth in the games study—which meant that there were twelve fellows who were not interested in the remarks of Horace Coker.

That, of course, made no difference to Coker. If he had suspected that fellows were not interested in his remarks, he would only have pitied them for their lack of common sense.

"I've been looking at the evening paper," said Coker, his heavy voice booming through the door to Bunter's ears. "There's been another burglary in this neighbourhood."

"Has there?" yawned Greene.

"There has! Old Popper's place this time!" said Coker. "That's the third crib that's been cracked in a week."

"The third which that's been whatted?" said Potter.

"They call 'em cribs," said Coker; "and when they burgle 'em they call 'em cracked. It's a sort of thieves' slang. If you read as many detective novels as I do, Potter, you'd know."

"Well, speaking of the match with Redclyffe—"

That was the voice of Blundell, the captain of the Fifth.

"Old Popper's place is the third crib that's been cracked," went on Coker, regardless. "It's the work of the same gang, you men. They're working the neighbourhood, see? And I've been thinking—"

"Draw it mild, Coker!" That contribution came from Price of the Fifth. There was a chuckle in the games study.

"I've been thinking," hooted Coker, "that that cracksmen gang may drop in at Greyfriars. There's a lot of loot to be picked up here. They could get a lot of swag—"

"Of which?" ejaculated Blundell.

"Swag!" said Coker.

"What on earth's swag?"

"They call their loot swag," explained Coker, with the condescension of the fellow who knew, Coker being a well-read man in yellow-jacketed literature. "They could get a thumping lot of

swag here, if they burgled Greyfriars. I shouldn't be surprised if they came here next. The Head keeps a lot of stuff in the safe in his study, you know, and there's the school plate, and all that."

"Speaking of the Redclyffe match that—"

"The queer thing about all these cases," resumed Coker, "is that they seem to be inside jobs."

"What's an inside job?" asked Potter, in a tired voice.

"They call it an inside job, Potter, when there's no trace of the place having been broken into," explained Coker. "Take old Popper's place, for instance—Popper Court. No clue—nothing that the police can get hold of, at any rate. Either somebody let them in, or some of the gang got into the

brilliant idea. *You go round the House now, looking into all the studies, and make sure that there isn't a cracksmen hanging about."

"Good idea!" exclaimed Price.

"Do, Coker!"

"Oh, do!"

"Splendid idea!" exclaimed Potter. "We should all feel safer if you did that, Coker, old man."

"Rot!" said Coker. It did not even dawn on Coker's powerful brain that the Fifth Form men were fed up with him and his conversation, and would have been glad to see him fare forth from the games study for any reason whatsoever. "Rot! Just listen to me—"

Billy Bunter grinned, and rolled on his way. He was feeling safe now. Coker, Potter, and Greene were all in



Bob Cherry gave Bunter a shove, and the Owl of the Remove staggered and then fell down. Bunter's bundle crashed to the floor, the wrappings burst, and a huge cake rolled into view.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob. (See Chapter 1.)

place and hid themselves before it was shut up for the night, or—or something."

"Speaking of the Redclyffe match that—"

"Blundell's remark came in like a sort of refrain. "Let a fellow speak," said Coker. "I can tell you men that this is serious. It would make the fortune of that gang, if they got hold of the loot here and shared it out. The divvy—"

"The what?"

"The divvy. They call it a divvy when they divide the loot—"

"That would cause trouble in the gang, I should think," remarked Fitzgerald of the Fifth.

"Eh, why?" asked Coker.

"I mean, there would be a rift in the lute."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't make idiotic jokes, Fitz, on a serious subject. Suppose one of the gang got into the school, and let the others in at midnight? Easy enough for a man to sneak in a rambling old place like this, and hide himself—say, in a Form-room, or a study—"

"Tell you what, Coker," said Blundell of the Fifth, as if struck by a sudden

the games study, so obviously there was nobody in Coker's study—where the cake was! Bunter rolled on down the Fifth Form passage, and the voices in the games study became an indistinct murmur.

A minute later, and Billy Bunter was in Coker's study, and the door was closed behind him.

The light was off in the study, and Bunter did not venture to turn it on. There was a gleam from the fire that gave him light enough for his purpose. Bunter rolled across to the study cupboard.

Whether Coker & Co. had supped on that cake Bunter did not know. But even if they had, it was certain that there would be a good deal left. It was a huge cake—one of Chunkley's biggest and best—an expensive cake, only to be afforded by a fellow like Coker, who was rolling in money. No three fellows could have finished that cake at a sitting—unless Billy Bunter was one of the three!

Bunter's eyes glistened behind his spectacles as he raised a fat hand to the cupboard door.

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Whether the cracksmen gang who were "working" the neighbourhood paid a visit to Greyfriars or not, there was no doubt that a burglary was about to take place in Horace Coker's study!

Bunter grinned in anticipation.

But, with his hand on the door, the Owl of the Remove suddenly stopped and listened, with a throbbing in his fat heart.

Slam!

The sound of a door, closed with considerable violence, rang along the Fifth Form passage.

It was the door of the games study. Somebody had left that study, and shut the door after him with great emphasis.

Heavy footsteps tramped down the passage.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He knew those footsteps! They were Coker's! It really was cruel luck on Bunter. He had left Coker talking—and, naturally, he had supposed that Coker would go on talking. Coker, in fact, never left off talking if he could help it. Apparently, on this occasion, he had not been able to help it.

Anyhow, he was coming to his study. Bunter stood frozen with terror—forgetting even the cake. It was too late to dodge out of the study—he would have emerged full in the sight of the approaching Fifth-Former.

Yet he knew what to expect if Coker found him there. It was his second attempt on the cake. On the first occasion Coker had pursued him to the Remove passage—and what had happened there could not have improved Coker's temper. If he found Bunter after that cake again—cornered in the study, with escape cut off—Bunter turned quite cold at the thought.

He blinked wildly round the study for a hiding-place.

Fortunately, there was one ready at

hand. The study table was draped with a handsome cover, a gift from Coker's affectionate Aunt Judy. That cover descended all round the table to within a foot of the floor.

Bunter plunged breathlessly under the table.

Squatting in the centre of the space beneath the table, stilling his breath, the Owl of the Remove was safe from discovery—unless a fellow actually stooped down and looked under the table, which, of course, Coker was not likely to do.

Bunter was only just in time.

The door opened, and heavy footsteps tramped into the study, and the door slammed again. Bunter was no longer alone.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bunter!

HORACE COKER turned on the light in his study.

His rugged face wore a deep frown.

He was annoyed.

He had come back to his quarters alone; Potter and Greene, his study mates and chums, remained in the games study. They had let him go alone—in fact, they had been glad to see him go. With Coker's friends, a little of Coker's conversation went a long way. Coker had a way of collaring the conversation, so to speak. He had little use for replies; interruptions he frowned upon.

In conversation, it was for Coker to select the topic, and expatiate upon it. Other fellows were limited to "Oh!" and "Ah!" and "Yes," and "Quite so, Coker!" and not too much of that.

Obviously, a conversationalist like

Coker was bound to have his feelings hurt sometimes.

They were hurt now. Blundell of the Fifth had told him that he was fed-up with burglars; Bland had requested him to ring off, Price had asked him to shut up; Fitzgerald had inquired whether he was wound up; and Hilton had said that if he didn't give a fellow a rest, he would shy a hassock at his head. These remarks were plain enough to penetrate even Coker's triple armour of obtuseness, self-satisfaction, and fatheadedness.

So he had departed from the games study in wrath, slamming the door of that apartment behind him with a mighty slam.

He naturally expected his chums, Potter and Greene, to follow him and revel in the delights of his conversation in their own study. But they hadn't. They had let him go alone, just as if they were as fed-up as the other fellows with Coker's chinwag. This was the unkindest cut of all.

Coker stamped across to the armchair and sat down. He had the evening paper under his arm. In that paper was the latest account of the "cracked cribs" in the neighbourhood of Greyfriars School. Coker sat down to read that account.

Few fellows at Greyfriars were interested in cracked cribs. But Horace Coker was one of the few.

Literature, for the most part, did not appeal to Coker. School books he regarded with deep disdain. All the masterpieces of classic literature Coker lumped together under the general heading of "muck." His feelings towards P. Vergilius Maro and Q. Horatius Flaccus were bitter. With Titus Livius, he would have been glad to have the gloves on for a few rounds, had that been possible.

But there was a peculiar kind of modern literature that hit Coker just where he lived, so to speak.

He revelled in yellow-jacketed detective novels. The shillings that Coker expended on these remarkable works would have ruined any other man in the Fifth.

From this deep well of information Coker drew an extensive knowledge of cracksmen and their ways. He knew all about swag, and marks, and buses, and cribs and the cracking thereof.

So when a series of burglaries occurred in the near vicinity of the school that Coker honoured and adorned with his presence, he was naturally interested and thrilled.

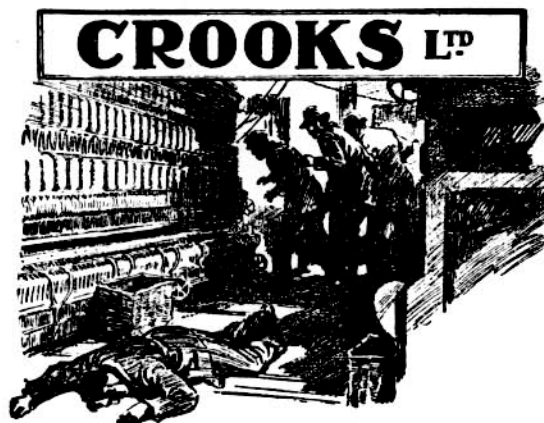
The police, so far, had been unable to track down the mysterious cracksmen. Coker fancied that, in their place, he would have handled the matter rather more successfully. And it did not occur to him that this was merely a fancy.

Sprawling in the armchair, with his long legs stretched out towards the study table, Coker devoured the newspaper account of the latest outrage.

Coker's legs were long, and their extremities invaded the space under the table when he stretched them out—rather to the alarm of a fat junior who was squatted there. Two enormous feet rested within a few inches of Billy Bunter.

Bunter blinked at them in dismay. A few more inches, and those huge feet would have prodded Bunter. Fortunately they stopped short of that.

Coker, as he devoured the latest news, recovered from his ill-humour, and the dark frown left his rugged brow. He was deeply interested in the proceedings of that mysterious gang of cracksmen. But if Horace Coker was enjoying himself, the other occupant of the study was not.



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Bunter was growing more and more uncomfortable.

Prep being over, he had not expected Coker to come back to his study at all. When Coker came in, Bunter had hoped that he had merely come in for a book or something, and would depart again. When Coker settled down in the arm-chair with the newspaper, Bunter's dismay was great.

It was getting towards bed-time for the Remove. Bunter, evidently, could not stay very long where he was.

On the other hand, he could not leave so long as Coker was there. So he was on the horns of a dilemma.

He dared not make a sound. He tried not to breathe. The mere idea of being discovered and rooted out by Coker made a cold chill run down his spine.

He listened to the rustling of the newspaper and to an occasional grunt from Coker, and wondered dismally whether the beast would never go. If Coker remained there till bed-time Bunter was done for—bed-time for the Fifth being half an hour later than for the Remove.

"Silly ass!" ejaculated Coker suddenly. "Fool!"

Bunter almost jumped.

For the moment he fancied that Coker had spotted him, and was addressing him.

But Coker did not stir from the arm-chair.

"Chump!" he went on. "Fathead!" He was not addressing Bunter. He was expressing his opinion of Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, who was engaged on the Popper Court case.

"So they've sent for a Scotland Yard man, have they?" Coker went on, aloud. "Well, I hope he may do some good. Grimey won't get back old Popper's silver pots for him, that's a cert. If a fellow had a chance—"

Coker sighed. The limitations of school life pressed very heavily upon him just then.

"It's as plain as anything," went on Coker, addressing space, "that one of the gang got into the house and hid himself, and let in the others afterwards. That's what I deduce."

Bunter grinned under the table. "Just what might happen here," went on Coker. "Now it gets dark so early, a cracksmen could sneak into the place before the House is locked up—a back window or something—all ready to let the other rotters in at midnight! Might happen any night!"

And Coker gave a snort, expressive of his feelings of contempt for the official police—a contempt equalling that of any private detective in a yellow-jacketed novel.

He resumed the newspaper.

Bunter squatted and waited. Would the beast never go?

The beast showed no signs of going.

Bunter was getting cramped.

He had been more than a quarter of an hour under the table, crouched in a most uncomfortable attitude.

His fat limbs ached, a feeling like pins and needles crept along one fat leg, he had a tickling in his back. He realised with horror that he would not be able to keep still and silent much longer. Would the beast never, never go?

At all risks, Bunter had to shift his position a little. He was getting more and more cramped.

He shifted a little.

There was a sudden rustle of the newspaper, and Coker moved in the chair. Bunter's fat heart stood still.

For a long, agonised moment he dreaded that Coker had heard him—that the Fifth Form man was about to lift the edge of the tablecloth and reveal

him—after which, Coker's heavy boot would play the principal part in the subsequent proceedings.

But Coker did not rise from the chair. He sat still—very still—indeed, unnaturally still! Bunter breathed again. He little knew!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Strategie!

COKER hardly breathed. He was not reading the newspaper now.

Over the top of the paper his gaze was fixed, as if fascinated, on the table-cover's lower edge.

He was not admiring that expensive gift from Aunt Judy. He was not thinking of the table-cover. He was thinking of what it hid.

He was thinking—or trying to think—with his brain almost in a whirl.

Coker was not alone in the study! He knew that now! Distinctly he had heard a stealthy sound from under the table. Under that table, draped by the descending edge of the cover, someone was hidden.

There could be no mistake about it. He knew! He had heard a stealthy

SMILE, BOYS, SMILE!

Here's an amusing joke, which wins one of this week's pocket-knives for Joseph Connolly, of 40, Cork Street, Dublin.

POOR ANNE!

"Father," said little Tommy, looking up suddenly from his History, "was Anne Boleyn a flat-iron?"

"A flat-iron," repeated the father, puzzled. "No. What makes you think that?"

"Well," said Tommy, "my History says that Henry VIII pressed his suit with Anne Boleyn!"

It's as easy as rolling off a form to win one of these useful prizes, chums! Pile in!

movement distinctly. Now, in the deep silence of the study, he fancied that he could detect a sound of suppressed breathing.

Coker did not need telling what it meant. Not the slightest doubt on that point crossed his mind. The gang of cracksmen who had worked the neighbourhood had, as Coker had already suspected, turned their designs on Greyfriars School. They had, as Coker had already suspected, surreptitiously introduced one of their number into the House, to remain in hiding and let in the rest of the gang when the place was buried in silence and slumber. It was all clear to Coker.

Under the table in his study, within a few feet of him, was crouched a desperate cracksmen in hiding. That was obvious—to Coker!

To Coker's credit be it said, that he did not lose his nerve in these perilous and thrilling circumstances.

Coker had heaps of pluck. Nature, who seemed to have overlooked Coker in the matter of brains, had endowed him with unlimited pluck, doubtless by way of compensation. But courageous as he was, Coker could not help a queer thrill creeping along his spine at the knowledge—the certain knowledge—that within a few feet of him crouched a grim and ruthless desperado, probably with an automatic pistol in his grip.

That the villain had an automatic was practically certain. All the cracksmen in Coker's yellow-jacketed novels had automatics. There was no reason, so far as Coker could see, why this particular villain should depart from the general rule.

Coker remained very still. Now that he knew how matters stood, he had to think.

His first impulse was to grip the poker, raise the table-cover, and root out the hidden burglar. Coker was prepared to stun him with a hefty blow—indeed, to crack his head beyond repair if necessary. But the thought of the automatic restrained him. Fear did not enter into Coker's composition, but he knew that a poker was not much use against an automatic.

Coker did not act on his first impulse. Sitting in the chair, he affected, with masterly strategy, to have heard nothing.

The ruffian, evidently, had been under the table all the while Coker had been in the study. Coker could follow the villain's thoughts quite easily. The cracksmen had watched the place, learned a good deal about its ways, and was aware that after prep a study was a fairly safe place to hide in. Creeping through the House looking for a safe hiding-place, the scoundrel had fancied that he had found one in a study where there was no light on. It was clear enough to Coker. But for the fact that the fellows in the games study had grown tired of Coker's conversation, Coker would not have returned to his study at all, and the dastard would have remained undiscovered and secure. His plans, Coker could see, had been well-laid.

The question was now, how to deal with him. Coker considered that, as he sat with the newspaper on his knees, staring at the drooping table-cover that hid the cracksmen from his sight.

Attacking him with the poker was simply asking for a bullet from the deadly automatic. That was not good enough.

Obviously, Coker's game was to affect to know nothing, to see nothing; to retire from the study in a casual sort of way, without awakening the hidden villain's suspicions, and return with overwhelming help to secure him.

Having reached that decision Coker rose from the chair, making his movement as casual as possible.

Carelessly he strolled towards the door.

Under the table Billy Bunter almost gasped with relief. The beast was going at last.

Coker, though his heart was beating rather fast, hummed a tune as he strolled towards the door. That was to show how very casual he was, and to reassure the hidden burglar. The villain, of course, was not to be allowed to guess that Coker knew he was there.

Coker reached the door and opened it. Swiftly, deftly, Coker changed the key to the outside of the lock.

Then, rather hurriedly, he stepped out of the study into the passage, drew the door shut, and turned the key.

"Got him!" breathed Coker.

And he fairly sprinted up the passage towards the games study.

He left a very dismayed fat burglar behind him in his room. Billy Bunter had watched Coker's legs progressing across the study to the door with deep satisfaction. But as he heard the key click in the outside of the lock, Billy Bunter's satisfaction vanished all of a sudden. He gasped with dismay. He was locked in the study. For some unknown, inexplicable reason Coker had

locked the study door after him; and Bunter was a prisoner.

"Oh, crikey!" murmured Bunter. He put his head out from under the drooping table-cover, a good deal like a tortoise poking its head from its shell, and blinked round him.

Coker had left the light on. That looked as if he meant to come back.

Why he had locked the door was a mystery. He could not know that Bunter was there. Had he known that he would have kicked the Owl of the Remove out of the study instead of locking him in it. Coker's proceedings were inexplicable. But the fact was clear that the fat junior was locked in the study, and that there was no escape for him. Still, as Coker had left the light on, he evidently intended to return, and it behoved the Owl of the Remove to remain in hiding. At that point in the proceedings Bunter would have been willing to leave, even without the cake. But there was no escape for him yet, and he listened in fear and trembling for Coker's returning footsteps.

Meanwhile, Coker had reached the games study, and burst suddenly into that apartment.

Talk was going on in the games study—football jaw. The match with Redclyffe was the last big fixture before Greyfriars broke up for the Christmas holidays. And it was a matter of great interest to the footballing fraternity—far exceeding any interest they might have felt in crackmen, and the cracking of cribs.

"Oh dear! Here's Coker again!" murmured Greene.

"You men," Coker was gasping with excitement, as he burst in—"you men, get a move on!"

"Tain't bed-time yet!" said Potter.

"Burglars!"

"What?"

"Burglars!" gasped Coker.

"For goodness' sake," said Blundell crossly, "give us a rest! We're fed-up with you and your burglars, Coker!"

"You silly owl!"

"Chuck it, Coker!" implored Fitzgerald. "Enough's as good as a jolly old feast, you know. Give a man a rest!"

"Burglars in the House!" gasped Coker. "Don't you understand? Burglars, crackmen, armed villains!"

Coker naturally expected the Fifth to rise to that bait. He expected to see the whole party leap to their feet in wild excitement.

But they didn't. They simply stared at Coker, and two or three laughed.

"Don't you understand?" gasped Coker. "I tell you it's happened just as I deduced. One of the gang has got into the House, and hidden himself—ready to let the others in. He's hidden under the table in my study."

"You've been to your study?" asked Fitzgerald.

"Yes, I—"

"Did you drop off to sleep there?"

"Eh? No."

"Then how did you come to dream that a burglar was in your study?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly chump!" shrieked Coker.

"I tell you he's hidden under the table. Come and help me seize him."

"Gammon!" said Price.

"I heard him moving—"

"The cat, perhaps?" suggested Greene brilliantly. "Mrs. Kebble's cat is always getting into the studies."

"Don't be a silly ass, Greene."

"You see, old chap, you've got it wrong, somehow," said Potter patiently.

"Burglars don't burgle early in the evening, while the lights are on. They don't, really."

"Don't be a silly chump, Potter!"

"Well, look here," said Blundell, "if there's a burglar in your study, Coker, he's your burglar, and you can do what you like with him. Nobody here wants to be bothered with him."

"You frabjous ass!"

"The idea of playing Loder against Redclyffe," said Blundell, "is rot! I feel bound to speak to Wingate about it. Wingate's captain of the school, and head of the games, and all that; but I feel bound to point out to him that there's a better man to be found in the Fifth. I've thought for a long time that there's too many of the Sixth in the First Eleven. What do you fellows think?"

There was a chorus of assent. To a question like that there was not likely to be a dissentient voice in the whole Fifth Form of Greyfriars.

Coker gazed at the Fifth Form men almost in stupefaction.

He had arrived there, breathless, with news of the burglar who was hidden in his study to gather reinforcements to secure the desperate villain. And the Fifth went on talking football just as if he hadn't spoken. Nero fiddling while Rome was burning was a jest to this.

"You howling asses!" roared Coker.

"Are you coming to help me get hold of that crackman, or not?"

"Cheese it, Coker!"

"Run away and play!"

"I tell you—" bawled Coker.

"Look here, you've told us your funny story once," exclaimed Blundell.

"Now, ring off, there's a good fellow!"

"I tell you—"

"Shut up!" roared Blundell.

"If you won't help me secure the villain, I'll go to Prout!"

"Go to Prout, or go to the dickens, or go to Jericho, if you like," grunted the captain of the Fifth. "Go anywhere you jolly well like, so long as you shut up!"

"Sure, that's the important thing," said Fitzgerald. "Shut up, old man!"

Coker banged out of the games study. There was no help there. He rushed for the stairs to report the presence of the hidden burglar to his Form master. In the games study they resumed football jaw, just as if Coker hadn't happened.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Coker's Crackman!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"What's the row?"

"House on fire, or what?"

Harry Wharton & Co., loafing serenely in the direction of the Rag, after prep, were quite startled.

There was a beat of hasty footsteps on the big staircase, and they looked round to see what was up, or, rather, what was coming down.

It was Coker of the Fifth.

Judging by his motions Coker was in a great hurry. He came down the stairs three at a time in a series of kangaroo-like bounds. Solid as the staircase was, it groaned under Coker's descent.

The Famous Five stared at him. Other fellows stared at him. Wingate of the Sixth, who was chatting with Gwynne of that Form near the foot of the big staircase, ceased to chat, and glared up at Coker. Racing about the House was strictly forbidden to juniors. It was not forbidden to seniors, simply because Upper Form fellows were supposed to know better. Yet here was Coker, a senior of the Fifth Form, racing about the House like an unruly fag who was sure that his Form master's eye was elsewhere.

"What the thump—" began Wingate.

Down came Coker, red and breathless, obviously pressed for time.

"It's a race, I suppose," said Harry Wharton.

"The racefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurrey Jamset Ram Singh.

"But who's he racing with?" asked Bob Cherry; a remark that would have earned him a severe reprimand had it been made in the presence of his Form master.

Fortunately, Mr. Quelch was not at hand to note that reckless misuse of the nominative case.

"Coker was after Bunter this afternoon," said Johnny Bull. "Can't be Bunter after Coker—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! There he goes!"

Coker had no memory for Latin, even for such a well-worn Latin tag as "festina lente." It was a case of more haste and less speed with Coker. Three steps at a time was all very well, so long as a fellow kept his footing. Coker missed his.

The result was that Coker finished the descent of the stairs in a single plunge! He came head first.

What would have happened had Coker's head struck the floor cannot be said. Probably the stout old oak planks would have stood the strain. But Coker's head, though of solid construction, would probably have been hurt. Fortunately, Wingate and Gwynne were near enough to the staircase to break his fall. Coker plunged headlong into them, threw his arms round them in a wild attempt to save himself, and hurled them both to the floor, sprawling over them.

Coker's fall was broken, and, to judge by the fearful yells that came from the two Sixth-Formers, they were broken, too.

"Yooooooop!"

"Whoooooop!"

"Oh!" roared Coker. "Oh, my hat! You fatheads, getting in a fellow's way! Don't stop me—I'm in a hurry!"

Coker scrambled up. He planted a foot on Gwynne's neck as he rose, and rested a heavy hand on Wingate's face. Really, Coker was not in a mood to notice trifles like these, he was excited, and he was in a hurry. Wingate and Gwynne noticed them.

Like one man, they grabbed at Horace Coker. They struggled up, still holding Horace. Their looks indicated that they were going to slay him on the spot.

"You burbling idiot!" gasped Wingate.

"You dangerous maniac!" yelled Gwynne.

"Leggo!" bawled Coker. "Help! Burglars! I'm going to Prout! There's a burglar in my study! Hands off, you fools! Hands off, you dummies! I've got to get help to bag that burglar!"

"What?"

"Oh crumbs!"

Wingate and Gwynne, in sheer astonishment, released Coker. Horace stood panting and spluttering.

"A burglar!" howled Wingate.

"In your study?" hooted Gwynne.

"Yes," gasped Coker. "I'm going for Prout. I say, you come with me—there's no time to lose! I've locked him in, but he may escape from the window! He must have heard me lock the door of the study on him—that would give him the alarm! Come and seize him!"

Wingate grasped Coker's shoulder and shook him.

"Is this a fatheaded joke?" he roared.

"Ow! Leggo! No! It's a fat-headed burglar—I mean a burglar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Will you come?" hooted Coker.
 "He may get away while I'm going to fetch Prout! Come! Don't be funky! Call some more fellows, in case he tries to use his automatic—"

"His what?" gasped Wingate.
 "Automatic! He's got an automatic!"
 "Did you see it?" howled Gwynne.
 "For goodness' sake don't waste time jawing!" exclaimed Coker. "He's got an automatic, and we want a good many fellows to seize him. He won't dare to fire on a crowd of us. Come on!"

Coker could not say that he had seen the automatic. But he knew that the burglar must have one; he had never read a cracksman story without an automatic in it.

Wingate and Gwynne looked at one another, and started up the staircase. They did not know what to make of this alarm; and it seemed improbable that the most enterprising burglar could have entered Greyfriars while all the lights were on and all the fellows were up. Still, Coker had positively stated that there was a burglar in his study, and they naturally supposed that he had seen somebody there—burglar or not! They could not guess that Coker had merely heard somebody under his study table, and that all the rest was masterly deduction.

"Better get a weapon of some sort!" exclaimed Coker.
 "Pokers, or something—"
 "Oh, rats!" grunted Wingate.

"Don't be a silly ass!" urged Coker.

The two prefects went on up the stairs unheeding. Something, they supposed, must have happened in Coker's study, though they did not believe that a burglary had happened. And they did not consider it needful to arm themselves with pokers for the investigation.

Coker rushed up after them. He would have preferred to delay long enough to arm himself with a poker, a chopper, or a golf club. But he was not going to be left behind. It was, after all, his burglar!

"Come on, my children!" said Bob Cherry. "We're on in this scene."

"Yes, rather."
 "The onfulness is terrific!"
 "If it's a burglar, we'll help collar him," said Bob.
 "If it's Mrs. Kebble's cat, we won't!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five followed the seniors up the stairs. After them followed a crowd of other fellows—seniors and juniors. Coker had spread the alarm—though nobody, it was true, looked very much alarmed. Something was up, and the fellows wanted to see what it was; but nobody expected that a burglar would materialise.

Wingate and Gwynne and Coker marched into the Fifth Form passage, the Famous Five after them, and twenty or thirty fellows after the five. The tramp of many feet caused some of the Fifth to look out of the games study. They seemed surprised to see the crowd in their passage.

"Hallo what's this game?" asked Blundell.

"Only some of Coker's rot, but we're looking into it," answered Wingate, and he walked on down the passage.

"Howly mother av Moses!" ejaculated Fitzgerald. "Coker's brought the prefects up to bag that burglar."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It's Coker's latest," said Bob Cherry. "Walk up, gents; no charge!"

Some of the Fifth joined the crowd going along the passage. Quite an army arrived at the door of Coker's study, with Horace and the two prefects.

"Open the door, Coker!" said Wingate gruffly.

Coker fumbled in his pocket for the

the Midnight Murder"; but the key did not yet come to light.

"Somebody's there," said Gwynne.
 "Potter or Greene, I suppose; it's their study," said Wingate.

"We're here!" said Potter and Greene together.

"Oh!" said the Greyfriars captain. Nobody belonging to the study was in the study. Yet someone was there. That was certain. He had been heard to gasp, and he had been heard to move. The fellows began to wonder whether there might be a burglar there, after all. It was possible that Coker had not made a mistake. Not probable, but possible!

"Where's that key, Coker?" growled Wingate.

"I can't find the beastly thing—"
 "You silly ass!"

"Look here, Wingate—"
 "Is that the key sticking out of the book, Coker?" asked Frank Nugent gently.

"Shut up, you cheeky fag— Oh, here it is!" Coker drew forth the key,



"You fatheads, getting in a fellow's way!" roared Coker. "Don't stop me—I'm in a hurry!" As Coker scrambled up, he planted a foot on Gwynne's neck, and rested a heavy hand on Wingate's face. But Horace was not in a mood to notice these trifles.

(See Chapter 5.)

key, which he had withdrawn from the lock, after locking in the burglar with such masterly strategy.

"Hark!" ejaculated Gwynne.

There was a sound in the study. Clearly and distinctly came the sound of a startled gasp and of someone that moved. Then there was silence.

The crowd in the passage looked at one another. Coker was still fumbling for the key. In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten in which pocket he had placed it. He turned out all sorts of articles in his search for the key—a pocket-knife, a fountain-pen, two or three letters soaked with ink from the fountain-pen, a volume in a yellow paper cover entitled "The Mystery of

which he had inadvertently thrust between the pages of the "Mystery of the Midnight Murder" when placing it in his pocket. "Now I'll have the door open in a jiffy! Look out for his automatic!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Look here, Wingate—"

"Open the door, ass, and shut up!"

"Look here—"

"Open that door, fathead!"

Coker breathed hard and opened the door. These doubting Thomases would be convinced when they saw the burglar!

He unlocked the door, turned the handle, and threw it open. Fellows
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COKER'S CRACKSMAN!

(Continued from page 10.)

take long to nip down to the study in the Fifth Form passage and annex the cake.

"I say, you fellows!"

Bunter whispered louder.

But there was no answer; the Remove fellows were all sleeping the sleep of the just.

Bunter crept out of bed at last.

There was a glimmer of starlight at the high windows of the dormitory; light enough for Bunter. He groped for his clothes, and bundled on trousers and shoes. He found his spectacles and jammed them on his fat little nose.

Then he tiptoed towards the door. He bumped into a chair in the dark and grunted.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

It was a sleepy voice from Bob Cherry's bed.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Bob sat up and peered round.

"Anybody out of bed?" he asked.

"What's up?"

"No, old chap!" gasped Bunter.

"Nothing's up! I'm not out of bed!"

"You fat chump—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"What are you doing out of bed?" demanded Bob, peering through the gloom at the dim, fat figure that was creeping to the door. "Come back, you ass!"

"I'm not going out, old chap! Don't wake all the fellows! If you think I'm going down after Coker's cake you're jolly well mistaken."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Nothing of the sort, you know."

"You fat chump!" exclaimed Bob.

"Go back to bed!"

"What's the row?" asked Harry Wharton drowsily.

The voices in the dormitory had awakened several of the juniors.

"That fat chump going down to raid Coker's cake," said Bob.

"Nothing of the kind!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, don't make a row and wake up the house. I dare say there'll be a fuss when that cake's missed to-morrow, and I don't want to be suspected. Besides, I'm not going after the cake, you know. Never thought of it."

There was a sleepy chuckle from several beds.

Bunter opened the door and slipped out.

"Bunter, you ass—" called out Harry Wharton.

The door closed.

The Removites settled down to sleep again. They were not specially interested in Bunter's proceedings, or in the fate of Coker's cake. And they were sleepy. They closed their eyes, and left William George Bunter to his own devices.

Billy Bunter hurried along the dormitory passage. Not a light burned in the great building; and from the various windows came only a faint glimmer of starlight. But Bunter forgot his fear of shadows, in his hurry. It would be just like those beasts to follow him, and yank him back to the dormitory—minus the cake. Bunter hastened.

Breathing quickly, the fat junior reached the stairs, and started down, feeling his way along the banisters. He did not need to go as far as the ground floor; the Fifth Form quarters were on the first floor. Bunter was not likely to miss the way, even in the dark. He reached the landing from which the Fifth Form passage opened.

On that landing was a large window,

glimmering with starlight. Part of the window was of the casement pattern; and Bunter, to his surprise, noticed that one of the casements was open. The cold draught that came in made him shiver; the December night was cold.

It occurred to Bunter that whoever had left that window open was a careless ass, for beneath it was an old stone porch, easy to climb; and a burglar could have entered easily, had there been burglars about.

But he did not give the matter any thought. His thoughts were concentrated on the cake in Coker's study.

He crossed the landing swiftly.

Bump!

Bunter staggered back.

The landing was broad, and should have been unencumbered—there was nothing, so far as Bunter knew, for him to bump into. But he bumped into something as he scuttled across in the gloom.

For a second he did not realise what it was.

Then he knew—as a sudden light flashed into his startled eyes, and a grip that seemed of iron closed on him.

He knew—with a rush of terror that sent icy thrills through all his fat limbs.

His terrified yell rang through the sleeping house:

"Help! Oh! Burglars! Help! Help! Help!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Burglar!

"HELP! Help! Help!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Bob was settling into slumber again, when the yells from below came ringing through the night.

He sat up in bed.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "That fat idiot will wake up the whole House. What on earth's the matter with him?"

"Fallen downstairs, perhaps," suggested Frank Nugent.

"Or run into a shadow, and taken it for a jolly old burglar!" said Bob.

"My hat! The beaks will all be up!"

"Help! Help! Help!" came the frenzied yell.

Harry Wharton & Co. turned out of bed. Most of the Remove were awake now, and sitting up. Distant as Bunter was from the Remove dormitory, his wild yelling was plainly heard.

"Something may have happened to him," said Harry. "Better go and see. The beaks will be awake now, anyhow."

There was no doubt about that. Bunter's frantic yelling had certainly awakened the whole House.

The Famous Five scudded to the dormitory door and opened it. A dozen fellows followed them.

Doors could be heard opening in various directions, and lights flashed on in rooms and passages.

Whether Bunter had fallen downstairs, or whether he had been frightened by a shadow, it was evident that he was in need of help. His frantic yelling still rang far and wide. Harry Wharton & Co. ran along the corridor, and scudded down the stairs.

"Help! Help! Help!"

They were aware of the direction the fat junior had taken; and anyhow the yelling would have guided them to him. They came out with a rush on the landing where Bunter stood, and Wharton switched on the light. In the sudden flood of illumination, Bunter was discerned. He was standing in the middle

of the wide landing, quite alone, with his mouth wide open, his eyes distended with terror behind his big glasses, yelling at the top of his voice.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" gasped Wharton. "You're waking the House."

"Help! Help! Help!"

"What's the matter?" shrieked Bob Cherry.

"Help! Help! Help!"

"You frabjous idiot!"

"Help! Burglars! Help!"

"Dry up!" gasped Wharton.

"Burglars! Keep 'em off! Help!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton took him by his fat shoulder and shook him. There was, so far as the juniors could see, no sign of burglars, and they had no doubt that Bunter had been frightened by some shadow in the darkness.

"Ow!" yelled Bunter. In his dire terror he had not even observed the juniors, and he seemed to fancy that a lawless and desperate clutch was on him.

"Leggo! Mercy! Spare my life! Ow! Wow!"

"You potty chump—"

"Yaroooh! Help! Police! Fire! Burglars! Whoooo! Mercy!"

"It's me, you ass—Wharton—"

"Us, old fat bean!" said Bob.

"Keep quiet, you born idiot!"

"The quietfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed fat Bunter! The absurd beaks are all awakened by your terrific and ridiculous hullabaloo!"

"I say, you fellows—" Bunter seemed to recognise the juniors now. "I say, help! Keep 'em off! Murder! Fire! Oh dear! Save me!"

"There's nothing to save you from, you burbling bandersnatch!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Ow! Burglars! Wow!"

"Fathead!"

"He got hold of me!" shrieked Bunter. "I ran into him, and he clutched hold of me! He had a light! Oh dear!"

"Well, he hasn't got hold of you now, old fat bean—if there was any be! Simmer down!" said Bob.

"There was nobody, you chump!" said Bolsover major, who had arrived on the scene now with half the Remove.

"Ow! Help!"

"What is this disturbance?" It was the voice of Henry Samuel Quelch, the master of the Remove. He strode up in a dressing-gown and slippers, with an expression on his face that might have terrified the boldest burglar that ever burgled. "What is this? What are you boys doing out of your dormitory?"

"Help, help!"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Quelch. "How dare you shout in that ridiculous manner in the middle of the night, Bunter!"

"Wow! Burglars—"

"Silence! Wharton, what does this mean?"

There was a swarm on the scene now. The Removites had got there first, but fellows of all Forms were gathering, half-dressed or in their pyjamas. Two or three masters joined the alarmed throng. Coker of the Fifth arrived with a golf club in his hand. Other fellows had snatched up fives bats, or pokers—all sorts of weapons.

"Wharton! What—"

"I don't know, sir!" gasped Wharton.

"We heard Bunter shouting for help and came down, sir—"

"Is it burglars?" boomed Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth. "Is it burglars, Quelch? There have been several burglaries in this neighbourhood of late. Have no fear—have no fear, my dear Quelch! I am here!"

There was a snort from dear Quelch.

"Please do not interrupt, Mr. Prout."
 "What—what!"
 "Wharton, explain this at once!" snapped the Remove master. "The whole House has been alarmed—"
 "We came down because Bunter shouted, sir—"
 "Why was Bunter downstairs at this hour?"

Wharton made no reply to that. The frowning Form master turned to Billy Bunter.

"Bunter, what were you doing downstairs?"

"He got hold of me!" gasped Bunter. "He flashed the light on and grabbed me! Ow, ow, ow!"

"Who did?" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"Owl! The burglar! Wow!"

"You utterly absurd boy, there is no burglar—"

"The window's open, sir!" exclaimed Wingate of the Sixth. "It's unfastened!"

"What?"

"Look!"

The casement, which Bunter had seen open in the starlight, was not wholly closed; it was open several inches.

"I think not, sir," he said.

"What—what?"

"The window looks as if it's been forced, sir."

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"It's been forced from outside, sir," said the Greyfriars captain.

"Is it possible?"

Mr. Quelch, with startled eyes, examined the casement. There were unmistakable marks on the woodwork. It had been forced. Someone, standing on the top of the stone porch below, had gained the sill and forced the fastening of the casement from without.

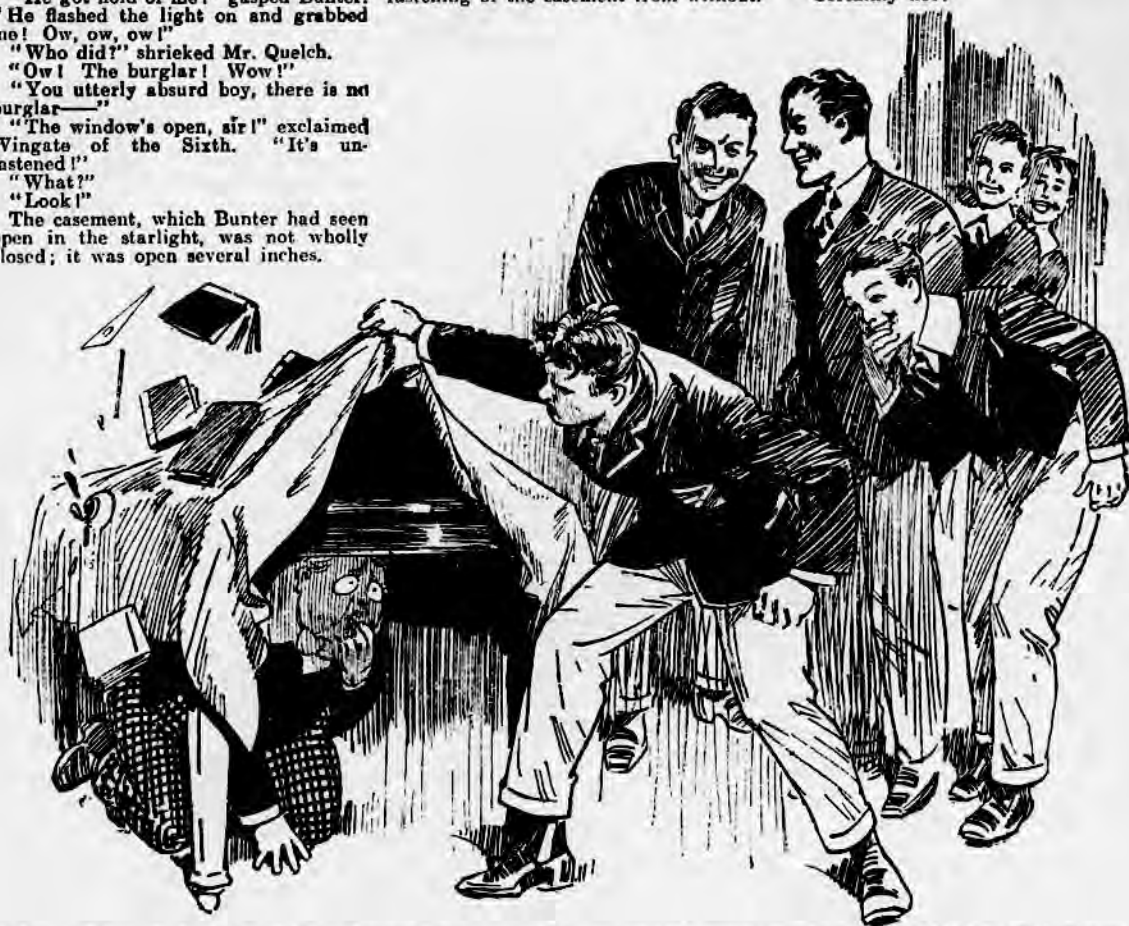
branches of leafless trees and the shifting shadows in the starlight met his gaze. The intruder, whoever he was, was gone.

Mr. Quelch turned back from the window. His face was very grave.

"There has been a burglary—an attempted burglary!" he said. "Do not be alarmed, my boys; the man is gone!"

"Shall we go out and search for him, sir?" exclaimed Coker of the Fifth eagerly.

"Certainly not!"



Horace Coker strode to the table and lifted the cover. "Come out and surrender, you scoundrel!" he said jubilantly. "You haven't an earthly!" There was a terrified squeak from under the table, then a roar of laughter from the fellows. "Bunter!" "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 5.)

Mr. Quelch hurried across to it. He stared at it, and then turned back to the Owl of the Remove.

"Bunter, did you open this window?"

"Owl! No!" gasped Bunter. "It was open when I came down, sir—wide open! I—I saw it, and thought some ass had left it open, sir! Then he seized me—"

"Who seized you?"

"The burglar! Oh dear!"

"Nonsense!"

"Puzzle, find the burglar!" murmured Skinner of the Remove. "We know where to find Coker's cracksman! Now find Bunter's burglar!"

There was a chuckle from some of the juniors. Mr. Quelch glared round, and the chuckle died away with startling suddenness.

"The window was no doubt left open by a careless servant, and this foolish boy has been frightened by the dark!" said the Remove master crossly.

Wingate was examining the casement very curiously.

Some steel instrument had been inserted between the window and the frame, and the fastening had snapped open.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

There was a hush in the buzzing crowd on the landing; for it was certain now that the alarm given by Bunter had not been groundless. The fellows exchanged startled looks.

"Then—then there really was a burglar!" said Bob Cherry.

"Phew!"

There was no doubt about it now. The window had been forced, and some person or persons unknown had entered the House by it. Bunter had blundered into the midnight marauder; and the latter, evidently, had fled the way he had come, as Bunter's yells awakened the House.

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

He opened the window wider and stared out. Nothing but the nodding

"We might bag him yet, sir! If I get near him with this golf club—"

"No one is to leave the House!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Certainly not!" boomed Mr. Front.

"The House must be searched," said the Remove master. "I will telephone to the police station, immediately. Wingate, you and the other prefects will search the House."

"Certainly, sir!"

"All juniors will return to their dormitories immediately!"

"We'd like to help, sir—"

"Take fifty lines, Cherry!"

"Oh!"

"Go back to your dormitory at once, Bunter, I will question you in the morning concerning your unwarrantable action in leaving your dormitory at this late hour—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Go immediately!"

Unwillingly the juniors returned to

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A sumptuous holiday with plenty of delicious tuck and money to burn, is how Dr. Birchamall, the Head of St. Sam's, hopes to spend Christmas. But there's a big surprise in store for him, as you will learn when you read this latest effusion by our tame author—Dicky Nugent.

I.
"LICKHAM, old fellow!" said Dr. Birchamall, the Head of St. Sam's, one wintry nite. "Just lend me your shell-like ears for a minnit, will you? I have tidings of grate joy to impart!"

Mr. Lickham, the master of the St. Sam's Fourth, obediently detached his ears and lent them to the Head.

"Pray proceed, sir!" he said, having performed this little formality.

Dr. Birchamall sank his voice to a thrilling whisper, and announced in dramattick tones:

"Christmas is coming!"

Mr. Lickham recoiled, with a violent start.

"Good heavens! However did you find that out?" he asked, in a state of considerable astonishment.

The Head laughed.

"Quite easily, my dear Lickham! This morning, on sitting down at my desk, I insulted the calendar, and in a couple of ticks I had ascertained that the Festive Season is drawing nigh. Not everybody would have thought of finding out in such a manner, I admit. But then, I'm not like everybody else, am I?"

"You certainly are not, sir!" grinned the master of the Fourth. "Fortunately, there are not many dubble-died villains of your kidney about!"

"Why, you cheeky ass!" eggscclaimed the Head, indignantly.

"Anyway, now that Christmas is coming, what about it?" asked Mr. Lickham, deeming it advisable to change the subject.

"Are you contemplating giving me a Christmas box or standing me a whacking grate feed or something? If so, I will axsept your kind offer with the greatest of plezzure!"

Dr. Birchamall shook his head vigorously.

"I had kontemplated nothing of the kind, Lickham. To my mind, a much better idea would be for you to stand a feed to me! However, that's by the way. The real reason I mentioned the coming of jolly old Christmas is that I am selling Christmas cards, calendars and crackers on commission, this year, and I am looking to you to give me a substanshall order. What about it?"

Mr. Lickham looked deeply interested. "Well, I shall certainly require a quantity of Christmas cards, sir," he remarked. "Matter of fact, I am seriously thinking of sending out quite a lot to my rich maiden aunts and bachelor uncles, in the hope that they will remember me in their wills!"

"I eggspcet they are much more likely to remember you in their 'won't's'!" grinned the Head. "However, there's no harm in trying. Trot along now, Lickham, and inspect my stock, which I have set out on a table in my study!"

"Delited, sir!" said the master of the Fourth, and the two gentlemen then tramped off together.

As they trotted through the Fourth Form passidgo, the sound of youthful voices raised in mewsick fell on their ears. Jack Jolly & Co. were practising Christmas carols for the end-of-term concert and the cheery strains of "Good King Wence's Lass" farily filled the air.

"Good King Wence's Lass looked out On the feast of Stephen—"

roared out Jack Jolly & Co. in their youthful trebbles.

Dr. Birchamall pawsoed, his beady eyes twinkling merrily.

"Good whooze! I'll ask Jolly and his friends to come along and see the goods at the same time!" he remarked. "They are influential ladds with lots of wealthy connections. Probably they will be able to get me a lot of orders! Eggscuse me a moment, Lickham!"

"Granted as soon as asked, sir!" said Mr. Lickham, readily.

The Head, in his usual polite way, kicked open the door of Jack Jolly's study and poked his head in.

"Good evening, boys!" he bellowed.

"Good evening, sir!" corussed Jack Jolly & Co., pawsing in the middle of "Good King Wence's Lass."

"I notiss you're carolling," remarked the Head, genially. "Do you object to my singing you a new version of 'Wence's Lass'?"

"Not at all, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly. "We're willing to try anything once, aren't we, you chaps?"

"Yes, rather!" shouted the rest of the Co.

"Right-ho, then!" said the Head. "Here goes!"

He cleared his throat (an easy matter to a high-jump champion like the Head!) and to the tune of "Good King Wence's Lass" sang the following words:

"Who will buy my Christmas cards For the Feast of Stephen? Take a tip from me, my pards! Come along this even. See my stock and pick and choose— That's the finest ru-u-u-ule. I've got bargains; you can't lose; Every one's a je-e-e-awel!"

"My hat! Is that all, sir?" asked Jack Jolly, politely, when the Head had concluded this little ditty.

"That is all, Jolly. Probably you are thinking you would like to hear some more verses, sung in my wonderful basso-contralto voice?"

"Not eggscactly, sir. To be quite frank, if there was any more to come, I was going to hop it as quickly as possibul!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Morry and Bright and Fearless.

The Head's eyes gleamed dangerously for a minnit, but remembering that Jack Jolly & Co. mite prove good customers, he swallowed his wrath and manidged to grin.

"Well, boys, apart from the merits of my voice, are you thinking of taking the advice given in the song?" he asked.

Jack Jolly looked surprised.

"Grate pip! Are you really selling

Christmas cards, then?" he asked.

"I am—I is!" smirked the Head.

"Strictly between ourselves, I don't mind telling you that my stock of Christmas cards, calendars, crackers and whatnots beats anything you ever saw. I've got all the grate London stores—Whiteridge's, Selfoy's, Gammods and Hargages—whacked hollow! Coming along?"

"Yes, rather!" replied Jack Jolly & Co., feeling curious to see the Head's Christmas stock. And the chums of the Fourth, grinning all over their diles, linked arms and followed the Head and their Form-master to the former's study.

When they reached that dredded sankturn, they found that the Head's table was piled high with a weird and wonderful assortment of cards, calendars, Christmas stockings, cracker and novelties of every kind. Jack Jolly & Co. looked grately impressed and Mr. Lickham farily blinked.

"My hat! This stuff looks good and no mistake, sir!" he remarked.

"It IS good, Lickham!" retorted the Head. "What about this for a calendar, for eggssample? And the price of the article is only a paltry cupple of bob! A bargain, what?"

"It certainly looks it!" agreed Mr. Lickham. "Has it got plenty of dates in it?"

"You will find, my dear Lickham, that it contains quite as many dates as most people require," answered the Head, in his fruitiest voice. "For the opinion of those who don't agree with me, I don't care a fig, anyway!"

"What price this Christmas stocking, sir?" asked Frank Fearless.

"Half-a-crown, Fearless, and dirt cheap at the price!"

"Give you sixpence!" grinned Frank Fearless.

The Head snorted.

"Asking for a thick ear, Fearless?" he asked.

"Nunno, sir!"

"Then don't be cheeky! Anyone insulting my stockings is going to get socks, I can tell you! You'd better toe the line, Fearless, or I shall be forced to bring you to heel!"

Frank Fearless dried up, feeling that he had put his foot in it.

"Ninepence for this Christmas card, sir?" asked Jack Jolly.

"A meer paltry, piffing ninepence, Jolly! With a nice envelope thrown in. You can't lick it!"

"Can't you? Then I shan't buy it!"

"By gum!" mermered Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Head stamped his foot with rage. "Cackling idiots! I'll take jolly good care not to let you see my next collection!" he grunted. "But seriously, don't you

consider I've got some remarkable bargains on show here?"

Jack Jolly & Co. had to agree that such was the case.

"Then in that case," said the Head, when they had all signified their agreement, "I wonder if you'd all do me the favour of bringing along your friends and acquaintances to buy their Christmas requirements from me?"

"Plezzure, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly & Co.

"Thank you, my boys!" grinned Dr. Birchamall, rubbing his hands gleefully. "Do this, and I promiss you that before we break up, I will stand you all a feed that you will remember as long as you live!"

II.

DR. BIRCHMALL was all sorts of different things at various times. He was a booyling tyrant and a rank outsider and a beastly rotter, for instance. But nobody could deny that he was a man of honour. Having said a thing, he was as good as his word. And he kept his promiss to Jack Jolly & Co.

Our heroes certainly brought him lots of customers. Their opinion was valued highly in the Lower Skool at St. Sam's, and when they recommended the Head's Christmas cards et settera, everybody flocked to buy them.

The conskewence was that the Head did a tremendous trade, and the prophets of his little spare-time bizzness went up by leaps and bounds.

Each nite at bed-time, when the Head closed down for the nite, he transferred the day's takings to the munny-box he kept in his desk. Nite after nite, this process went on until the munny-box was simply chock-full of munny. The Head farily gloated as he watched his hoard grow.

A cupple of nites before St. Sam's broke up for the Christmas vack, the Head kept his promiss to Jack Jolly and his chums. Each member of the sellybrated Co. received an invitation reading as follows:

"You are invited to join the Head-master in a whacking grate feed in his study at 8 p.m. to-nite."

Jack Jolly & Co., of course, were only too glad to take advantage of that invitation. They turned up prompt to the minnit, dressed in their best bib and tucker, and with not half the usual number of ink-stains on their fingers.

Dr. Birchamall did our heroes really well. The table farily groaned under the wait of innumerable herrings, sardines, doonutts, jam-tarts, and biskits, while the air was filled with the sound of popping jinjer-beer corks.

After the feed was over, the Head entertained his guests with his plans for the fourthecoming hollidays. Out of the prophets he had made from the sale of his Christmas goods, he was going to take a trip to London Town and have a really gay time for a week or two.

"Of course," he eggexplained, with a lofty eggpression on his skollerly dille, "I shall stay at the best hotel in the town. Nothing less than the Ritz-Poshe will do for me, I assure you!"

"My hat! That will cost you a bit, sir!" remarked Jack Jolly, with a whistle.

"Probably it will! But what is munny to a successful Christmas-card dealer?"

asked Dr. Birchamall, hawtily. "Every-thing I do will be on a similar scale, natchurally. I shall eat grate quantities of the best tuck available, have a box at the theatre, hire a Hispano-Swizzer car and mix on equal terms with the nobility and jentry. I can tell you, boys, I shall farily set the town on fire!"

"I suppose you've put all your takings in the bank, sir?" inkwired Bright, casually.

"No, Bright. I felt that it was too much munny to trussed a bank with, and I have therefore kept it in my desk. In two days' time, the collector from the Christmas card firm will call for his dews, leaving the prophets to me to spend as I think fit. When he calls, I shall go to this desk and perjoice it from the drawer at the side—"

The Head came to a sudden stop. While he had been speaking he had gone to the desk and opened one of the drawers, fully eggspccting to find in it the munny-box with its bulging contents.

But instead of that, the drawer in the Head's desk resembled the sellybrated cubbard of Old Mother Hubbard.

The munny-box was missing!

The Head stared at the empty drawer, his eyes almost bulging out of their sockets. Then he gave vent to his feelings in a yell of dismay.

Jack Jolly & Co. started to their feet in alarm.

"Anything wrong, sir?" asked Jack Jolly.

"Oh, grate pip! I should jolly well think there is something wrong!" gasped the Head. "My munny-box—"

"What about your munny-box?"

"It's missing!" groaned the Head, wringing his hands in an aggermy of greof. "Some awful rotter has boned it!"

"My hat!"

"Ruined!" moaned the Head. "Two thirds of that munny belonged to the Christmas card firm! Unless I can recover it, boys, my Christmas will be spent behind prison bars!"

"Grate pip!"

"Quick! Search the building from the topmost garret to the deepest dunjun!" ordered the Head. "Boys! If you want to save me from ruination find the missing munny-box!"

"We'll do our best, sir," said Jack Jolly, dewbiously. "But if it really has been boned, I don't think we shall suxceed."

And Jack's gloomy fourcast proved to be correct. Half the Skool turned out that nite to assist in the search. But though they turned out all the chimbleys, tore up floor-boards all over the place, and searched all the masters' studies, no trace of the missing-munny-box could be found.

The Head spent a restless, sleepless, troubled nite, that nite. For weeks, he had been dreaming of a Christmas holliday with unlimited munny to burn. Now, by the irony of fate, all his fond dreams had been shattered at a single blow!

What was the mistery behind the missing munny-box? And what awful fate was in store for the Head when the collector turned up and found no munny fourth-coming?

Only the future could answer those questions.

THE END.

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(Continued from page 13.)

their dormitories. Masters and prefects proceeded to search the House for a possible burglar, though there was little likelihood of finding one. Mr. Quelch hurried to his study to ring up the police station at Courtfield and apprise Inspector Grimes of what had happened. The Lower School had been sent back to bed—but not to sleep. It was likely to be a long time before eyes were closed again in slumber at Greyfriars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Bold!

"O dear!" gasped Bunter. Billy Bunter, at least, was glad to plunge into bed again. Even Coker's cake had vanished from his mind.

There was a buzz of excited voices in the Remove dormitory. Some of the fellows were listening at the door, in the hope of hearing a burglar rooted out by the searching prefects.

Lights were still on, all over the school, and many footsteps sounded below, and voices called.

"I say, you fellows, don't open that door!" gasped Bunter. "Better lock it! Better put a bed against it! Oh dear!"

"The jolly old burglar's gone, fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"Still, you'd better lock the door!" "Rats!"

"I say, you fellows, he might come here, you know!" gasped Bunter. "There might be more than one of them. Might be a gang! Suppose—suppose one of them came here and hid under a bed?"

"The supposfulness is terrific."

"What happened to you downstairs, fathead?" asked Skinner.

Bunter shivered. "Oh dear! It was—was awful! Of—of course, I wasn't frightened."

"No; you sounded as if you weren't!" remarked Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He seized me in a fearful clutch!" gasped Bunter. "I walked right into him, you know. He flashed on a light, and seized me in a grip of steel."

"Why didn't you collar him?" asked Snoop.

"You silly owl!" hooted Bunter.

Certainly it had never occurred to Bunter to collar that burglar. Being collared by him was enough for Bunter.

"Well, what happened after he seized you?" asked Toddy.

"I—I suppose he must have let go again," said Bunter. "He was gone when you fellows got there! Perhaps I frightened him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"That's it, you men!" said Skinner.

"He flashed on his light, and saw Bunter's face, and was frightened. Bunter's features want getting used to."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass, I don't mean that!"

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hooted Bunter. "I dare say he was frightened. If he'd given me time I should have seized him—or knocked him down, or—"

"Or fainted from sheer funk?" suggested Squiff.

"Beast! He—he ran away, anyhow," said Bunter. "He must have run away, as he was gone when you fellows got there. I thought the awful villain was still clutching me. I—I mean I shouted to wake the House, so—so that he could be nabbed. Presence of mind, you know."

"Oh, my hat!"

Billy Bunter was recovering himself. With the light on in the dormitory, and all the Remove awake round him, Bunter's courage revived. In the presence of danger Bunter's fat heart was wont to fail him; but when there was no peril a lion had nothing on Bunter for courage.

"Presence of mind!" repeated Bunter firmly, sitting up in bed and blinking at the Removites. "As for being frightened, I can jolly well tell you that precious few of you fellows would have had the pluck to go down alone, in the dark, to look for burglars."

"What?" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Why, you fat villain, you went down after Coker's cake!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"You were after a burglary, not a burglar!" chuckled Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner!"

"Well, what did you go down for?" demanded Hazeldene.

"I—I went down to look for burglars, of course!" said Bunter. "Not one of you fellows would have had the pluck to do it. Hearing a noise, I decided to go down and see what was up."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"When I reached that landing?"

continued Bunter. "I saw a shadowy form—"

"Go it!"

"Then I knew it was a burglar, and I rushed on him."

"You rushed on the burglar?"

shrieked Wharton.

"Yes, and seized him."

"You said a minute ago that he seized you."

"I—I mean, I seized him, and he seized me at the same time. We struggled desperately—"

"Pile it on!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! If you think I'm not telling you the exact truth about—"

"The truth! Ye gods!"

"The truthfulness is not terrific!"

chuckled Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky! I seized him, and we struggled desperately, and—and if you fellows had been a minute sooner we'd have got him. But I suppose you were funky."

"You—you suppose we were funky!" gasped Bob.

"Yes. If you'd been a bit quicker we'd have got him. He was too strong for me," said Bunter. "I'm rather an athlete, as you know."

"Oh, crikey!"

"But he was fearfully strong—a hulking ruffian, more than six feet," said Bunter.

"I can't handle a brawny ruffian, six feet high—it's not to be expected. I nearly got him—but with a terrific effort he broke away and rushed out of the window. He gasped with fear as he fled."

"He would!" said Skinner. "A sudden sight of Bunter's features, in the middle of the night—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! He escaped me!" said Bunter. "I don't mind admitting that

I can't handle a brawny villain six feet six—"

"He's growing!" remarked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"More than six feet six—I should say close on seven feet!" said Bunter.

"Gigantic! He fled, yelling with terror!"

"Somebody was yelling with terror!" agreed Skinner. "We heard him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" hooted Bunter.

"I jolly well know any of you chaps would have been frightened out of your wits. I wasn't."

"You haven't any to be frightened out of, old fat bean."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" said Bunter bitterly.

"Cackle! I expect this from you fellows, after showing boundless pluck and wonderful presence of mind. The house would have been burgled, but for me. You can't get away from that. And if you fellows hadn't been too funky to come down and back me up we'd have got him. I only wish he'd come here now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can just see you fellows scuttling into bed if he came!" sneered Bunter.

"Like rabbits! You'd see whether I should be scared!"

"Hallo, halo, halo, here's somebody coming up the passage!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, as he closed the dormitory door quickly, and bolted into bed.

"Yaroooooh! Help!"

"Jump up, Bunter, and face him!"

gasped Bob, as he plunged into bed.

"Quick!"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"He's coming!"

There were footsteps in the dormitory passage. Somebody, evidently, was coming. Bunter did not jump up. He crouched under the bedclothes, drawing sheet and blankets over his head, and yelled with terror.

"Ow! Help! Whooop! Keep him off! Whooop! Burglars! Murder! Help!"

The dormitory door opened. Mr. Quelch, with a frowning brow, stepped in. Every fellow was in bed. One fellow, hidden under his bedclothes, was roaring for help. The other fellows knew that the footsteps were those of their Form master. Bunter didn't! That made all the difference.

"My boys!" said Mr. Quelch severely. "There has been an alarm, but it is all over; and I insist upon your settling down quietly for the remainder of the night. There is no further cause for alarm—and if there is any further sound from this dormitory, I shall—"

"Help! Help!"

"Silence! I repeat that if there is any further sound—"

"Keep him off! Help!" came a muffled roar from under Billy Bunter's bedclothes.

Mr. Quelch stared at Bunter's bed.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Who is there? Is that Bunter? Bunter, you absurd boy, be silent!"

"Help! Keep him off! Police! Murder! Help!" yelled Bunter.

The enveloping blankets and the sound of his own voice deafened Bunter to the voice of his Form master.

"Bunter!" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"Help! Burglars! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"What is the matter with the boy? Has he taken leave of his senses? Has he been frightened into a fit? Bunter!"

"Help! Help! Help! Yooooop! Help!"

"Really, this passes all patience!"

exclaimed Mr. Quelch, and he strode to Bunter's bed and grasped the blankets. "Bunter—"
 "Ow! He's got hold of me again!" shrieked Bunter. "Help! Back up! Rescue! Keep him off! Help!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the convulsed Removites. Even the presence of a frowning Form master could not restrain their hilarity.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch in a formidable voice. "Bunter!"
 "Yarooogh! L e g g o! Help! Mercy!"

Mr. Quelch grasped the bedclothes and dragged. A fat and squirming figure in striped pyjamas was revealed, wriggling with terror.

"Keep off!" shrieked Bunter. "Spare my life! Yarooogh!"

"You ridiculous boy—"

"Help! Fire! Help!"

"Bunter! It is I, your Form master. Silence! Be silent at once! What is frightening you?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" Bunter blinked at his Form master, and realised that it was not a burglar this time. "Oh! Is—is it you, sir? Oh dear! Oh! I—I—I—thought— Oh crumbs!"

"Such cowardice as this, Bunter, is very reprehensible!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "You should be ashamed of yourself, Bunter!"

"Oh dear!"

"Now be silent! I will leave on the light, as this foolish boy seems to be so frightened," said Mr. Quelch. "But I insist upon all of you going to sleep; and if I hear another sound from this dormitory the whole Form will be detained to-morrow. Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!" gasped the Removites.

Mr. Quelch left the dormitory. Billy Bunter blinked at a row of grinning

faces. There was a chortle from bed to bed.

"I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I wasn't frightened, you know. I—I knew it—it was Quelch all the time!" gasped Bunter. "I was just—just pulling his leg, you know! He, he, he!"

"You frabjous spoofer—"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I can jolly well tell you that if the burglar really came here—"

"What's that under Bunter's bed?" asked Skinner.

"Yaroooh!" Bunter bounded up.

"Oh! Ow! Help—"

"All serene—only the floor!" added Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

"Now, shut up, Bunter," said Peter Todd. "If you give us any more gas I'll take my bolster to you!"

"Oh, really, Toddy, considering that I'm the only fellow here who had pluck enough to tackle that burglar—"

Swipe!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

And Bunter shut up at last.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Not Nice for Bunter!

GREYFRIARS turned out the following morning, in a state of considerable excitement.

There was only one topic in the school—the attempted burglary of the night.

Fellows crowded round the window that had been forced, to examine the marks on it; they stared up from the quad at the porch, upon which the marauder had climbed to reach the

window—and some hopeful spirits looked up and down and round about in search of footprints or other traces of the cracksmen.

Coker of the Fifth was keenest of all. Coker had been disappointed once in the matter of a cracksmen. But he told the world that he, Horace Coker, had foreseen this, anyhow. Had he not stated in the games study that the gang of cracksmen who were working the neighbourhood would, very likely, turn their attention to Greyfriars next?

He had! And he had been right! They had turned their attention to Greyfriars; and only by a mere accident had they been baffled. But for a junior happening to come down in the night, they would have rifled the Head's safe, and made their get-away with the swag, as Coker described it in yellow-jacketed language. And Coker, thrilling with the desire to show the unbelieving Fifth Form men who was who, and what was what, took up this matter with great earnestness, in the hope of gathering some clue to the vanished burglar.

It was true that Inspector Grimes of Courtfield had already been on the scene, and had discovered, apparently, nothing. The window had been forced—the cracksmen had entered. Bunter had blundered into him—and the man had fled on the alarm being given. Everybody knew that; and the inspector could learn no more. But Coker, whose confidence in his own powers was unbounded, hoped to do much better than a mere police detective. It was rather unfortunate, Coker thought, that the Christmas holidays were so close at hand. If Greyfriars broke up before he had tracked down the cracksmen it would mean a serious interruption to his detective work. However, Coker

(Continued on next page.)

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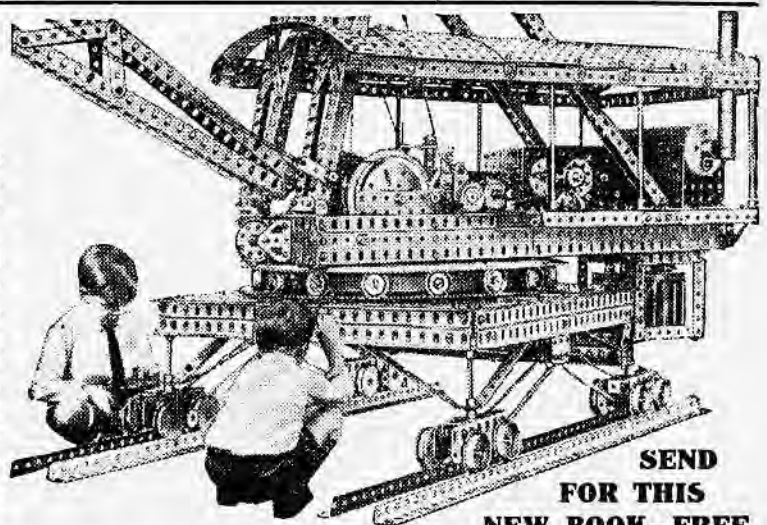
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was going to do his best in the short time at his disposal.

"It's my chance at last," he told Potter and Greene before breakfast that morning. "Now the villain has actually been here, I've a chance of getting in to him. See? He must have left some clue."

"I saw Grimey before he went," remarked Potter. "He didn't strike me as looking jolly hopeful."

Coker smiled.

"What does Grimey know about it?" he asked. "A country police-inspector! Pah! He would naturally miss all the clues!"

"And you would naturally hit on them?" asked Greene, with deep sarcasm.

"Exactly," assented Coker. "You take my meaning precisely, Greeney." Sarcasm was a sheer waste on Horace Coker. "I'm going all out in this affair—and you fellows will see what you will see."

There was no doubt about that much, at all events; and Potter and Greene did not controvert the statement.

Billy Bunter carried his bullet head very high that morning. Bunter was, in his own opinion, at least, the important fellow in this matter. It was Bunter who had given the alarm—Bunter who had baffled the burglar—Bunter who had saved the Head's safe from a thievish hand!

At breakfast, Bunter's fat face was beaming. He felt that much credit was his due; and if the Remove fellows did not give him any he attributed that to their natural jealousy of a fellow who had distinguished himself. He hoped for better things from the Head. He was to go before the Head after breakfast; and Bunter looked forward to the interview with elation.

He could picture it, in his mind's eye. Dr. Locke, in all probability, would lay his hand on Bunter's shoulder, and say in a voice of deep emotion "My brave, brave lad, how can I reward you?" Mr. Quelch would chime in: "You are a credit to the Form, and to the school, Bunter! Such courage—such reckless bravery—" And the Head would continue: "You have saved me from a heavy loss, Bunter! I thank you for your courage, your devotion! Gallant lad!"

It was going to be something like that—and it was natural that Bunter should anticipate such an interview with keen pleasure.

"I say, you fellows," he told the Famous Five after breakfast. "I've got to see the Head about that affair last night. Quelch says. The Beak's rather anxious to see me. He would be, of course! Feeling rather green about it, what? He, he, he!"

"The greenfulness is not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!"

"I'm not surprised that you're jealous," said Bunter complacently. "You're right out of the limelight this time."

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"For goodness' sake, Bunter, don't tell the Head any lies," said Harry Wharton. "He will spot you at once!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You may be let off for breaking dormitory bounds, considering what's happened," said Nugent. "But if you start gassing to the Head—"

"I shall tell him the exact facts, of course," said Bunter loftily. "There's one thing about me—I'm not the fellow to brag. You chaps know that. Still, I'm bound to tell the Head just what

happened. Hearing a noise, I went down to look for burglars—"

"You're going to tell the Head that?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"I'm bound to tell him the truth, Bull."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Spotting the burglar lurking, I sprang at him," continued Bunter. "Seizing him by the throat, I bore him to the floor. Holding him down by main strength, I shouted for help. You see, that's how it happened."

"That—that—that's how it happened, is it?" stuttered Wharton. "You're going to give the Head that?"

"I'm bound to state the facts."

"Great pip!"

"If I'd had any backing, I should have secured the villain," continued Bunter; "as it was, he escaped. That wasn't my fault! A lot of funks failed to back me up. He got away. I say, you fellows, the Head's certain to offer to reward me, isn't he?"

Bunter blinked rather anxiously at the juniors.

"Of course, gratitude's all very well," he went on. "But a fellow would naturally like something more solid, you know. Do you think the Head might spring a tenner?"

"Bunter!" It was the voice of Mr. Quelch. "Bunter! You will now come with me to the headmaster's study."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" said Bunter.

And with a vaunting blink at the Famous Five, Billy Bunter rolled after his Form master, leaving the chums of the Remove staring.

Greyfriars fellows seldom enjoyed a visit to the headmaster's study. Such a visit generally meant that there was trouble on the tapis. But on this special occasion Billy Bunter looked as if he were going to enjoy himself. His fat face was wreathed in beaming smiles as he followed in his Form master's footsteps.

"Here is Bunter, sir," said Mr. Quelch.

And the Head, who was busy with papers, looked up over his glasses at the Owl of the Remove.

He did not pat Bunter on the shoulder. He did not say, "Ah, this is the heroic lad!" He did not say, "You should be proud of this boy in your Form, Quelch." He did not, in fact, say or do any of the things that Bunter had so happily and confidently expected.

"Ah, Bunter," said the Head, "it appears that you left your dormitory after midnight last night. You are, of course, aware that this is a serious matter. Explain yourself."

Bunter blinked. Extraordinary as it was, he realised that he was going to get blame instead of praise.

"Hearing a noise, sir!" he gasped.

The Head's eyes were fixed on him.

Bunter faltered.

Somehow or other, under the steady, unwinking stare of those clear, penetrating, grey eyes, it would not come out.

"What?" said the Head.

"Well?" said Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I mean—"

"What do you mean, Bunter?"

Bunter took his courage in both hands, as it were, and made the plunge.

"Hearing a noise, sir, I—I came down to—to catch the cake—"

"Eh?"

"I mean to catch the burglar—"

"You came downstairs in the expectation of finding a burglar in the House?" ejaculated the Head.

"I—I— Exactly, sir! Being as brave as a lion—" Bunter faltered again. "I—I mean all the fellows will

tell you how plucky I am, sir. Hearing a noise—"

"You heard a noise in the night?"

"Just so, sir. Hearing a noise I leaped out of bed and rushed downstairs to catch the burglar before he could get away, sir. Seizing him by the—the throat—"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, gazing at Bunter.

"Bunter, tell Dr. Locke the truth!" came Mr. Quelch's voice, in grinding tones.

"Oh, certainly, sir! That's what I'm doing, sir. Hearing a noise," gasped Bunter, considerably disconcerted by the Head's gaze—"hearing a noise, I woke up in the middle of the night, sir—I mean I hadn't gone to sleep, sir, owing to having six—"

"Oh!" said the Head.

"Hearing a noise I rushed downstairs without stopping to think of the fearful danger, sir, as most fellows would. The burglar was creeping across the landing, and I rushed on him. Seizing him by the throat, I hissed 'Surrender!'"

Dr. Locke turned to Mr. Quelch.

"Is this boy perfectly sane in your opinion, my dear Quelch?" he asked.

"He is the most stupid member of my Form, sir," answered Mr. Quelch. "His absurd statements are due, I think, to the influence of the cinema."

"Oh, really, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"I found the boy last night in a state of the most despicable terror," said the Remove master. "He stated that the burglar had seized him. Apparently he had come upon him suddenly in the dark, and was very much frightened. That, of course, was natural, in the circumstances. But it is a mystery to me why he was downstairs in the Fifth Form quarters."

"Hearing a noise—" gasped Bunter.

"You could not possibly have heard a noise at such a distance from your dormitory, Bunter, unless it was very loud indeed."

"Yes, sir, it—it was loud!" gasped Bunter. "Frightfully loud! Like—like a thunderclap, sir."

"A few strokes of the cane, sir," suggested Mr. Quelch.

"Owl! I—I mean, I—I didn't hear a noise, sir!" gasped Bunter. "That—that's what I meant to say, sir."

"Why were you out of your dormitory, Bunter?"

"Because—because—"

"Well?" rapped the Head.

"Because I—I—I w-w-w-wasn't in it, sir."

"Bless my soul! Is that intended for impertinence, Bunter?"

"Owl! No! I—I mean— It—it—it had nothing to do with a cake, sir."

"A cake?" repeated the Head blankly.

"Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir. Nothing at all. I shouldn't have dreamed of going down for a cake, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Dear me!" said the Head. "You left your dormitory after midnight to fetch a cake—"

"Owl! No, sir! I wouldn't! I never even knew there was a cake in Coker's study, sir. Besides, it was really my cake."

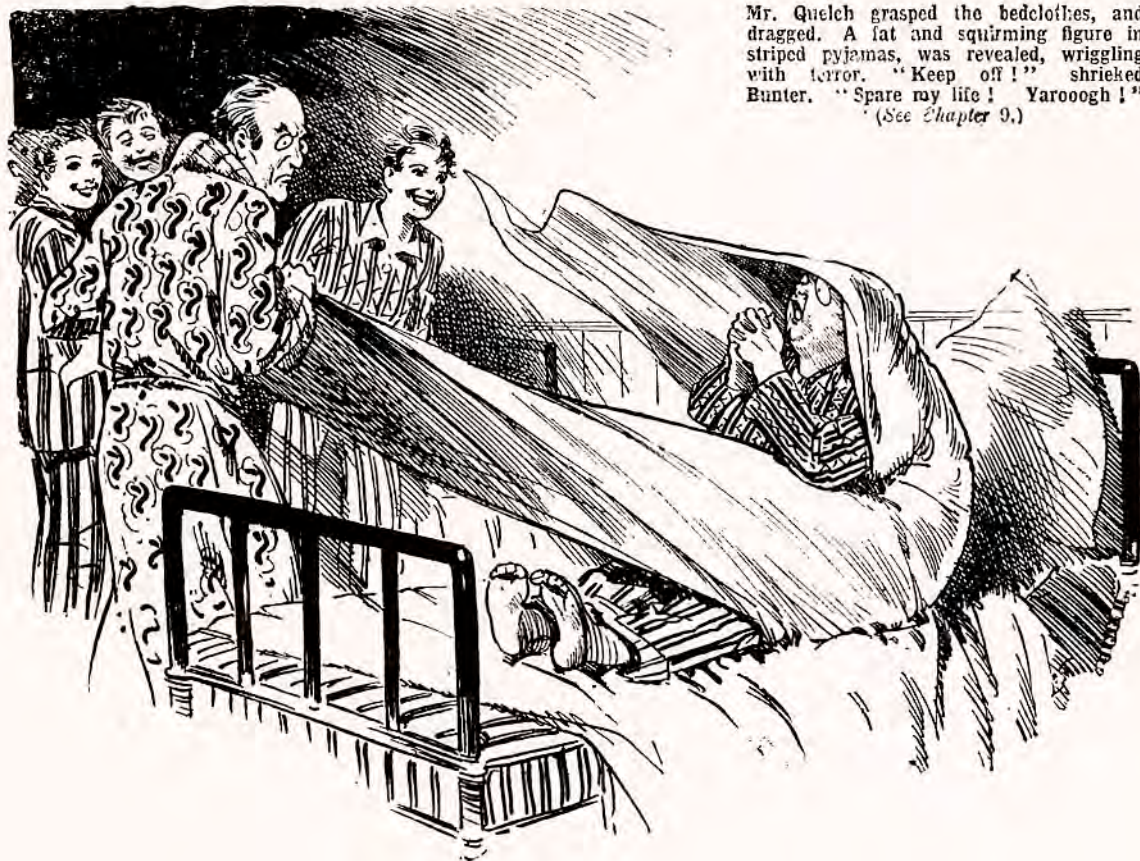
"This is a most extraordinary boy," said the Head, gazing at Mr. Quelch. "A very extraordinary boy indeed. Bunter, if you do not immediately tell me why you were out of your dormitory at such an hour of the night, I shall cane you severely."

"Yes, sir. Hearing a noise—"

"What?" thundered the Head.

Bunter jumped in terror.

"I—I—I mean, hearing a cake—" babbled Bunter, hardly conscious of what he was saying in his confusion.



Mr. Quelch grasped the bedclothes, and dragged. A fat and squirming figure in striped pyjamas, was revealed, wriggling with terror. "Keep off!" shrieked Bunter. "Spare my life! Yarooogh!" (See Chapter 9.)

"Hearing a cake—I mean—that is to say—"

"This foolish and greedy boy evidently descended in the night to obtain food," said Mr. Quelch. "From what he says, it appears that he intended to purloin a cake from a Fifth Form study—"

"It was my cake, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Besides, I never did, sir. Coker knows I wasn't after his cake, sir. He never chased me out of his study last evening, sir—"

"Silence!" "Oh dear!" groaned Bunter. Dr. Locke's hand strayed to his cane. He withdrew it, however, much to Bunter's relief.

"In the circumstances, Bunter, as you gave the alarm, and possibly prevented a burglary from taking place, you will be pardoned," he said. "You may go."

Bunter was glad to go. His fat face was dismal as he rolled out into the quad. The interview had not gone according to his expectations. It had been quite different. Neither the Head nor Mr. Quelch seemed to realise that a heroic part Bunter had played. He had had a narrow escape from a caning—and that was all.

"Hallo hallo, hallo!" The Famous Five gathered round Bunter for news. "Did you get licked, Fatty?"

Bunter blinked at the juniors. "Licked?" he repeated scornfully. "Certainly not! After preventing a burglary at the risk of my life, I should hardly be licked, I suppose."

"What did the Head say?"

"Well, he laid it on rather thick," said Bunter. "Praised my courage and reckless pluck, and all that, and offered me reward. Of course, I refused it. 'No, sir,' I said. 'I couldn't think of it, sir. I've done my duty. That's enough for me.' And the Head said,

'You are a gallant, lad, Bunter—a very gallant lad.' His very words."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "And Quelch patted me on the shoulder," went on Bunter. "He said, 'I am proud to have you in my Form, Bunter. You are an example to the others.' There were tears in his eyes."

"Phew!" "Then they both shook hands with me," said Bunter. "The Head said, 'Splendid courage!' Quelch said, 'Magnificent pluck! Give me your hand again, my boy. I am proud to shake hands with a hero.' His very words."

"Bunter!" Billy Bunter spun round. Mr. Quelch was looking out of the doorway of the House with an extraordinary expression on his face. Bunter blinked at him, his jaw dropping. Obviously Quelch had heard.

"Bunter!" stuttered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh dear!" "Bunter! How dare you tell your school-fellows such absurd untruths! How dare you!"

"I—I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—" "Follow me to my study, Bunter."

"Oh crikey!" From Mr. Quelch's study, a few minutes later, proceeded the sound of a whacking cane, and the voice of William George Bunter in tones of lamentation.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker's Clue!

"A SS!" said Coker. "Look here, Coker—" "I didn't mean you, Potter," said Coker kindly. "Well, look here—" said Greene. "I didn't mean you, Greeney," Coker of the Fifth, apparently, had

made that remark without alluding to either of his chums.

Potter and Greene glanced round to see to whom Coker had alluded.

Not that they were deeply interested. In fact, any fellow more observant than Coker would have detected tired looks on the faces of Potter and Greene of the Fifth.

As it was getting towards tea-time, Potter and Greene were, in the nature of things, thinking of tea. That, indeed, was why they were still with Coker. In Coker's study in the Fifth Coker and tea were really inseparable. Walking with Coker, Potter and Greene tried again and again to guide his footsteps, surreptitiously as it were, in the direction of the school shop. Shopping had to be done for tea—and Coker had to do the shopping, if it was going to be done at all.

But Coker, whether he observed the manoeuvres of his comrades or not, constantly eluded them.

Again and again Potter and Greene had got him headed for the tuckshop; again and again Coker had jibbed, as it were, and taken another direction.

Like an obstinate horse, Coker had to be given his head.

Coker was not thinking of tea. Weightier and mightier matters occupied the powerful brain of the great man of the Fifth.

Coker was, as he told his chums, on the track. With grim determination, Coker had taken up the matter of that mysterious cracksmen. The fact that the unknown marauder had visited Greyfriars gave Coker his chance. Had the malefactor continued to crack cribs in other spots, Coker, of course, would not have been in a position to pick up clues. Now he was in that happy position. That the villain had left some

clue behind him, Coker felt sure. No doubt Inspector Grimes had failed to pick it up. That cut no ice with Coker. He flattered himself that he was a little brighter than the Courtfield inspector.

True, so far no clue had materialised. But Coker had a hopeful nature. He was looking for clues now. Walking round the school and the grounds, he kept his eyes open. Murderers, he told Potter and Greene, have been discovered and brought to justice by a clue of a little cigarette-ash, a burnt match, or an old envelope. Potter and Greene wearily wondered whether Coker expected to find a little cigarette-ash, a burnt match, or an old envelope, in the quad, or in the garage yard, or in the Cloisters, or wherever his footsteps wandered—and what he would deduce from it if he did.

Looking round, Potter and Greene discerned the person to whom Coker's sudden and disdainful ejaculation alluded.

It was Inspector Grimes.

The Courtfield inspector, was at Greyfriars that afternoon—hanging about the place, as Coker contemptuously expressed it. Lots of fellows had seen him hanging about. He had asked a lot of fellows questions—even listening patiently to Billy Bunter. He had questioned Gosling, the porter, and Mr. Mimble, the gardener, and Trotter, the page—and a dozen other persons. He seemed, as Coker sardonically remarked, to think he was going to bag that burglar by asking questions. Now he was talking to Barnes the Head's new chauffeur—no doubt asking more questions. Coker came to a halt, and Potter and Greene, abandoning for the moment their attempts to manoeuvre Coker in the direction of the tuckshop, halted also. Coker looked towards the portly Courtfield inspector with an extremely sarcastic expression on his face.

"Ass!" he repeated.

"Oh, you mean old Grimey!" yawned Potter.

"Yes. The ass!" said Coker. "Hanging about the school, asking fellows questions! The chump!"

"Well, he's trying to pick up information, I suppose," remarked Greene. "He thinks some fellows may have seen or heard something last night."

"He would!" jeered Coker.

Potter and Greene did not see why Mr. Grimes shouldn't. But they did not argue with Coker. They seldom argued with Coker. The less a fellow argued with Coker, the sooner Coker might leave off talking.

"His methods are not mine," said Coker.

Potter winked at Greene with the eye furthest from Coker.

"The fathead! Why the garage is fifty yards from the House, at least," said Coker, "yet he thinks Barnes may have heard something. He sleeps in the room over the garage, and never heard anything, and never probably knew there had been a burglary till this morning. But that ass is jawing to him. I saw him jawing to Bunter of the Lower Fourth this afternoon."

"Well, Bunter saw the burglar, and so—"

"Don't interrupt me, Potter. He was asking Gosling a lot of silly questions—"

"Well," said Greene, "Gosling might have heard or seen—"

"Let a fellow speak," said Coker. "Come on! Let's look round! The cracksmen may have scouted this way. It's rather easy to get out by way of the garage. Some of the fellows break

bounds this way, I believe. I've heard Price mention it. Come on!"

Coker marched on, keen as ever on picking up clues. Potter and Greene, keen as ever on tea, trailed wearily after him. Mr. Grimes glanced at them for a moment, and then resumed his talk with the Head's chauffeur. Barnes glanced at them also, probably wondering what they were rooting about the garage yard for.

Mr. Grimes remained only a few minutes longer; probably he had not gained any information from the chauffeur. He drifted away, portly and rather ponderous, though Mr. Grimes' eyes were very sharp under his heavy eyelids. Coker, taking no heed of him, was examining the vicinity of the garage, watched with more and more surprise by Barnes.

The chauffeur came over to him at last.

"Lost something, sir?" he asked.

Coker shook his head.

"No. I'm looking for something, Barnes."

Barnes seemed puzzled. Perhaps he was mystified by Coker looking for something when he had not lost anything.

"I say, Coker—" murmured Greene restively.

BRAVO, BRADFORD!

Jack Harrison, of 131, Whetley Hill, Bradford, Yorks, who sent in the following clever Greyfriars Limerick, has been awarded one of this week's useful pocket-wallets.

There's a Greyfriars youngster
named Tubb,
Who once "peppered" old George
Wingate's grub;
But that worthy found out
That a plot was about,
The result was, he made poor
Tubb blubb!

Your Greyfriars limerick will be welcomed, chum. Send it along to-day!

"You noticed anything, Greene?"

"Nunno. I was thinking about tea."

"Don't be an ass, Greene!"

"Well—" began Potter, equally restive.

"Shut up, old chap!"

Coker turned to the chauffeur. He eyed him, and Barnes, more and more surprised, stood respectfully at attention. Barnes was a very quiet and civil-spoken young man, regarded by all the maids at Greyfriars as a very superior young man. He kept very much to himself, however, and to the garage and the two room—he occupied over it. He was an excellent driver, and kept the Head's car in perfect trim, and Dr. Locke regarded him as rather an acquisition.

"Look here, Barnes—" said Coker.

"Yes, sir," said Barnes.

"You look a rather intelligent fellow, Barnes."

"Thank you, sir."

"I suppose you were asleep last night?"

"I generally sleep at night, sir," said Barnes respectfully, without a muscle of his clean-shaven face moving. Potter winked at Greene again; but Coker observed nothing.

"There was a burglary in the school last night, Barnes."

"I have heard so, sir."

"You didn't happen to wake up and hear anything?"

"No, sir. Mr. Grimes has just asked me the same question."

"Oh, Grimes!" said Coker carelessly. "Never mind Grimes. I suppose you keep your eyes open, Barnes?"

"In the daytime, sir," answered Barnes. This time Greene winked at Potter; but it never occurred to the mighty brain of Coker that the chauffeur was mildly making fun of him.

"Oh, of course!" assented Coker. "Well, did you notice anything unusual to-day about the place, Barnes? Any sign of anyone having been around here who had no business here?"

"Not till you came along, sir."

Potter and Greene turned their faces away to hide their smiles. Coker stared at the chauffeur.

"You don't quite catch my meaning," he said. "I may as well tell you, Barnes, that I am after that burglar."

Barnes jumped.

"Surprised you?" smiled Coker.

"A—a—little, sir."

"Well, my idea is that, after bunking from the House, he may have come this way," explained Coker.

Barnes gave him quite a strange look.

"Do you think so, sir?" he murmured.

"Yes. This would be an easy way out," said Coker. "You're sure you never heard any sound in the night?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Or noticed any sign this morning of anyone having been rooting about?"

"No, sir."

"No footprints, or anything?" asked Coker.

"I did not think of looking for footprints, sir," said Barnes respectfully.

"But if there had been any, I should have noticed them, I think."

"No cigarette-ash lying about?"

Coker was rather keen on cigarette-ash; which had led to the detection of the wicked count in the "Mystery of the Midnight Murder."

"I did not notice any, sir."

"Well, I suppose you wouldn't," said Coker. "You don't mind my having a look round here, Barnes?"

"Not at all, sir."

Barnes went back to the Head's car, which he had been polishing when the Courtfield inspector interrupted him. He resumed his work; only eyeing Coker occasionally with some curiosity. No doubt he had never seen a detective like Coker at work before.

Potter and Greene stood waiting, shifting from one leg to the other, wearily, while Coker continued his investigations. Coker examined the gate, but found no clue to anyone having climbed over it. He rooted along the wall. He scanned the flagstones in the yard; but not even a burnt match rewarded him.

When he was at a little distance and out of hearing, the chauffeur approached Potter and Greene.

"Excuse me gentlemen," he murmured.

Potter looked at him.

"Excuse me, but is that young gentleman quite right in his head, sir?" murmured Barnes.

Potter and Greene chuckled.

There was a sudden sharp exclamation from Coker. He fairly jumped at something that lay near the wall of the yard. He turned an excited face round.

"Barnes, come here!"

"Certainly, sir!"

Barnes went across to Coker, and Potter and Greene followed him, wondering what Horace had found.

On the stone flag near the wall was a little heap of greyish powder. Coker, on his knees, was scanning it.

"What's that?" asked Potter.
 "Ash!" replied Coker. "Cigarette-ash, old man! A clue, I rather think."
 Potter and Greene did not agree. They did not believe that criminals in real life scattered cigarette-ash about by way of a clue, in order to lead to their own detection. However, they did not argue the point. Coker, as usual, was given his head.

Coker carefully scooped the ash into the palm of his hand. He raised it to his nose, and sniffed.

"Rather an unusual scent," he said.
 "But—" murmured Potter. "I suppose Barnes smokes cigarettes?"

"Yes, sir," said Barnes.
 "This is a very unusual ash," said Coker. "What sort of cigarettes do you smoke, Barnes?"

"Virginia, sir."
 "This isn't Virginia ash," said Coker. "You can see that yourself, Potter, if you've got any eyes in your head. It has a rather queer smell, too. This isn't the ash from one of your cigarettes, Barnes."

"No, sir," said Barnes.
 "It's fairly clear," said Coker complacently; "the cracksmen smokes an unusual brand of cigarettes. They often do; in fact, I believe they invariably do, so far as I've read up the subject. That's what gives the detective his chance. This is a very valuable clue. Grimes, of course, missed it."

"But you think the burglar stopped to smoke a cigarette here, while he was bolting after the alarm last night?" ejaculated Greene.

"I don't think he did—I know he did," answered Coker calmly. "I dare say he felt safe when he got as far as this. No doubt he climbed this wall ready to drop over, and feeling safe he put on a cigarette. I deduce that he is an inveterate smoker—a slave of the habit. That, of course, will help in his ultimate detection. At the present moment we hold a clue—a valuable clue. This ash must be identified. That's the next step."

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.
 "Unfortunately, I don't know much about smokes," said Coker. "Being a schoolboy is rather a handicap in matters of this sort. I suppose you've smoked a good many kinds of cigarettes, Barnes?"

"Yes, sir."
 "I dare say you could distinguish the ash of, say, a Turkish cigarette, from that of a Virginian or a Brazilian?"

"I think so, sir."
 "Well, have you ever come across ash of this kind before?" asked Coker, holding out the palm that contained the priceless clue. "You notice that it has rather a peculiar and pungent scent?"

"Quite, sir."
 "You've happened to come across it before?" asked Coker eagerly.

"Many times, sir."
 Coker's eyes danced. He felt he was fairly on the track now.

It was, as he had said, rather a handicap being a schoolboy; he had no personal knowledge of the different varieties of smokes. It was, therefore, fortunate that there was a chauffeur at hand—a fount of knowledge on that abstruse subject.

"You've seen this exact kind of ash before?" almost gasped Coker.

"Certainly, sir!"
 "You can give it a name, then?"

"Yes, sir."
 Coker smiled—a gloating smile.

"What's it called?" he asked.
 "Carbide of calcium, sir."

"Wha-a-a-t?"
 "There's a lot of it in a can in the garage, sir," said Barnes, without moving a muscle. "It's used for acetylene lamps, sir."

"Acetylene lamp?" murmured Coker dazedly.

"Yes, sir. A little of it must have been spilt here," said Barnes gravely. "But it's quite safe, sir, unless it's damped and a match put to it."

Coker stood quite still for a moment. Barnes' face was as solemn as that of a graven image. Potter and Greene struggled with their emotions.

"You—you—you mean to say that it—it—it's not cigarette-ash at all?" stuttered Coker, when he found his voice.

"No, sir! It's calcium carbide."
 "Oh!" gasped Coker.

"You can tell it by the smell, sir."
 "The—the smell?"

"Yes, sir."
 "But—but calcium carbide—is—is in lumps—"

"There's generally some powder in the can, sir. Is there anything more I can tell you, sir?" asked Barnes respectfully.

Coker did not answer. He let the valuable clue slip from his palm. He had no use for a little powdered calcium carbide.

Barnes went back to the motor-car. Potter and Greene dared not look at one another. They knew they would laugh if they did, and Coker's expression showed that it was no time for laughing.

With great efforts, Potter and Greene suppressed emotions that were well-nigh irresistible. Horace Coker spoke at last.

"Let's get out of this," he said. "No good hanging about this garage, that I can see. If you fellows want to hang about—"

"Well, I like that!" said Greene. "You brought us here. You said—"

"Never mind what I said!" granted Horace Coker. "Let's get out of this at once."

"But—" began Greene obstinately.

"Come on!" murmured Potter.

The three Fifth-Formers departed, Barnes looking after them for a moment with a very curious expression on his face. Coker went in silence. For once Coker had nothing to say. And in this unusually silent and abashed state Potter and Greene succeeded, at long last, in guiding his footsteps in the direction of the tuck-shop.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Big Idea!

"O H dear!" gasped Billy Bunter. Bunter spun round from Coker's study cupboard.

It is said that history never repeats itself. But history, unfortunately for William George Bunter, was repeating itself now in the most disconcerting way.

The cake—Coker's cake—was the cause of it. Bunter had a well-grounded apprehension that after tea there would not be any of that cake left.

In spite of so many discouragements, Bunter had not given up the idea of raiding that cake. It drew him like a magnet. It attracted him as the lode-

(Continued on page 22.)



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stone mountain attracted Sindbad's ship. And it was clear that if Bunter was to annex that cake, he had to annex it before Coker & Co. had tea.

Coker & Co. were out of the House. Bunter had ascertained that.

They seemed late for tea. They might come in any minute, but they had not come in yet. But two or three Fifth Form men loafed in the open doorway of the games study, and under their eyes Bunter could not nip into Coker's study after the cake. He kept his eyes on the Fifth Form passage, watching for a chance. At length the Fifth Form men went into the games study and shut the door. There was no one else in the passage. Now was Bunter's chance. He whipped along to Coker's study and nipped in.

But precious minutes had flown—procrastination is the thief of time. Coker & Co. were late for tea, but now they came in. Bunter had not been ten seconds in the study when he heard their voices and footsteps in the passage.

History was repeating itself—horribly. Just as he had been cornered the previous evening, so Bunter was cornered now; just as he had dodged under the table the previous evening, he dodged under it now. And, just like last time, he had not a second to lose—he was only safe out of sight when Coker and Potter and Greene entered the study.

With feelings too deep for words Bunter heard them shut the door and dump a parcel on the table. Once more Bunter was a prisoner in Coker's study, with this difference—that if Coker heard him there he was not likely to take him for a burglar this time.

Coker threw himself into a chair. Potter and Greene unwrapped the good things from the school shop. One of them went to the study cupboard, and lifted something out—Bunter could guess what it was! The remnant of the cake was on the point of vanishing.

Bunter could have groaned. But he dared not groan! He crouched in silence, only hoping that he would remain undiscovered till these beasts had finished their tea.

Potter and Greene started tea with keen appetites. Coker did not seem so keen on it.

"I've had a bit of a set-back!" Bunter heard him say.

"Yes, this is prime ham," said Potter. "Aren't you going to have your tea, Coker?"

"If you fellows think I am discouraged you're mistaken," said Coker. "One swallow doesn't make a summer."

"You make the tea, Greeney."

"I've taken up this matter," resumed Coker. "The burglar coming to the school has given me a chance at him, as I've told you. So far I haven't picked up a clue. But I've got an idea."

Potter and Greene did not inquire what the idea was. Perhaps they did not want to know. But Coker did not wait for inquiry. He proceeded to propound the idea.

"Owing to that fat idiot Bunter butting into him the burglar scooted last night," said Coker. "I dare say everybody thinks that he will give Greyfriars a wide berth after this—for a time, at least."

"Most likely," said Potter, with his mouth full.

"You think it's most likely?" asked Coker.

"Well, I suppose so. He wouldn't be as enough to butt in again, with everybody on the alert."

"You think the same, Greeney?"

"Oh, yes. You pour out the tea, Potter."

"I thought you'd think so," said Coker.

"Knowing what silly asses you are, I felt certain of it. Everybody else thinks the same—being silly asses, too. See? Well, my idea is that the cracksmen will guess that everybody's got that silly idea in his head—and so he will think it a jolly good chance to come back and bag the swag."

"Oh!" ejaculated Potter and Greene together.

"That's my idea," said Coker—"that's my idea, you fellows, for what it's worth."

Coker's manner implied that he thought that idea worth quite a lot. Potter and Greene did not state their estimation of its value.

"Ten to one," said Coker, "the cracksmen will work it out that nobody expects him—and so he will come! See?"

"Oh! Ah! Yes!" said Potter.

"Um!" said Greene.

"You'd hardly see it," said Coker. "It needs brains—and I've pointed out before that I'm the only brainy man in this study—or in all Greyfriars, if you come to that. Well, it being ten to one that the cracksmen will take advantage of everybody not expecting him, I'm going to nab him if he comes to-night—or I may say, when he comes to-night."

"Oh!" said Potter.

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"Um!" said Greene.

"To-night," said Coker calmly, "I'm going to watch. You fellows can watch with me, if you like. I shall leave the dormitory after the House is asleep, and keep watch from the games study doorway. If he comes in the same way, as he's practically certain to do, I shall nab him. If you fellows like to keep watch with me I'll be glad of your company."

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance.

"We—we-w'd be glad," stammered Potter. "But—but I—I'm rather afraid we—we might be in the way."

"Might do something clumsy, and—and alarm him!" said Greene, shaking his head. "That would spoil it."

Coker nodded.

"Something in that," he said. "I don't want to leave you fellows out of it, but, as you say, you'd very likely spoil the whole thing. Perhaps you'd better stay in bed."

"Perhaps we had," murmured Potter and Greene.

"I shall have a golf club with me," said Coker. "I shan't stand on ceremony with the scoundrel! I shall knock him senseless and seize him."

"If he comes—" murmured Potter.

"When he comes!" said Coker.

"Oh, yes! When he comes—I mean when he comes."

"You fellows can stay awake, of course, and be ready to come to my help—if I need it. I'm not likely to need it."

"Nunno! Most likely not!" gasped Greene.

"Well, that's settled," said Coker. "Let's have tea."

He drew his chair up to the table and thrust his long legs beneath that article of furniture.

"Yaroooooh!"

There was a sudden roar under the study table, that made the three Fifth-Formers fairly jump.

Bunter had intended to keep silent. His safety depended on silence. But how was a fellow to keep silent when a boot is suddenly jammed into his neck? Bunter was taken by surprise.

"Why—what—" gasped Coker.

"There's somebody under the table!" yelled Potter.

Coker jumped up.

He did not think that it was a hidden cracksmen this time—he guessed who it was. He dragged up the table cover and glared underneath, and then he thrust his boot at a squirming fat figure there.

"Yooooop!" roared Billy Bunter.

He rolled out from under the table, propelled by that hefty lunge in his fat ribs.

"Bunter!" roared Greene.

"That fat villain!" gasped Potter.

"After the cake again—"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Collar him!" roared Coker.

"Ow! I wasn't after the cake!"

Yaroooooh!"

Bunter made a wild bound to the door. Coker and Potter and Greene jumped after him. Bunter tore the door open just as the three reached him.

Three boots crashed on Bunter together. Owing to the fat junior's extensive circumference there was plenty of room for them to land. They landed—hard!

Bunter flew!

Bump!

"Yow-owowowwwwwwwp!"

"After him!" roared Coker. "Kick him out of the passage!"

"Wow-ow-ow!"

How Bunter got out of the Fifth-Form passage he never quite knew. He was quite surprised to find himself all in one piece afterwards. For quite a long time afterwards deep groans could be heard proceeding from Study No. 7 in the Remove—what time Coker & Co. were finishing the cake that had caused Bunter so much disaster, and which was now gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Cracksmen for Coker!

BOB CHERRY wore a thoughtful look.

Thoughtful as his brow was, however, there was a twinkle in his eyes which seemed to indicate that his reflections were of a humorous nature.

The chums of the Remove were in the Rag, after prep, and four of them were discussing Christmas holidays, while Bob remained silent in meditation. Harry Wharton clapped him on the shoulder at last.

"Penny for 'em!" he remarked.

"It's Coker I'm thinking of," explained Bob.

"Oh, Coker!"

The Co. grinned. The mere mention of Horace Coker was enough to make them grin. Coker was, indeed, in the opinion of the Remove men, enough to make a cat laugh.

Coker went down on one knee and scooped the ash into the palm of his hand. He raised it to his nose and sniffed it. "Rather an unusual scent," he said. "It's fairly clear the cracksmen smoke an unusual brand of cigarettes!" (See Chapter 11.)



Bunter, of course, had been talking about what he had heard in Coker's study. The Removites chuckled over it. Coker's idea that he could play detective entertained them. His idea of tracking down the cracksmen made them chortle. The picture of Coker sitting up all night watching for a cracksmen who would never come, made them roar. Bunter, indeed, who had a large accumulation of aches and pains, had expressed a wish that the cracksmen would come, that he would encounter Coker, and that he would knock Coker on the head. But that was only an idle wish—Bunter did not believe that the cracksmen would come. Nobody believed that he would come—excepting Coker. It was, in fact, pretty certain that he wouldn't come. Only a powerful brain like Coker's could have reasoned it out as probable that he would come.

"Coker's going to sit up alone, from what Bunter heard," went on Bob, "Potter and Greene don't seem keen on detective stunts at midnight."

"Let's hope he'll enjoy himself," said Frank Nugent charitably. "He won't catch a cracksmen! He may catch a cold."

"Well, it seems rather rotten for old Coker to sit up all night, and catch nothing but a cold," said Bob. "Why shouldn't he catch a cracksmen, if he's keen on it?"

"Eh?"

"Enterprise ought to be rewarded, you know," argued Bob, "Coker's keen. He hasn't any brains to speak of; but he's frightfully keen. He's worked out a theory, like the detectives do in the shilling novels. In the novels, the theory always comes out a winner. They always catch their man. Well, why shouldn't Coker—if we can help him?"

"What are you driving at?" demanded Wharton. "The burglar won't come near the place, after giving the alarm. If he ever comes again, it won't be till after he's given the place a long rest."

"Naturally, but necessity is the mother of invention," said Bob. "If there's no cracksmen where a cracksmen is badly wanted, one can be made. Can't a lot of nice, thoughtful, good-natured fellows like us, provide Coker with the cracksmen he wants so bad?"

"Oh! It's a jape?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Just that!" said Bob. "Now, Coker will be in the doorway of the games study—watching in the dark. When he sees a shadowy form, what will he do?"

"Land it one with his jolly old golf club," said Johnny Bull. "And I can tell you that I don't want to be within range, when Coker starts doing physical jerks with a golf club in the dark."

"That's it," said Bob. "We won't get too near Coker—safety first, you know. But the cracksmen will be there—ready for Coker's mighty swipe. It will buck Coker no end."

"But how?"

"An old suit of clothes, stuffed with rags," said Bob, "a pillow for a head, with an old hat on it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But would even Coker be idiot enough to be taken in by that?" asked the captain of the Remove laughing.

"My dear man you know Coker! Isn't he idiot enough for anything?"

"Passed nem. con.," said Johnny Bull.

"The idiotfulness of the esteemed Coker is terrific," agreed Hurree Janiset Ram Singh. "It will be a preposterous jape."

There was a whispered discussion among the Famous Five for some time. The more they discussed the idea, the better they liked it. As Bob had said, it was a pity that Coker should be disappointed when he was so keen on capturing a cracksmen. It was only good-natured to provide a cracksmen for Coker to capture. And the outcome of the discussion was, that the Famous Five retired from the Rag, and adjourned to Study No. 1 in the Remove

to make preparations for the little jest on Coker.

From the property-box of the Remove Dramatic Society, they obtained a suit of clothes for the purpose. From an old packing-case in the box-room, they obtained several wooden slats, to give the dummy figure perpendicularity. The trousers and coat were stuffed round the slats, and a pair of ancient boots were affixed beneath. A cushion formed the head, with an ancient bowler hat fixed on top, and a blackened handkerchief was spread over the front of it to form a mask—likewise to conceal the lack of features.

In the lighted study, the figure did not look very alarming. But in the dim darkness of midnight, it was likely to be another matter.

Having finished it with a few artistic touches, the chums of the Remove regarded it with great satisfaction, and many chuckles.

Any fellow, meeting that figure in the dark, might have been alarmed; especially a fellow who was expecting to meet a cracksmen.

"I say, you fellows—"

The study door opened, and Billy Bunter blinked in.

"I say, you fellows, if you're going to have a study supper—yaroooh!"

Bunter's eyes fell on the figure leaning on the study table.

He gave it one terrified blink, and then his yell of alarm woke every echo of the Remove passage.

"Ow! Help! Burglars! Ow! Wow! Help!"

Bunter vanished.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Burglars! Help!" roared Bunter, as he fled for the stairs.

"Oh, my hat! The fat idiot!" gasped Bob Cherry. "We shall have half the House here—"

"Get it out of sight!" exclaimed Wharton.

There were footsteps and excited

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voices in the Remove passage. Hurriedly the juniors whipped the figure into the corner of the study, and dragged the screen in front of it.

"What on earth's the matter here?" Vernon-Smith looked in at the doorway. "Bunter says there's a burglar here." "D-d-does he?" stammered Bob.

"What are you fellows up to?" Peter Todd looked in.

"Help! Burglars! Help!" Bunter was roaring. "Oh, ow, wow! Help! Burglars! Yaroooh! Whoop! Help!"

"What the dickens—" "Here comes Wingate."

"Oh, my hat!"

The voice of the Greyfriars captain could be heard on the stairs.

"Bunter! You young ass! What the—"

"Ow! Help! Burglars!"

"You young ass!" roared Wingate. "What do you mean?"

"Ow! In Study No. 1," gasped Bunter. "I saw him—a hulking ruffian, masked—he pointed a revolver at me—"

"What?"

"Sprang at me like a—a tiger," gasped Bunter. "I—I just looked into the study and he sprang at me—"

"You young ass! Come with me."

"Ow, ow, ow!" howled Bunter, as Wingate led him up the passage to Study No. 1, with a finger and thumb compressing a fat ear.

The prefect looked in at Study No. 1. The Famous Five were there—with innocent wonder expressed in their countenances. Wingate stared at them.

"Bunter says there's a burglar in this study," he snapped. "Have you been stuffing the young idiot?"

"Ow! Leggo! I saw him—he sprang at me—"

"Nobody here but ourselves, Wingate," said Harry Wharton. "We were here when Bunter looked in. I didn't see any burglar."

"The scullessness was not terrific, my esteemed Wingate."

"You young ass, Bunter!" growled Wingate.

"I—I saw him," gasped Bunter, blinking round the study. "I—I tell you I—I saw him—a fearful ruffian! He was grinding his teeth—"

"What on earth does the young ass fancy he saw?" exclaimed Wingate.

"I—I wonder!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"If there'd been a burglar here, we should have seen him, you know," said Nugent. "We were all here."

Wingate gave the juniors a suspicious look. Then he gave Bunter a shake.

"Ow! Yow! Wow!" gasped Bunter.

"If you make any more row, I'll give you six!" snapped Wingate, and he walked away.

"I—I say, you fellows, where—where's he gone?" asked Bunter, blinking round the study.

"I—I saw him—a hulking ruffian, with a black mask, and his eyes gleaming like—like lightning—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boasts!"

Billy Bunter rolled away, still alarmed, and very much perplexed. Harry Wharton locked the study door when the Co. left it. It was necessary for that cracksmen to remain unseen and unsuspected till the time came for Coker of the Fifth to capture him.

"It will work," said Bob Cherry.

"Bunter took him for the the genuine article even in the light—so he will be good enough for Coker in the dark. There's going to be some fun to-night, my beloved 'earers.'"

And when the Remove went to their dormitory, there were five members of the Form who did not go to sleep. Those five cheery youths had business on hand at the witching hour of midnight.

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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Crack for a Cracksmen!

COKER nodded.

He could not help nodding. The fact was that it was much easier to arrange at tea-time to keep watch all night than to keep awake all through the stilly hours.

Greyfriars was silent and slumbering. Coker was silent and very nearly slumbering.

He had almost to prop his eyelids open. He found them unexpectedly heavy.

In the Fifth Form dormitory Potter and Greene and the rest of the Fifth slept in peace. Nobody had awakened when Coker slipped out of bed and dressed himself. Coker left the Fifth Form dormitory as quietly as he could. Coker never did anything very quietly. He bumped his golf club on the door; and when he shut the door after him it slipped from his hand and banged a little. Still, nobody awakened. Nobody but Coker was bothering about burglars.

Had, indeed, a cracksmen been entering the school that night, Coker would probably have frightened him off. He dropped the golf club on the stairs with a crash—such accidents would happen, at least to Coker. When he reached the games study he stumbled over a chair, and there was a thud. There was also an exclamation from Coker, who had barked his shin on the chair.

However, Coker settled down at last—quietly. When he was sitting down, even Coker was quiet.

The door of the games study was half-open; just within the aperture Coker sat and watched. Midnight chimed out in the silence of the night. There had been no sound of alarm so far—excepting those made by Coker. But Coker hardly expected the cracksmen before midnight. Now he was doubly cautious and doubly watchful.

He nodded. A fellow couldn't help nodding. But he did not go to sleep. He was determined not to go to sleep. It would have been a very poor end to the adventure had Coker gone to sleep—and woke up in the games study in the morning, to find that the burglary had taken place! That, of course, would never have done!

But if Coker did not sleep, he certainly dozed.

When there were sounds on the landing opposite the doorway of the games study Coker did not hear them. Shadowy figures moved in the darkness, with a taller shadowy figure in their

midst, that moved only when he was lifted or pulled.

Shadowy figures crept silently away, leaving the taller shadowy figure propped against the easement by which the burglar had entered the previous night.

Still Coker did not stir. He was not asleep—but he was remarkably near it. Probably a genuine cracksmen, had he been at work that night, would not have experienced much trouble from Coker.

Five shadowy forms, bunched round a corner, waited and listened.

"The silly ass must have gone to sleep!" breathed one.

"Just like Coker!" breathed another.

"We can't leave that cracksmen to be found in the morning!"

There was a suppressed chuckle.

"Quiet!"

Really it was not needful to be very quiet. Nodding in the doorway of the games study, Coker was deaf and blind. "Leave it to me!" murmured Bob Cherry.

He stepped out from the corner and stamped heavily on the landing, and popped back again. The juniors listened breathlessly.

There was a sound from the games study. It was made by the legs of a chair, as somebody sitting on the chair suddenly moved.

"Hook it!" breathed Bob.

And five shadowy figures looked it, satisfied that the Fifth Form detective was on the alert at last.

Coker was undoubtedly on the alert. He had heard a sound—an unmistakable sound. His eyes were wide open now, and no longer needed propping open. He rose from the chair and peered out into the dim shadows, his heart beating fast. Never had Coker been wider awake than he was at the present moment.

Through the tall window starlight glimmered on the wide landing. Coker put his head out and peered round.

Then he gave a violent start.

He had expected it. His wonderful powers of deduction had led him to the inevitable conclusion that the burglar would return that night. Yet it gave him a start and a thrill to see a dark figure at the window—a figure that blocked the starlight and cast a long, dark shadow across the landing.

Coker breathed hard, and gripped the golf club almost convulsively.

It was the cracksmen!

There could be no doubt about that.

Gripping the club, Coker stepped out of the games study, his eyes gleaming, his heart going like a hammer. He was not afraid—Coker feared no foe! But he was wildly excited.

The figure at the window did not move.

Coker's impression was that the cracksmen, having entered, was standing very still and quiet, listening, before he proceeded. It was a natural impression, in the circumstances.

Coker, of course, did not intend to let the villain escape, as he had escaped the previous night when Bunter blundered into him. He was not going to whip out of the window and bolt this time as he had done before—not if Horace Coker knew it.

Coker intended to bag that cracksmen! His grip was going to be on the villain before he gave the alarm, cutting off his escape. No doubt he had an automatic. Coker was not going to give him a chance to use it, however. At the first hostile movement the golf club was ready.

For a second Coker stared at the dark figure that blocked the starlight at the window. Then he leaped at it.

When a fellow leaps at a cracksmen probably armed with an automatic it is surely excusable to begin operations by

Read

"The Thriller—"

It's a Wow!

handing him one with a golf club! Coker felt that it was.

He leaped, and he swiped! The business end of the club crashed on a bowler hat, smashing through it, and the dark figure went with a crash to the floor.

"Got him!" gasped Coker.

He stood over the figure, club in hand, ready for a second swipe if the scoundrel resisted or displayed a woe.

But the scoundrel did not resist; he did not display a weapon. Coker realised that he must have stunned him with that hefty swipe. Stretched on the floor, on his face, at Coker's feet, he did not stir again.

"Surrender, you villain!" panted Coker. "Lift a finger, and I'll brain you! I warn you!"

There was no answer, no stirring of the felled cracksmen. Obviously he was stunned.

Coker breathed hard and deep.

With rapid footsteps he crossed the landing to the electric light switch and turned it on. Then he shouted.

"Wake up, you fellows! This way! Burglars! I've got him! This way!"

Coker's powerful voice rang through the House.

Coker did not leave the spot. He hurried back to the figure that lay prone, with the club ready to bash him again if he attempted to escape before help came to secure him.

"Help! Burglars! This way!" roared Coker.

Five shadowy figures lurking on the stairs fairly gasped as they heard Coker roar.

"My only hat! He'll wake the House!"

"Great pip!"

"The frabjous fathead! Can't he see it's a dummy?"

"Oh dear!"

"Hook it! We don't want to be up when the beaks arrive! Hook it!"

Breathlessly the five fled for the Remove dormitory, and bolted into bed. The jape was developing rather beyond their anticipations.

"Help! Wake up! Burglars! I've got him!" bawled Coker, standing on guard over the prone cracksmen, with upraised club.

There was a calling of startled voices, a flashing of lights. Doors opened, and footfalls echoed. Coker had alarmed the House.

"What is it—"

"What's up?"

"Who's making that row?"

"What the thump—"

"Burglars!" roared Coker. "I've got him! This way—"

"Oh crickey!"

A crowd of half-dressed fellows converged on the landing from various directions. They stared in amazement at the prostrate figure, and Coker, club in hand, standing over it. Mr. Quelch whisked on the scene in his dressing-gown, a poker in his hand.

"What has happened?" exclaimed the Remove master. "What—Why, bless my soul!"

He stared in horror at the prostrate form.

"I've got him, sir!" said Coker jubilantly. "I rather fancied he would come back to-night, sir, and I stayed up on the watch. I knocked him down with this club before he could draw his automatic! I've got him!"

"Coker's got him!" gasped Potter.

"Coker's got him!" repeated Greene dazedly. "Then Coker was right! My only hat!"

"The wretched man must be stunned!" gasped Mr. Quelch, approach-

ing the prone figure very gingerly. "I—I—I hope he is—is not—"

The Remove master broke off. The figure lay dreadfully still; and the bowler hat was smashed down over the head, testifying to the force with which Coker had delivered his swipe.

Coker started.

"I—I hit him rather hard, sir!" he said. "I was only just in time before he got at his automatic. He—he fell without a cry. Just fell!"

Mr. Quelch bent over the still figure. Fifty fellows or more watched him breathlessly.

An extraordinary expression came over the Remove master's face. He started almost convulsively.

"Is—is he dead, sir?" gasped Coker.

Mr. Quelch did not answer. At a closer view he had discerned what had escaped Coker's observation.

Still with that extraordinary expression on his speaking countenance, Mr. Quelch turned the prone figure over and jerked it upright.

The battered hat fell off. A cushion,

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draped with a blackened handkerchief, was revealed.

There was a gasp of amazement from fifty fellows.

Coker gazed at the cracksmen. Mr. Quelch gazed at Coker.

"Coker!" he said, in a deep voice. "What does this mean? You absurd and wretched boy, what does this mean?"

Coker could not reply. He had lost his voice. Even had he found it, he could not have told Mr. Quelch what it meant. He did not know.

There was a yell from Potter.

"It's a dummy!"

"A dummy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, Coker! Ha, ha, ha!"

"This," said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice, "is an artificial figure. It is not a human being. Coker, how dare you play such a trick?"

Coker babbled helplessly.

"Trick! I didn't—I never! I—I saw him get in at the window—"

"What? You saw this artificial figure get in at the window?" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I mean, I—I saw him standing inside the window. I—I—I thought he had just got in!" babbled Coker. "I—I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" boomed Mr. Quelch. "Mr. Prout!" The Fifth Form master had arrived, half-dressed. "Mr. Prout, I leave this in your hands! This boy of your Form has alarmed the House, for a jest—an absurd jest—a practical joke."

"I haven't!" yelled Coker. "I—I

didn't! I—I thought he was a burglar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was on the watch—watching for him, and I—I saw him, and I—I thought—" babbled Coker. "Oh, crickey, I—I've been taken in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"S-s-s-somebody must have rigged this up to take me in! Oh, dear! I—I—"

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Prout! "Go back to your dormitory! Go! Not a word! I will deal with you in the morning! I will take you to your headmaster to be dealt with! Silence! Go!"

And Coker went—gasping. In the Fifth Form dormitory the fellows rocked with laughter. In every dormitory there were shrieks of merriment. There was, as the poet has put it, a sound of revelry by night. There was only one fellow who did not laugh. That was Horace Coker. Coker did not even see anything to laugh at. But the other fellows did—and they howled.

All Greyfriars was smiling the next morning.

Except Coker.

Coker did not smile. Indeed, he looked like the ancient king who never smiled again.

He had quite an unpleasant interview with the Head. Fortunately the Head accepted his explanation, and realised that the whole affair was not a practical joke on Coker's part. Coker was not a practical joker. He was only a born idiot. The Head told Coker at considerable length what he thought of him, and gave him five hundred lines for having broken dormitory bounds; and there it ended, so far as the Head was concerned.

But it did not end there for Coker! Coker found himself an object of general merriment! Coker's cracksmen remained a standing joke till the school broke up for the Christmas holidays. Coker found himself looking forward rather anxiously to the break-up.

"This is what a fellow gets when he shows that he's a bit out of the common ruck!" he told Potter and Greene bitterly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at. The whole school's cackling at me—and there's absolutely nothing to cackle at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" roared Coker. "I can tell you one thing! I was going to keep on my detective work and bag that cracksmen! Now I won't!"

"You—you won't?" gasped Potter.

"No!" said Coker firmly. "I won't! I was going to, but now I won't! That cracksmen can go on ahead, and burgle every blessed place in Kent, if he likes, and I won't raise a finger to stop him! I was going to—but now I won't! I mean it—I won't!"

"You—you—you won't capture that cracksmen?" gasped Greene.

"No!" said Coker firmly. "I won't!"

And Coker kept his word.

He didn't!

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of Harry Wharton & Co. in next week's BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER, entitled: "QUELCHY'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT" by Frank Richards. As there is always a great demand for the Christmas Number of the MAGNET, regular readers should make a point of ordering their copy at the earliest opportunity.)

PETER FRAZER— IRONMASTER!

By JOHN BREARLEY.

Half-dazed, the young ironmaster stiffened as he heard the screech of an iron bolt and the soft plash of a foot-step!

To Save the Foundry!

THE water lapped evilly round Peter Frazer. An eternity passed, in long, dragging minutes.

Creak!
Half-dazed, the young ironmaster stiffened suddenly at the sound and strove hard to turn his head. The sound came again out of the darkness, and the screech of an iron bolt. Then the soft plash of a foot-step! Someone was coming.

Peter tried hard to force the gag from his mouth, but at that moment the door of the cellar opened, and a wave of water swirled across his face. Whoever it was, friend or foe, was wading towards him. Suddenly, he felt the newcomer bend over him.

Friend or another enemy! In the foul darkness, he could see nothing. Something was thrust beneath his head, lifting it clear of the water.

Rapidly the stranger splashed through the flooded cellar, busy at Peter's bonds. First one leg then the other, then finally both arms were patiently released, and next he laid firm hands beneath Peter's shoulders and lifting and dragging, hauled him to the door and so out into the wet passage.

Again he bent over the exhausted captive, the same firm hands were laid over Peter's heart and temples, and next a tiny flask of spirit was held to his lips.

The fierce fire of it made him choke and gasp, but it revived him. He struggled feebly to rise, whereat his rescuer hauled him to his feet and half-guiding, half-supporting, led him along the passage. With every step the air blew cleaner until, at last, they bumped against a stair. A grating barred the way. Peter lurched against it and it opened with a jerk, bringing them both to their knees. And so they tumbled into the open air, where the wind blew salt and damp.

And then his rescuer vanished like a wraith, as mysteriously as he had appeared!

Peter groped round for him; tried to call him, but his stiffened jaws refused; blundered against a wall and felt along it until he reached a corner.

Far out in front of him, the still riding-light of a ship, this time with



no houses in between, told Peter that he was on the river-bank—probably on the small wharf of an old warehouse.

In black darkness, he proceeded gingerly. The night air was sweet after the close foulness of the cellar, and as he went he gulped it down in great lungfuls, stopping often to massage his aching limbs and chilled body.

INTRODUCTION.

Head and sole owner of Fraser's Iron Foundry! It is a strange prospect that lies before Peter Frazer, a cheery strapping youngster of eighteen when he arrives in the squalid industrial city of Maxport to take over the great business left to him by his dead uncle. Peter soon realises that his legacy has brought danger with it, for he is kidnapped on his way to his new home. Luckily, he escapes, but with only one clue to the identity of his unknown enemy: the man is completely bald, with a terrible jagged scar running across the top of his head. At the works Peter learns from his manager, Mr. Dimmock, that Fraser's Foundry is on the brink of ruin, owing to the activities of a man named Granger and his gang. Peter is determined to fight his enemies tooth and nail, and he starts by knocking out the scoundrelly Granger in a fight, and then sacking him. One evening, with the faint hope of finding some clue that will put him on the trail of the scarred man, Peter wanders into the lowest quarter of Maxport. Through the window of a dingy inn, he catches sight of Granger's gang, and another man whom he recognises as an accomplice of the kidnappers. He is straining his ears to catch their talk, when a sudden charge from behind sends him hurtling into the bar. In a trice, Peter is overpowered, gagged, and bound, and then carried through underground passages to a cellar below the level of the river. There he is tied, spreadeagled, and left to drown. As the water leaks slowly into his prison, rising inch by inch, Peter strains fiercely at his bonds.

Somewhat revived at last, he went on, his mind in a whirl. He wondered who his rescuer had been and where he had gone, but he dared not call out. One thought, however, was clear and distinct. He had to get back to the works!

Suddenly he bumped into a blank wall, and failing to find a gate or door in it, clambered over stiffly. The effort warmed him, and dropping down, he set off more briskly down a narrow, muddy lane.

This brought him to a cobbled street. A dim, yellow light shone from a battered house a little way up, and as he passed it, a youth who whistled softly but cheerfully, stepped out. Only one lad of Peter's acquaintance whistled like that, and the young ironmaster dived for him instantly! It was Sparrow!

The terrific luck of the encounter lent vigour to Peter's grip, which, descending on Sparrow out of the darkness, nearly scared him into a fit!

"Sparrow! It's Peter Frazer!"

The cheerful one's straining body relaxed.

"T'master!" he yelled. "Coo lumme!" His hands darted over Peter's wet clothes. "Ye're soaking. What's up? Quick, in here, sir!"

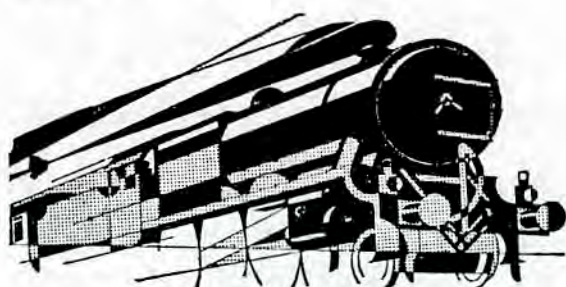
Crouched shivering in the dark doorway, Peter told him briefly what had happened. At the finish, he gripped Sparrow's arm imperatively.

"Sparrow, I want the foundry, and quick! Which way?"

The sharp-witted youngster's reply was prompt.

(Continued on page 28.)

(Now read on.)



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"Peter Frazer—Ironmaster!"

(Continued from page 26.)

"The foundry it is, sir! This way!" Together they plunged beneath an arch and into a fresh maze of twisted alleys. Once they even single-footed across a plank-bridge over a dark swirling back-water. Peter was all for haste and would have broken into a run, but Sparrow grabbed his elbow.

"Walk, boss!" he muttered. "Folks round here don't like other folks what ran. They gets curious!"

Recognising the sound advice, but in a fever of impatience, Peter compromised with a rapid walk. He was shaking off the cold of the water, but a chill fear for his foundry gripped his heart, for to his excited nerves the little man's black bag shrieked aloud of bombs and every second he expected to hear a dull, sullen roar roll across the roofs above him. He fairly whirled Sparrow along.

With a sudden gasp of relief, he found himself, after ten minutes dodging and twisting, with grass under his feet. Sparrow had brought him to the edge of the marshes, and then they were in the lane—his own lane, leading to the foundry gate itself. And the moon broke suddenly through the clouds.

Without a word, he was off into a run like lightning, Sparrow pounding after him.

No dreadful roar had yet rolled out. Perhaps even yet they would be in time! Surely the villains should have reached there by now, although, of course, it would take them time to get in—unless—unless—they had inside help!

In the old and palmy days, the works would have been as busy by night as they were by day, with all the furnaces working and the sky a red blaze.

But now there was only enough work to keep them going by day, and so at night the foundry was empty save for a very small crew to keep the banked fires tended through the night. All else, the shops and yards, would be empty!

The gate loomed up, dark and black. Fiercely Peter fumbled in his wet clothes for the key to the wicket door. Sparrow panting up just as he opened it.

Like avoung shadows, they slipped inside and tore across the desolate yard. Out of the blackness by the footbridge, a figure rose with a snarl and crouched before them, but Peter, in a cold frenzy, slammed into him solidly and went on, the man, whoever he was, dropping limply into the filthy back-water with a loud splash.

So the gang were in!

Frantically the two boys raced into the works; the great lofty mill-room opening before them.

Startled by the crash of the door, the men on the furnaces at the far end swung round and stood petrified at the soaked, dishevelled scarecrow charging towards them with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

The sight of the astonished men momentarily reassured Peter, for it was obvious that nothing had occurred there. All the hands, among whom were two of the football team, were plainly astounded by his sudden entrance. Collins, an under-foreman in charge of the shift, sprang forward.

So the mills and furnaces were safe! Peter gasped with relief. And yet his enemies were somewhere around, as witness the sentry at the footbridge.

His eyes, darting about the great room, rested on the arch leading to the galvanising shed. There would be no men working there now.

Seizing Sparrow, he jerked him towards the advancing furnace-men.

"Tell 'em!" he snapped. "And surround the place!"

A tool-bench stood close by. Peter jumped for it, and grabbing a long, thick spanner, made for the doorway at a run. Even as he dashed through it recklessly, he heard the sudden, excited voices of the furnace-shift. In breathless gulps Sparrow gasped out their danger, and to a man they split up, all save the two footballers, who turned and raced after Peter.

In the centre of the huge galvanising shed stood the great bath, empty and closed.

The moon had appeared again, and a wide silver beam through the tall gaunt windows flooded the place, lighting bath, benches, plant, and loading-trucks at the other end.

Crouched round the bath, intent and absorbed in their work, stood three of the gang, with the little rat-faced man in their midst. One coat sleeve was turned back; he was slowly pulling down the other. And on the wall of the bath beside him was the black bag—open and empty!

Although it was night, there was sufficient clatter from the furnace-room to have drowned all sounds of Peter's

A POCKET WALLET

has been awarded to the sender of the following clever Greystriars limerick.

Said Fishy to Bunter one day:

"You greedy, great, big, hulking lay,

You have scooped all my grub,

Now I'm going to rub

Your nose in the dust, right away

Sent in by: W. Armstrong,
Dillon Terrace, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

arrival, and the noise served, too, to cover him as he slipped in through the arch, a menacing figure.

Simultaneously, however, the little man looked up and saw him, and his piercing, horrified yell shrilled echoing through the great room.

For Peter, bedraggled and wet, the moonlight streaming over him, with the red glow of the furnaces at his back—Peter, whom they had left to drown in the underground cellar—made a horrifying spectacle as he charged them silently, heavy spanner gripped in a powerful fist.

The effect was too much for their nerves. Dropping everything in awful panic, they spun round and pelted for the farther door, through which another, acting as sentry, had already disappeared.

They had a start of at least half the length of the shed, and Peter suddenly realised with sick dismay that beyond that door was another one, and once through that they would be in the yard and on the football field. Out there, there would be cover to spare in the fleeting moonlight.

Elles and Baker, the two footballers, ran at Peter's heels as the gang poured through the doorway.

He called on them for a spurt, and roused himself savagely, for he was tiring from his long run. Baker, the fastest man in the foundry, drew ahead, but the panic-stricken fugitives had entered the arched door in a body. Nearly beside himself with rage, the young ironmaster steadied himself and

hurled the long, heavy spanner after them. There was a yell and dull, thumping crash.

"We got 'em!" gasped Baker. "Arl the blokes'll be outside by now!"

"Come on, then!" gritted his leader, and they were through the arch and at the other door. He tore it open. There was a narrow asphalt path beneath his feet, a strip of yard with a huge coal-heap, and beyond that the football field. Two single lights shone across the field from Mr. Dimmock's house and Moller's cottage.

But of Granger's gang, the little man, or even his own men, there was no sign!

He stopped helplessly. Elles and Baker staring about dumbly. The field lay before them, flat and wide. It was impossible that the gang could have got away by that route and be out of sight! The coal-heap would not have hidden them all. Even as they stared, the rest of the men, headed by Collins, poured round the angle of the building and stood gazing blankly.

Sore with disappointment and perplexity, Peter's voice was curt.

"Spread out and search!" he cried.

"Come on, men, everywhere! Careful! Something's very wrong!"

They started to spread out, but as Peter began to run for the middle of the field, the door behind him burst open and Sparrow thrust a white, excited face into the moonlight.

"This way, sir! Got one!" he shrilled. And vanished.

They darted back in a crowd. Sparrow ahead like a terrier. He plunged into the black shadow by the door of the galvanising-room, and there Peter saw a huddled form. Many hands seized the man and dragged him into the light, then someone kicked against the heavy spanner Peter had thrown. His desperate shot had scored after all.

Bending down, the young ironmaster thrust a hand under the unconscious man's chin and pulled back the heavy, lolling head, showing a great dull mark across the forehead.

And the man was Moller, his engineer foreman!

"Moller! My only sainted aunt!"

Peter rose slowly to his feet, the men around him staring curiously down at the unconscious foreman.

He was not in his working dungarees, and, from his boots, had recently been out on the field. To a sharp question, Collins replied that Moller had gone off duty with the others at six o'clock and left him in charge of the night shift.

"Get over and ask Mr. Dimmock across," Peter ordered him. "And you men, carry this chap to a bench. Sparrow, you'd better phone for a doctor."

He was becoming more worried and puzzled every minute. If Moller was at the bottom of all the trouble, they would find out somehow when he revived. Instinctively he glanced at the man's bruised head, and grinned dryly. One thing was certain, Moller was not his chief enemy.

A scared furnace-man touched his arm.

"Happen we'd better find out what yon fellows were a-doing, master?" he muttered.

Peter glanced at the man and nodded. "Bring Moller into the light," he said, and strode into the galvanising-shed. The men followed slowly.

(For the continuation of this great industrial serial, see next week's BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER of the MAGNET.)