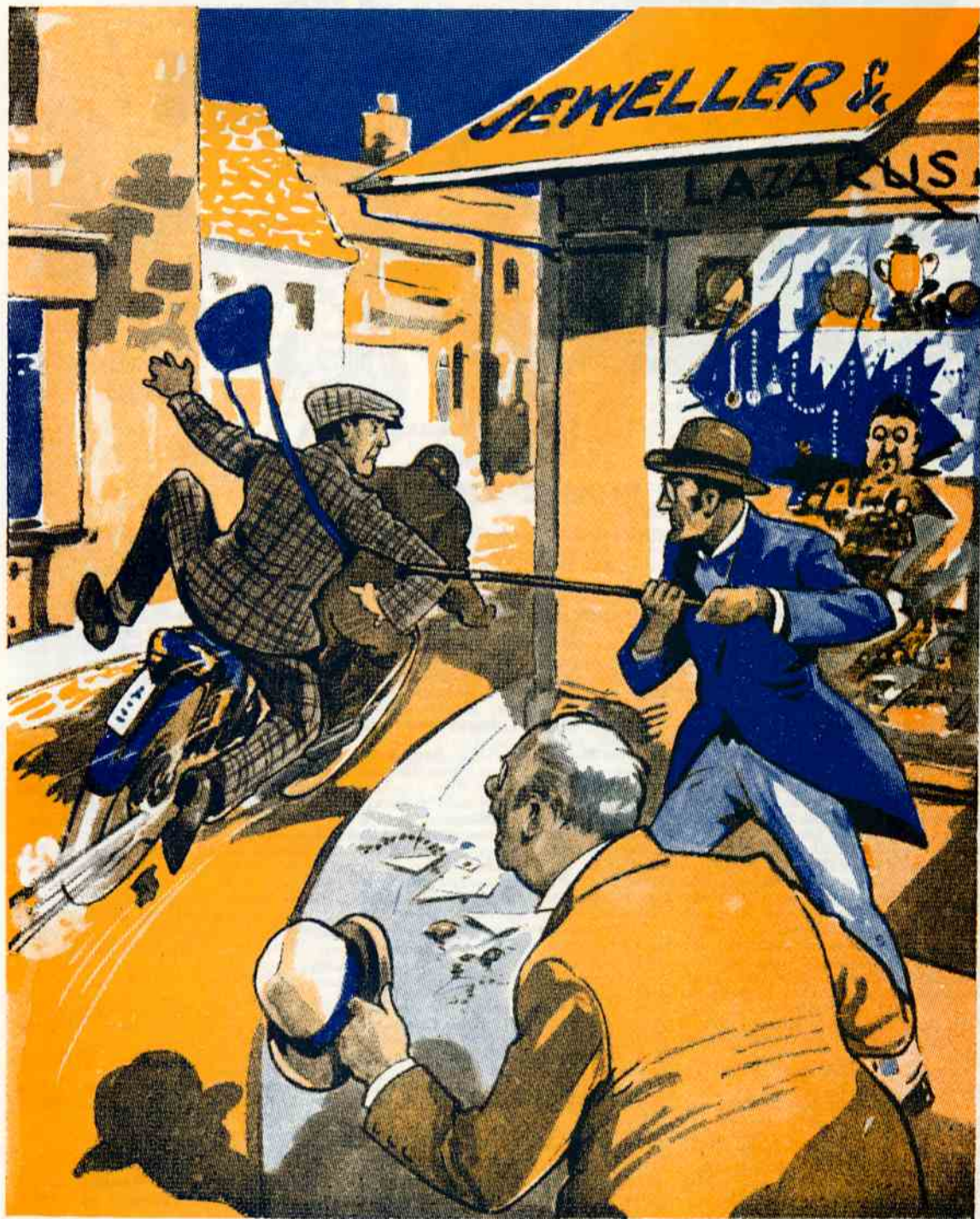


"MICKY, the SPRAT!" Thrilling School Story of Harry Wharton & Co. **By Frank Richards!**

The MAGNET 2^D





"What do you boys want?" asked Micky, the Sprat, coolly. "We've been tipped that a man in a check suit is running from the police," said Bob Cherry, "and there's not much doubt that you're the man!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Funny!

"**H**A, ha, ha!" roared Coker of the Fifth.

Coker thought it funny.

It was the last half-holiday of the term at Greyfriars—a blazing summer's afternoon. The River Sark, murmuring by drooping willows and green rushes, looked very attractive in the bright sunshine, and plenty of Greyfriars fellows found it so. There were Greyfriars fellows in boats, on the school raft, on the towpath, under shady trees. Coker and Potter and Greene of the Fifth were about to shove off, when a bunch of Remove fellows came down to the edge of the raft.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not heed Coker. They had had plenty of rows with Coker of the Fifth that term; but they did not want another that glorious afternoon. They wanted a pull up the river. Coker, however, gave heed to the Famous Five. Coker had a sense of humour that was all his own. He stood with an oar in his hands, shoving off the raft. Lifting it with both powerful hands, Coker brought it down on the Sark with a terrific smack. The splash that followed was more like a waterspout than a common-or-garden splash.

"Ooogh!" gasped five juniors together.

They were splashed from head to foot. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, who were nearest the water, got most of it. But Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh captured their share. And Billy Bunter, who was rolling

after the Famous Five, received some of the Sark in his fat face, and on his big spectacles, and sat down suddenly, roaring.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker.

"Ooogh! Oh!"

"I'm wet!"

"What the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Coker evidently was frightfully amused. He stood in his boat rocking with merriment, while Potter and Greene stared blankly. "Ha, ha, ha! Bit damp—what? Ha, ha, ha!"

"You blithering idiot!" bawled Bob Cherry, gouging water from his eyes. "You dangerous maniac!"

"You terrific fathead!" howled

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You piffing chump!" shrieked Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "You fags splashed me on the river the other day! Now you've got some! Like it? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jump on him!" roared Bob.

"Oh, jump!" chortled Coker. "Jump away! Ha, ha, ha!"

The boat was floating out into the river; Coker was already ten or twelve feet off. The exasperated juniors lined the edge of the raft. Had Coker been a little nearer they would have jumped, and taken signal vengeance on the humorous Horace on the spot. But Coker was too far, and he was floating farther. He grinned back at them as they glared.

"Jump!" roared Coker. "Do! Ha, ha, ha!"

But the juniors did not jump. They did not want a dip in the river. They shook their fists at Coker instead.

Chuckling, Horace Coker sat down, and put out his ears. He grinned at his friends—Potter and Greene.

"Funny—what?" he chuckled.

"Was it funny?" asked Potter.

"Your idea of fun?" inquired Greene.

"Oh, don't be a pair of silly asses!" said Coker crossly. "Don't be a pair of carping fatheads! Shut up, if you can't talk sense!" And Horace Coker, with a snort, started to pull up the river.

On the raft Harry Wharton & Co. squeezed water from their flannels, and breathed wrath. Billy Bunter staggered to his feet, and took off his big spectacles and wiped them, and jammed them again on his fat, little nose.

"I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter, "I'm wet!"

"That's the water," explained Bob Cherry. "One thing about water—it's generally wet!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Cut in and change, Bunter!" suggested Frank Nugent.

"Will you fellows wait for me if I do?"

"No fear!"

"Beast!"

"It won't take long to get dry in this sun," said Harry Wharton. "But as for that blithering idiot, Coker—"

"That howling maniac, Coker—"

growled Johnny Bull.

"Get out the boat!" said Bob. "I've got my pea-shooter in my pocket. We'll give Coker a few."

"Good egg!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

The chums of the Remove pushed their boat out and jumped in. Billy

Bunter rolled after them. Bob Cherry dropped a little parcel in the stern seat. Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles fastened on it at once. It was not a large parcel. It was oblong, about ten inches by seven or eight, and a couple of inches thick. It was wrapped in paper; and might have been a box of preserved fruits, or a box of chocolates or toffees. It might even have been a book—a rather large and heavy book. That idea, however, did not cross Billy Bunter's fat mind. He did not suppose for a moment that any fellow in his seven senses could be ass enough to take something to read instead of something to eat.

"I'll take care of this, you fellows," said Bunter, picking it up and placing it on his fat knees as he sat down.

"Eh? Oh! All right!" said Bob carelessly.

Four oars were put out, and the juniors pulled up the gleaming Sark on the track of Coker & Co. Coker was rowing a pair; but four oars easily beat two, not to mention the fact that the Remove fellows could row, and Coker couldn't. The Remove boat shot past Coker, and the ineffable Horace gave them a grin as they passed, apparently still in enjoyment in his great joke.

His enjoyment was destined to be short-lived.

Wharton and Nugent, Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull pulled, and Bob Cherry kneeled in the stern seat beside Bunter, looking back as they passed Coker's craft. From one pocket he drew a pea-shooter, from another a handful of peas.

"Steady!" called out Bob.

Ahead of the Fifth Form craft the Removites slowed down, just within easy range. Then Bob Cherry proceeded to business.

The back of Horace Coker's bullet head was towards him, with a straw hat on it. On either side of that bullet head were Coker's extensive ears. Bob was a good shot with a pea-shooter, and the range was easy. Coker gave a sudden, convulsive jump as something stung his right ear.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Was that a wasp? Ow!"

Potter and Greene, in the stern of the senior boat, were, of course, facing Bob, so they were able to watch his proceedings. They grinned.

"Wow!" roared Coker, as something stung his left ear.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Potter and Greene.

"What are you cackling at?" howled Coker. "Is there anything funny in being stung by wopses—I mean wasps? Wow-ow-ow!" he added, as another sharp sting came in the back of his neck.

Sting, sting, sting! came those mysterious wasps, peppering Coker all over his neck and his big ears. Coker dragged in his oars, and pitched them into the boat, and waved his hands wildly round his head. The boat rocked as wildly as Coker waved, and looked like shipping water. Potter and Greene ceased to laugh, and held on.

"It isn't wasps!" gasped the bewildered Coker. "It's something—what the thump is it? I keep on getting stung! It can't be gnats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the Remove boat.

Coker spun round. Whizzing peas landed in his red and wrathful face as he did so. Shot after shot caught Coker.

"It—it—it's that young scoundrel Cherry, with a pip-pip-pea-shooter!" stuttered Coker. "Why, I'll— Ooogh!

Smash him! I'll— Yarrooh! Spifficate him! I'll— Oh crikey! Oh crumbs! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's the lot, Coker, old bean!" yelled Bob. "I wish I had a few more!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker shook an infuriated fist, grabbed his oars again, and rowed frantically after the Remove boat. Potter and Greene howled. When Coker rowed with energy, as he was doing now, he had rather a perturbing effect on the river. Lots of it flew into the air. Plenty of it splashed over Coker's unfortunate friends.

"Look out!" yelled Potter. "Don't soak us!"

"Shut up, Potter!"

"Don't drown us!" yelled Greene.

"Shut up, Greene!"

Heedless of remonstrance, Horace Coker rowed and rowed, catching crabs without number, and marking his way up the Sark with a series of water-spouts. And Bob Cherry's ammunition being expended, the Remove fellows bent to their oars, and shot away—vanishing up the river, and leaving Coker of the Fifth splashing strenuously and frantically far astern.

SENSATIONAL JEWEL ROBBERY

IN COURTFIELD!

SMASH-AND-GRAB RAIDER HIDES PLUNDER

—and the only clue to its whereabouts is in a "Holiday Annual" belonging to Bob Cherry, of the Greyfriars Remove!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Smash-and-Grab!

"IT is hot!" said Mr. Prout.

"It is warm!" admitted Mr. Quelch.

"Hot, my dear Quelch, very hot!" said Prout.

While Greyfriars fellows were disporting themselves on the river, or on the cricket field, Quelch and Prout were taking a walk.

Quelch, the master of the Remove, was a rather bony gentleman, and a good walker. Prout, master of the Fifth, was a plump, not to say podgy, gentleman, and a very slow and laborious walker. Having walked into Courtfield, Quelch was prepared to walk on through the High Street, and cover miles and miles beyond.

Prout, on the other hand, had a feeling as if he had started melting in the sun-blaze, and he slowed and slowed, more and more, until at last he came to a halt.

Outside Mr. Lazarus' shop in Courtfield there was a sun-awning, and Mr. Prout found its shade grateful and comforting.

He stopped, lifted his hat, and wiped his plump brow. Quelch stopped also, suppressing his impatience. When Quelch went for a walk he wanted to walk. Now he had to stand still and watch Prout's performance.

Had Prout halted outside the bookshop it would not have been so bad. Quelch could have looked at the books. But there was nothing in Mr. Lazarus'

window to interest him. Watches and rings, necklaces and bracelets had no interest whatever for Mr. Quelch.

"Very hot indeed!" said Prout, mopping.

"Shall we proceed?" asked Quelch.

"One moment, my dear sir—one moment," said Prout, still mopping.

"There is, after all, no hurry! A leisurely peregrination, my dear Quelch—"

Quelch resigned himself to his fate.

Prout mopped and mopped.

There is nothing, really, of a comic nature in a stout, middle-aged gentleman with his hat in one hand, a handkerchief in the other, mopping a perspiring brow on a warm summer's afternoon. There was no reason, therefore, why three fellows who came sauntering along should grin and wink at one another in an impertinent manner.

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson, of Highcliffe School, were impertinent young rascals by nature, however. Likewise, they disliked Greyfriars and all its works! They generally had the worst of their encounters with Harry Wharton & Co. which, naturally, did not please them.

"Guying" a Greyfriars master seemed rather amusing to them. So they slackened pace as they came by, stared at Prout, and grinned and winked.

Quelch frowned at them.

Had they belonged to Greyfriars he would have ordered them back to the school at once, with impositions to keep them busy. As they belonged to Highcliffe, he could do nothing but frown. His frown was portentous; but it produced absolutely no effect on Pon & Co.

"Did you fellows see in the papers that a walrus had escaped from a menagerie?" asked Pon. "Fancy spottin' it in the High Street!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gadsby and Monson.

The three halted at a little distance from the two masters. Prout, busy mopping, did not heed them. Quelch heeded them. It would never have occurred to the majestic Prout that Pon was comparing him to a walrus. Quelch was aware of it.

"Kindly go on your way!" rapped Quelch sharply.

Pon looked at him.

"Excuse me, sir!" he said politely. "May I ask whether you have been appointed a master at Highcliffe?"

"Eh! What! No! Certainly not!"

"Then would you mind waitin' till that happens before you give orders to Highcliffe men?" further inquired Ponsonby.

Gadsby and Monson chuckled, and Mr. Quelch breathed hard and deep. He had a walking-stick hooked over his arm, and he felt strongly tempted to unhook it and give the cheery Pon the benefit of it.

"It's jolly warm this afternoon," went on Pon to his companions. "Walruses feel the heat in this climate, I fancy! What?"

"Looks like it!" grinned Gadsby.

"But is it a walrus?" continued the merry Pon, gazing directly at Mr. Prout. "Judgin' by appearances, it's a walrus standin' on its hind legs! What do you fellows think?"

"Elephant, in my opinion!" said Monson.

"Buffalo!" said Gadsby.

Prout, still majestically unconscious that he was being compared to these animals, mopped and mopped.

Quelch's face reddened and reddened.

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He unhooked the stick off his arm and took a grasp on it.

"Will you boys go on your way?" asked Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice.

"Can't we stop and look in a jeweller's window, sir?" asked Pon. "Or perhaps you've bought Courtfield High Street, sir, and it belongs to you? If we're trespassing, of course we'll go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gadsby and Monson.

Pon was really in a bright vein this afternoon.

Obviously, Quelch had no right to order them off, and they had a right to stand there discussing matters of natural history if they liked. But Quelch, by this time, was too irritated to consider the rights of the matter. He made a stride towards the happy Pon, swung round his walking-stick, and landed it on the legs of Pon's elegant trousers. Whereupon Pon's merry playfulness left him all of a sudden, and he hopped and yelled.

"What—what?" Prout, startled, left off mopping, and stared round. "What is the matter? What? My dear Quelch—what?"

"Now go!" rapped Quelch, glaring at the Highcliffians.

"You cheeky old ass!" yelled Ponsonby. Swipe!

Another lick from the walking-stick caused Pon to jump away in a great hurry. Gadsby and Monson retreated with equal promptness. They stopped, out of reach of the walking-stick, glaring at Mr. Quelch.

Pon stooped to pick up a stone, with the intention of flinging it, but his comrades grabbed him by either arm. Pon's temper was always liable to carry him a little too far.

Chug, chug, chug!

A motor-bike came chugging up the street. It slowed down outside Mr. Lazarus' shop. Pon & Co., engaged in angry dispute, did not heed it. Prout, mopping his brow, did not heed it. And Quelch, irritated and anxious to restart after the interval, did not heed it, either.

The motor-cyclist, unrecognisable in cap and goggles, brought his machine to a halt. There was a man sitting behind him, a rather slight man, in a check suit, with a large check cap pulled down low over his forehead, and the lower half of his face nearly hidden by an enormous sandy moustache.

He dropped from his seat to the pavement. There was a small leather bag slung over his shoulder by a strap, such as might have been used to carry a flask; but it was open and empty. He stood on the edge of the pavement for a few moments, and then, with a hand in his pocket, started across to the jewellery window.

He stood at that window, looking through the plate-glass, while his companion remained with the motor-bike. Certainly it never occurred to the Greyfriars Form masters, or to the three Highcliffe juniors, that they were about to witness one of the daring daylight raids of which they had read in the newspapers.

The man in the check suit, with his hand in his pocket, scanned the jewellery set out in the window, and also watched the reflection in the window of the people on the pavement. None of them regarded him. His hand came suddenly out of his pocket, with a chunk of lead in it.

Crash! Smash!

Plate-glass shivered and split, and scattered in fragments, as the lump of lead was dashed through the pane. In

an instant the man in the check suit was grabbing up handfuls of watches and rings and other articles, and cramming them into the bag at his side.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Prout.

He stared. Quelch stared. Pon & Co. stared. People up and down the street stared. But the man in the check suit was rapid. Handfuls of valuable things were crammed into the bag in a few seconds. He turned, raced back across the pavement, and jumped on the pillion. The driver was ready—the motor-bike roared off.

Prout gazed dumbfounded. Pon & Co. stared blankly. But Mr. Quelch was a man of action. He had been as utterly surprised as the others. But he had presence of mind. His walking-stick was in his hand. He leaped towards the motor-bike as it started, and hooked at the thief on the pillion with the crooked handle of the stick.

The motor-bike shot away up the street, and, behind it, the thief landed on his back on the ground, with the crook of the stick hooking his arm.

He sprawled and spluttered.

Never had he been so taken by surprise in his life. The thing had seemed absolutely safe: the softest thing in his career. Nobody at hand but a few schoolboys, and two elderly gentlemen who looked like schoolmasters: only a few people in the drowsy street of the country town! The motor-bike was roaring away at a wild speed, the man in front not even aware yet that his confederate had dropped off behind. He was thinking only of getting out of the town and into the open country road beyond; the motor-bike fairly whizzed. But for Henry Samuel Quelch's prompt action, there was not the slightest doubt that the pair of rascals would have escaped with their booty.

As it was, the motor-bike roared away and vanished up the High Street, leaving Micky the Sprat on his back in the dust.

He sat up, gurgling.

"Great pip!" gasped Gadsby.

"A—a—a daylight raid!" stuttered Monson. "Here, keep clear! The brute may have a gun or something."

"Keep clear!" gasped Ponsonby.

"Safety first" was the motto of the Highcliffians. They might have rushed on the sprawling man and secured him before he could rise. Instead of which, they backed promptly away.

Only Mr. Quelch rushed at him. Prout would have done so, no doubt, but he was so astonished that he could only stand and stare, almost gibbering in his amazement.

"Help!" shouted Quelch, and he rushed.

The man in the check suit scrambled up as the master of the Remove Form at Greyfriars reached him. He sprang back, and Mr. Quelch, clutching at him, missed him, but caught the big sandy moustache in his clutching fingers. It came off in his grasp, revealing a thin-lipped, close-shaven mouth. It was a startling surprise for Quelch, who, of course, was not accustomed to the manners and customs of daylight raiders. He staggered back with the moustache in his hand, staring at it blankly.

It was only a moment, but it was enough for the raider. He turned and bounded away. Micky the Sprat was used to acting promptly.

Pon & Co. had no intention whatever of trying to stop him. But they happened to be in his way. Without pausing, he knocked them right and left. Pon yelled and sprawled under a terrific clout. Gadsby and Monson sprawled over him, howling. The

desperate man trampled over them and ran.

The motor-bike was out of sight. The street was in an uproar—people running and shouting, popping out of houses and shops—a constable racing along from the police station. If the man on the bike had turned back to pick up his accomplice, he could never have succeeded—but probably he did not even think of trying. In that line of business, it was every man for himself! The motor-bike roared out of Courtfield, leaving the man in the check suit to his fate.

He seemed fairly well able to take care of himself! He raced down the street, and Mr. Quelch, running valiantly in pursuit, was left hopelessly behind. He ran for the nearest corner, and as he turned it, an errand-boy came round with a basket on his arm. There was a crash, and the boy yelled and sat down amid scattered groceries, and the raider reeled and almost fell. A butcher jumped out of the shop at the corner and caught him by the collar. He turned like a tiger, and the butcher sat down, hardly knowing what had hit him. Then the man in the check suit, with the bag of stolen jewellery swinging at his side on the strap, ran down the side street like a deer. After him poured a mob in pursuit.

The side street led into a lane, the lane to Courtfield Common. Evidently the desperate rascal was making for the open common and the woods along the river. He ran with frantic speed. His cap flew off, revealing a close-cropped head—but he did not stop for it. Hatless, in the blazing sun, he ran and bounded on, and reached the common, thick with golden gorse, with a roaring mob behind him.

"Bless my soul!" Prout, comprehending at last what had happened, caught Quelch by the arm. "A—a—a robbery—in broad daylight! Bless my soul!"

Mr. Lazarus emerged from his shop and stood staring at his smashed window.

"My cootness!" said Mr. Lazarus. "Oh, my cootness! Vat a loth, if my tltock was not insured! My cootness!"

"Quelch, let us follow—pursue that rascal!" exclaimed Prout.

"We have not even the remotest chance of getting anywhere near him, Prout," answered the Remove master calmly. "Let us continue our walk."

And they continued it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Man on the Island!

"CHANCE it!" said Bob Cherry. "Um!" said Harry Wharton doubtfully.

"I say, you fellows—" "Shut up, Bunter! Look here, blow old Popper!" said Bob. "We're jolly well going to land on the jolly old island—see? Old Popper's away now, anyhow—and his keepers don't care a bean when the old scout's eye isn't on them."

"Something in that!" agreed Nugent. "Let's!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, all right!" said the captain of the Remove. "Any old thing!"

Popper's Island, a mass of green in the middle of the shining Sark, looked very inviting. After a long pull, and a strong pull, up the river, a rest in the shade of the trees on the island seemed grateful and comforting. The only drawback to that attractive little island was the fact that Sir Hilton Popper, of Popper Court, did not allow anybody to land on it—if he could help

it! For Sir Hilton Popper, of Popper Court, the cheery chums of the Remove did not care two straws, or one; but a report to the Head meant trouble. Still, as Sir Hilton was, at present, away from Popper Court, it seemed safe enough.

"Jolly little spot!" said Bob. "I've got my new Holiday Annual—we'll all read it together while we take a rest."

"Good egg!"

Lying in the shade of the trees in the leafy island, reading the Holiday Annual, seemed a splendid idea. Billy Bunter, however, did not agree. While the chums of the Remove rowed, and discussed the coming holidays while they rowed, the fat Owl of the Remove had not been quite idle. Surreptitiously,

"It's not all right!" said Bunter. "I dare say Dr. Locke is an old ass—all schoolmasters are, of course; Still, he's our headmaster! I'm not going to disobey my headmaster!"

"Wha-a-at?"

The Famous Five stared blankly at Bunter. This principle, enounced by the fat junior, was undoubtedly a good one. But it was rather a surprise, from Bunter. Bunter was not really a model youth. He was not one of those fellows who are a shining example to other fellows. He was very far indeed from that! Exemplary conduct from Billy Bunter was rather novel.

"You fat owl!" said Bob Cherry. "There's no risk! Nothing to be afraid of, you flabby funk!"

captain of the Remove, and he hesitated.

"Blessed if I expected to hear this from Bunter," he said. "But, as a matter of fact, you men, he's right. Let's give it a miss."

"Rats!" growled Johnny Bull. "The fat villain's trying to pull our leg. Let's land on the island. Where's the harm?"

"The harmfulness is not preposterous."

"Well, yes," said Harry. "But—"

"Oh, let's!" said Bob. "Besides, if we land on the island we get shut of Bunter. That's worth something."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, all right, then!" The captain



"Wow!" roared Coker, as something stung his left ear. "I keep on getting stung! It can't be gnats—it isn't——"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the Remove boat. Coker spun round. Whizzing peas landed in his red and wrathful face as he did so. "Why—it—it's that young scoundrel Cherry, with a pip-pip-pea-shooter!" he stuttered. "I'll—oogh—smash him! Oh, crumbs! Wow!"

and with infinite care and cunning, Billy Bunter had annexed Bob's little parcel and slipped it under his jacket.

Whatever it contained, whether chocolates, or toffees, or preserved fruits, all was grist that came to Bunter's mill. Obviously, there was not enough in that parcel for six fellows—hardly a bit each all round. There was quite a nice little feed for one—if the one could get away with it!

That important matter now occupied Billy Bunter's fat thoughts. In matters of tuck, William George Bunter was absolutely unscrupulous. Fisher T. Fish, of the Remove, was not more unscrupulous in the pursuit of money than was Billy Bunter in the pursuit of tuck!

"I say, you fellows, that won't do!" said Bunter, shaking his head. "Popper's Island is out of bounds."

"That's all right, fathead!" said Bob.

"That's not what I'm thinking of," said Bunter, with dignity. "I hope I've got as much pluck as most fellows here, and chance it. Pluck's my long suit, as you fellows know."

"Oh, my hat! Is that why you bolted when young Tubb of the Third got after you yesterday?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Look here, you fellows, if you're going out of bounds, I'm not in it. It's the principle of the thing," explained Bunter. "I'm not going to treat my headmaster with disrespect. That's what it comes to. If you're going to land on Popper's Island, put me ashore first."

"Jolly glad to!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The gladfulness will be terrific!" concurred Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton stared at the fat Owl. Meticulous respect for the commands of the headmaster was something new in Bunter; but it was not so new to the

of the Remove yielded the point. "Chuck Bunter out, and let's get on."

The boat pulled in to the bank to land Billy Bunter—and his newly awakened conscience. It wedged into the rushes by the towpath, and Bob Cherry held on to a willow.

"Hop it, fathead!" he grunted.

Billy Bunter rose to his feet with some difficulty. The parcel concealed under his jacket was not very large, but it was a little difficult to negotiate. The chums of the Remove had no suspicion, so far, that Bunter had annexed it; but if they had spotted it about him, no doubt they would have comprehended, on the spot, Bunter's sudden and surprising scruples about going out of school bounds.

"Buck up, fatty!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Taking great care not to let the parcel

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show, Billy Bunter scrambled ashore. The boat pushed off again, much to his relief. Billy Bunter stood grinning on the towpath with the prize under his jacket. But he did not stay there long to grin. As soon as they missed the parcel the Famous Five were very likely to get on his track, and Bunter did not want to be found—at least, until he had disposed of the contents of the parcel. He rolled away from the towpath, up one of the shady little paths that led into the woods along the river, and vanished from sight.

Not at all depressed by the loss of Billy Bunter's society, the chums of the Remove pushed off again, and pulled on towards the island in the river. They had nearly reached it when a man came running out of the wood on the towpath—a man in gaiters, evidently one of Sir Hilton Popper's keepers. He stood staring up and down the bank.

"Hold on!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Better let that sportsman get clear before we land. No good asking for trouble. That's Joyce—old Popper's head keeper."

The keeper spotted the boat, came down to the margin of the Sark, and shouted:

"Hi!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" called back Bob cheerily. "Nice afternoon, old bean!"

"Have you seen a man?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"A man—along the river!"

"Plenty of men along the river," answered Bob, staring. "What the thump—"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Nugent. "Look!"

From the trees a police-constable in uniform emerged, after the gamekeeper.

"They're after somebody," said Harry.

Joyce shouted again.

"Have you seen a man—a man in a check suit? There's been a robbery at the jeweller's in Courtfield. He came through the woods—"

"Great pip! No, we've seen nothing of him!" answered Bob.

Joyce nodded and turned back to the constable, and they disappeared into the wood again together. The juniors looked at one another. On that sunny afternoon, which was a half-holiday to them, somebody had evidently been busy.

"A daylight robbery in Courtfield!" said Bob, with a whistle. "I wonder what jeweller it was? Old Lazarus, perhaps. Well, if we come across a man in a check suit, my beloved 'earers, we'll snaffle him and deliver him at Courtfield Police Station, this side up with care. And now those sportsmen have mizzled let's get on the jolly old island."

The juniors pulled on, and a few

minutes later the boat's bow was nosing into the rushes of the island. They pulled it under the willows, tied the painter, and jumped ashore. Bob Cherry lingered behind the others, staring up and down the boat.

"Where's my Holiday Annual?" he exclaimed.

"Did you bring it?" asked Nugent.

"Yes, ass! I hadn't even unwrapped it. It was wrapped up just as it was delivered from the newsagent's. Where the thump has it got to? That fat idiot Bunter picked it up, I remember. Where did he put it?"

The juniors scanned the interior of the boat. There was no sign to be seen of a parcel containing the latest Holiday Annual. Obviously it was not in the boat.

"Where the thump—" exclaimed Bob, in exasperation. "That fat chump can't have marched off with it, can he?"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, fathead?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the captain of the Remove. "That's why Bunter didn't want to land on the island. That's why his jolly old conscience was so tender! He wanted an excuse for getting out of the boat. He's got it!"

"What the dickens would he want my Holiday Annual for, ass? He could have read it along with us if he'd wanted to."

"Ha, ha, ha! I fancy he thought it was something else!" yelled Wharton. "Fellows don't usually carry books about wrapped up like parcels."

"It was just as it came from the newsagent's."

"Bunter didn't know that. I fancy he thought it was tuck!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

It was all clear now. Bunter's unaccustomed conscientious scruples were explained. He had wanted to get off with the parcel he had surreptitiously snaffled, and he had got off with it. And it was certain that he supposed that it contained tuck. Bunter would not have walked off with a book if he had known it. The juniors yelled. Even Bob Cherry joined in the yell at the thought of Bunter's face when he opened the parcel, expecting tuck, and found a Holiday Annual inside it. Billy Bunter could eat almost anything, but even Billy Bunter could not eat a "Holiday Annual."

"It's safe enough, old chap!" gasped Wharton. "Bunter won't eat it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll jolly well burst him!" said Bob. "Why, I haven't even looked at it yet, and I was going to read it here! Never mind, let's explore the jolly old island instead! We haven't been here for dog's ages! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Somebody's here already!"

He gave a jump at the sight of a startled face peering from the thickets. It vanished the next second, and there was a rustling sound which died away towards the centre of the island.

"My hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

The juniors exchanged startled glances. There was a man on the island, but no sign of a boat. A man who evidently was anxious to keep out of sight. And the same thought was in all their minds, as they remembered what Joyce, the keeper, had called out to them from the bank. They wondered whether the man on the island was the man in the check suit!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Desperate Measures!

MICKY THE SPRAT gritted his teeth with rage as he crouched close to the trunk of the big hollow oak in the middle of Popper's Island.

The "smash-and-grab" merchant was soaked to the skin, hatless, water dripping from his tousled hair. Perspiration mingled in streams with the water that ran down his face. Among the gorse on Courtfield Common he had dodged and escaped the pursuit, but it was still on his trail when he ran down the towpath by the Sark, out of sight. He could hear the roar of many voices.

His desperate thoughts had turned on swimming the river, but it was wide—too wide for him. Capture was better than drowning. And then he had spotted Popper's Island as he ran, and plunged in and swum across to it. There he had a breathing space, and from the thickets he watched the bank of the river and the green, shady woods like a hunted hare. And then, to crown his ill-luck for the day, the boat pushed in under the willows, and a party of schoolboys landed.

Micky the Sprat retreated through the thickets to the centre of the little island, panting, desperate, enraged. He heard Bob Cherry's shout, and knew that he had been spotted. And if they knew that there had been a smash-and-grab raid in Courtfield, the game was up. A shout from the island would bring the police, keepers, and various members of the public, who were beating the woods for him.

Crouching under the big oak, he listened. He heard the rustling in the thickets as the schoolboys came pushing their way through. He caught their voices.

"I jolly well saw him, you men! Somebody's here!"

"He doesn't want to be seen."

"He's jolly well going to be! Let's root him out!"

"What-ho!"

Micky gritted his teeth. He had already observed that the great oak in the middle of the island was hollow, large enough to hide a man inside. He squeezed himself into the opening of the big trunk, where it was split. It was a squeeze getting in; but inside there was more room. The interior of the ancient oak was mouldering and crumbling.

Hidden in the oak the hunted man crouched and panted. If the schoolboys missed him, and gave it up, he had a chance yet. If they did not know—

But he was soon aware that they knew! He heard their footsteps as they came into the open space round the great oak. Again their voices reached his ears.

"Not here!" said Frank Nugent.

"Hiding!" said Johnny Bull.

"That makes it pretty certain, I think," said Harry Wharton. "Ten to one it's the man Joyce called to us about—the daylight raider! He's hiding on Popper's Island."

"Must have swum!" said Nugent. "Look here, if he's a man in a check suit, as Joyce described him, and if he's wet, that will make it pretty certain. We've only got to look at him, and if he's the man we're bound to collar him and call the police here."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"May have his plunder on him," said Johnny Bull. "We can't possibly let him get away, if he's the man! If it's only some jolly old trespasser we shall soon see—it won't hurt him to take a squint at him."

FREE FOR YOU!

Don't forget, all you "Magnetites" who are going to the seaside this summer, that Messrs. Cadbury Bros., of Bournville, are contributing bars of Dairy Milk Chocolate for the consumption of readers buying their MAGNET from beach sellers, kiosks, and other such places at most of our popular seaside resorts. In addition to this, Cadbury Bros. are contributing pound boxes of their delicious assorted chocolates as prizes at our Concert Party, Cinema, and Gals Competitions. Be sure, then, and watch out for the MAGNET representatives when you are at the seaside this summer.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1331.

"But where the dickens is he? Up a tree? Look round!"

Micky the Sprat, out of sight for the moment in the hollow tree, breathed hard. Discovery was only a matter of minutes now. The game was up! All through that hatchet-faced schoolmaster hooking him with his walking-stick! He had no chance in a struggle with five sturdy fellows—even if they did not call for help—and there was plenty of help along the bank. The game was up!

But savagely enraged as the rascal was, he was cool. There was little chance of saving his liberty; but there was a chance of saving his plunder. To hide it, and to get word somehow to his confederate to find it before the police found it—that was the idea that was working now in the raider's active brain. And he could not have found a better spot than the one where he now crouched.

The hollow in the tree was thick with rubbish, that crumpled under his feet. He detached the leather bag, stooped, and grabbed with his hands in the loose earth and dust and mouldering wood. The bag was crammed out of sight, the rubbish covered over it, and he stamped it down. Then he rose upright again and listened. He could hear the schoolboys rooting among the thickets round the glade. Footsteps came towards the gap in the trunk of the great oak. Suddenly a face appeared before him not three feet from his own.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Here he is!"

"Oh, my hat! In the hollow oak!"

There was a rush to the spot. Five fellows stared at the desperate face glaring out of the hollow tree. Micky the Sprat pulled himself together.

"Lend me a hand out of this," he said. "I've got in, and I can't get out."

"It's rather a squeeze!" grinned Bob Cherry. "May a fellow ask what you got in for?"

"I'm trespassing here—I thought it was keepers!" said the man quite coolly. "I thought I'd get out of sight! If I'd known it was only schoolboys—"

"Oh!" said Bob.

Micky the Sprat squeezed out of the hollow trunk. Bob gave him a helping hand and pulled him out. His cool manner rather perplexed them; but as they saw that he was dressed in a check suit, and wet from head to foot, they could hardly doubt that he was the man of whom the keepers and the police were in chase. They gathered round him, not touching him, but taking excellent care that he did not bolt.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Micky coolly. "You're not the owners of this island, I suppose?"

"Hardly," said Harry Wharton. "But we've been tipped that a man in a check suit is running from the police, somewhere along the river. There's not much doubt that you're the man. You don't go for a swim with your clothes on for amusement, I suppose?"

"You've got a boat?" asked the man.

"Eh? Yes!"

"Take me to the bank on it, then, and call the police—if they want me, here I am."

Again the rascal's cool self-possession puzzled the juniors. It was almost impossible that they could be making a mistake; but certainly they did not want to use rough measures with a man who, by the barest possibility, was only a trespasser on Popper's Island—as in fact they were themselves.

"You're willing to come with us?" asked Harry.

"Why not? I'll give you a shilling to land me on the bank."

(Continued on next page.)

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Harry Wharton laughed. "Never mind the shilling," he said. "We'll take you in the boat and land you on the bank—rather! But I may as well tell you plainly that you won't be allowed to go till a policeman has seen you."

"I don't mind! You boys seem to be making some silly mistake—but if you take me for somebody else, no harm done."

"Oh, all right, then!"

And gathering round the self-possessed rascal, the chums of Greyfriars walked him down to the boat. On the opposite bank there was no one to be seen—the police and keepers were in the wood. Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stepped into the boat, after them stepped the man in the check suit, and Wharton untied the painter.

Up to that moment the man had been quiet, apparently unconcerned. But the Greyfriars schoolboys hardly realised the kind of man they were dealing with. All of a sudden Micky the Sprat woke to action. He dropped into the stern seat as if intending to sit there—to be rowed to the bank—and the next instant he had clutched up an oar and was swinging it round his head.

Before they knew what was happening Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh were knocked over the gunwale, splashing headlong into the shallow water under the willows. Nugent and Johnny Bull, who were stepping into the boat, jumped back barely in time as the oar crashed at them, stumbled on the grass, and sat down. Harry Wharton had the painter in his hand—and the oar lunged at him, landing on his chest and knocking him over. The rope slipped from his fingers, the oar crashed on the willows, driving the boat off, and it rocked away into the Sark, Micky the Sprat immediately seizing a second oar and starting to row—leaving Harry Wharton & Co. scrambling to their feet, panting, and stranded on Popper's Island!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Coker's Catch!

HORACE COKER looked perplexed.

"That's the boat!" he said.

"Looks like it!" agreed

Potter.

"It doesn't merely look like it, Potter—it is!" said Coker, in the dictatorial, positive way that did not endear him to his chums. "Use your eyes."

There was, in fact, no doubt that it was the Remove boat. It was rather a roomy old boat, which all the fellows knew by sight; it was painted, and they knew the colour; and the name was painted on it, which left no doubt whatever on the subject. But instead of five juniors in the boat, or six, there was one man, hatless, rowing like mad, as Coker expressed it, down the river with the current. Which was rather perplexing.

Coker, pulling up the river after the Remove fellows, had been keeping an eye open for that boat. Potter and Greene, facing up river in the stern seat, saw it before Coker did, and rather wondered, after recognising the boat, to see the hatless man in checks pulling it instead of the Remove crew. Coker, every now and then, stared round over his shoulders as he pulled, at the risk of brainishing Potter and Greene with the oars, which sometimes missed not only the water, but actually the rowlocks. Now, spotting the Remove boat, rowed by the hatless man, Coker ceased to pull, to splash, and to catch crabs and

dig up water-spouts, which was rather a relief to his friends. He sat and stared at the hatless man.

Horace Coker was anxious to meet the Remove fellows, in order to impress on them, forcibly and drastically, that Fifth Form men should not be potted with pea-shooters. That was why he was watching so sharply for the boat. But seeing the boat in strange hands, Coker forgot his hostile intentions. Cheeky as the Remove kids were, deeply as they merited severe handling at Coker's hands, Horace was not the man to see their boat stolen.

The man in the check suit was coming down the river with good speed, assisted by the current. He pulled a pair of oars with strength and skill. Obviously he was in hot haste—literally hot, for his face blazed and perspired in the summer sun. He was already over half a mile from Popper's Island when Coker spotted him, and still going strong. New hope of escape had leaped up in the heart of Micky the Sprat. All the chances had been against him, yet he had succeeded in stranding the schoolboys on the island and getting off with their boat.

To get to a safe distance and land on the opposite side of the river was his idea—but for the moment he was thinking chiefly of putting more and more distance between himself and pursuit.

His legs ached with fatigue, after long and desperate running; but his arms were strong, and the longer he could flee sitting down the better it was for him. He rowed hard and fast, making the boat fly, though it was rather a heavy craft, and when he noted Coker & Co. ahead he took no heed of them, except to steer clear with the oars.

Naturally, Micky the Sprat was totally unaware that Coker knew the boat, and was actually looking for it on the river. He knew nothing of Greyfriars School, or of the circumstance that the schoolboys on the island and the three fellows ahead of him belonged to that school. So he was far from expecting what happened next.

"That's the boat!" said Coker positively. "That blighter's pinched it, of course! Looks as if he's in a hurry. No wonder! Too big a hurry to stop for his hat—what!"

"I suppose he's pinched it," assented Greene. "They must have left it tied up somewhere, and that sportsman came along and hopped in."

"Well, he's not pinching a Greyfriars boat if I can stop him!" said Coker. "Steer for him, Potter."

Coker put out the oars again and pulled. Potter drew on the line, and the Greyfriars boat surged across in the way of the boat coming downstream. The hatless man swerved away to avoid a collision and shouted.

"Here, keep clear!"

Instead of keeping clear, Coker pulled on. Potter steering direct for him. The man in the check suit swerved again, going quite close to the rushes by the towpath. Coker's gunwale scraped the nose of his boat.

"You clumsy fool!" yelled the hatless man.

He backed water, and pulled again to get outside the Fifth Form boat. It had not yet dawned on him that it was capture that was intended; he did not guess that the three senior schoolboys in the other boat were after him. But he guessed it as Greene reached over and hooked with a boathook, bringing the two craft surging together. Horace Coker jumped up, and before Micky the Sprat knew what he was doing jumped from one boat to the other.

Of course, he stumbled and sprawled.

It would not have been Coker of the Fifth if he hadn't! He rolled in the Remove boat, which rocked wildly. Greene held on with the boathook; Potter got hold of the gunwale with his hand. Coker sat up rather dizzily.

The smash-and-grab merchant glared at him, jumped at him, and grasped him. He understood now that the three were trying to collar him, supposing that news of him had gone down the river already and that they were on the lookout for the robber of Courtfield.

His only thought was to fling Coker out of the boat, pull for the opposite bank, and land, and trust to luck there. But Coker was not so easily flung out of the boat. He gave grasp for grasp, and they rolled over in the bottom of the Remove boat, and it rocked and shipped water, drenching them both to the skin.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Potter. "Here, lend a hand, Greeney!"

Potter plunged into the Remove boat to help. Greene, holding the gunwale with one hand, reached over with the boathook in the other, and jabbed at the man in the check suit.

Unfortunately, a change of position as the combatants rolled over brought Coker in front of the jabbing boathook, and Coker got the benefit of it.

There was a fearful yell from Horace. "Yarcooh!"

"Oh crickey!" gasped Greene.

Coker seemed hurt. He let go the hatless man, roaring. Micky the Sprat scrambled up to his knees. Potter was in the rocking boat now, which was surging against the rushes below the towpath. From the direction of the school boathouse five or six fellows, who had witnessed the startling scene from a distance, were running up the bank—at the head of them Wingate of the Sixth Form.

"Look here, you've pinched this boat, you rascal!" panted Potter. "Get out of it! See!"

Micky the Sprat glared at him, at Coker—who was struggling up—and at the fellows running up the towpath. To his mind, there seemed no doubt that news of him and his escape had gone down the river, and that he was watched for on the lower reaches.

Coker scrambled breathlessly up. "Hold him!" he panted. "Collar him! He's not getting away, you ass! Get hold of him—"

Micky the Sprat shut his teeth hard. He had no chance of getting across the river in the boat with Coker and Potter on board and Greene holding on to the gunwale. Even if he could have got the upper hand in a tussle, the fellows running up the towpath would have reached him before it was over. He acted swiftly. Even as Coker grasped at him he made a flying leap out of the boat and went crashing into the rushes under the towpath.

"After him!" roared Coker.

But the force of Micky's leap as he went sent the boat rocking farther out into the river. Coker grasped an oar, while Potter, losing his footing, sat down on a thwart with a bump and a gasp.

The fugitive scrambled up through the rushes and gained the towpath. He gave one savage glare at the approaching Greyfriars fellows on the bank, and turned and raced away up the river—the direction from which he had come. He ran like a hare and vanished on the winding path.

Wingate of the Sixth could have run him down fast enough, but he stopped as he came abreast of the rocking boats.

"Here, what's this row, Greeney?" he called out.



The raider raced down the street, and Mr. Quelch, running valiantly in pursuit, was left hopelessly behind. The man ran for the nearest corner; and as he turned it, an errand boy came round with a basket on his arm. There was a crash, and the boy yelled as he was sent toppling backwards, his groceries scattering in all directions!

"Man pinched a school boat!" gasped Greene. "We've got it back! Oh crumbs! I'm splashed all over!"

"That's young Wharton's boat," said the captain of Greyfriars, looking at it. "Have the young asses let a tramp pinch it? Lucky you spotted him!"

"You've let him get away, you silly asses!" hooted Coker.

"Oh, blow him!" gasped Potter. "He hasn't taken the boat with him, anyhow. Let him rip! I'm fearfully wet!"

"Well, he ought to have been run in for stealing a boat!" said Coker. "Still, we've got the boat!"

That was satisfactory, at least—they had certainly got the boat. The thief, running like a deer up the towpath, was out of sight, and nobody was disposed to enter into a foot-race in the blazing sun to pursue him. They had, so far, no knowledge of what had happened in Courtfield that afternoon, and supposed that the man was simply a rascal who had found an opportunity of "pinching" an unguarded boat along the river.

But Micky the Sprat, in the full belief that he was watched for down the Sark, ran like the wind, panting and gurgling for breath. He looked back several times, and could scarcely believe in his good luck when he saw no sign of pursuit. But he had no doubt that it was behind him, and he ran on—till suddenly he came to a halt at the sight of a figure in velveteens and gaiters ahead. It was one of the Popper Court keepers coming down the path, and he gave a shout at the sight of the hatless man.

Micky the Sprat, gritting his teeth, turned off the towpath and plunged into the wood. There was shouting behind him as he went. The chase was close once more.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Billy Bunter Makes an Agreeable Acquaintance!

"BEASTS!" Billy Bunter made that remark in tones of deep feeling.

It had often seemed to Billy Bunter that it was a beastly world, populated chiefly by beasts. But never had things seemed so absolutely beastly as they seemed now, as he gazed at the latest number of the "Holiday Annual."

In the full belief that that parcel contained tuck, Bunter had snaffled it and made his escape. Still in the belief that it contained tuck, and that the chums of the Remove would pursue him as soon as they discovered the loss, Billy Bunter had sought safety in distance.

Hot as it was that afternoon, the fat Owl of the Remove rolled on a good half-mile through the shady woods before he came to a halt. Half a furlong was a long walk for Bunter; half a mile fagged him out. His fat little legs ached and his fat face streamed with perspiration. He stopped at last, tired and damp and gasping.

Between the woods of Popper Court and the extensive grounds of the Three Fishers' Inn there was a narrow, shady lane, almost like a tunnel of green under thick, over-spreading foliage. In that shady spot Bunter sat down in the grass, with his back to the Three Fishers' fence, to rest and to devour his prey.

But alas for Bunter!

He cut the string, he unrolled the wrapping paper, and revealed—not preserved fruits in a box, not toffees, not chocolates—but nothing more or less than a book! Certainly it was a very nice book—a very attractive book—

quite a popular book. But it was not what Bunter wanted. It was quite new, if that was any advantage—not even unwrapped since it had been delivered from the newsagent's that day. Bunter would not have cared if it had been as old as the Iliad. It was no use to Bunter. He blinked at it and ejaculated in tones that fairly thrilled with wrath and indignation:

"Beasts!"

Certainly Harry Wharton & Co. had not known that the fat Owl intended to snaffle that book in the belief that it was eatable. But Bunter felt as if they had played a scurvy trick on him.

He had walked half a mile—and he had to walk a good deal more than a mile home, instead of going back in the boat—and for what? Only to discover that the parcel contained Bob Cherry's new Holiday Annual! Billy Bunter's feelings, really, could not have been expressed in words.

"Beasts!" he groaned.

He let the Holiday Annual fall into the grass, leaned back on the Three Fishers' fence, and groaned dismally. There was nothing to eat. All his trouble had been for nothing! And he was tired—awfully tired. For quite a long time, he leaned on the fence. He was disinclined to move—besides, there was nothing to move for. Tea-time was a long way off yet. Finally, however, it occurred to Bunter that, as he was landed with a beastly book instead of something to eat, he might as well read the book as there was nothing else to do.

So he picked up the volume, opened it, selected a place to begin, and propped it open on his fat knees and read. It helped him, at least, to forget his harrowing disappointment.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,331.

After all, there were worse things in existence than sitting in the grass, shaded from the sun, and reading a really interesting book! Billy Bunter settled down in a state of fat comfort.

His eyes and his spectacles being fixed on the book, he did not observe a man emerge from the trees and stare furtively up and down the narrow lane. It was a hatless man in a check suit that had been soaked in water, but had now nearly dried in the sun.

Micky the Sprat stared at the fat figure squatted by the fence, indifferently. He had never seen Bunter before, and did not bother about him now. He stood in the lane, breathing hard in gasps.

The game was up; he knew that. For the moment, there was no pursuit at hand; he had eluded it, winding in the woods. But it was still going on, and it was long hours yet to sunset. All along the river, all round the wood, there were police and keepers, and a crowd of people from Courtfield and the neighbourhood, taking part in the exciting hunt. The game really had been up, when that bony schoolmaster hooked him off the motor-bike in the High Street at Courtfield. All his proceeding since had been rather like the struggling of a bird in a net, or a rat in a trap.

He was so exhausted that he found it hard to put one foot before another; and he knew that sooner or later he would be spotted, and that when he was spotted, he was done for. He could not have run another quarter-mile, with a mad bull behind him.

His only solace was that he had parked the plunder from Mr. Lazarus' shop in a temporarily safe place.

But when he was caught empty-handed, they would search for that plunder, tracking every step of his flight till they found it.

It might take a few days, perhaps.

He had no doubt that his confederate, Skid Smith, had escaped on the motor-bike. He knew that he would have escaped with Skid, but for that schoolmaster and his walking-stick. If, somehow, he could have got word to Skid where to lift the plunder before the police found it! That was what the Sprat was thinking of, as he panted for breath and listened for the sound of pursuers.

But it seemed hopeless. By that time, Skid was at their temporary headquarters, the Black Bull, at Lantham. He would wait there till he heard for certain what had become of the Sprat. But even if he had chanced on someone who could, and would, act as a messenger, he could not trust what he had to say in writing. He had his own code for communicating with his confederates; but a note falling into the hands of the police would have been deciphered in the long run. And yet—

He fixed his eyes on the fat schoolboy, reading a book in the shade, and came quietly along towards Bunter. The fat junior glanced up when he was quite close at hand, and stared at him, blinking through his big spectacles.

Micky the Sprat gave him a nod and a smile. He was quite respectably dressed, and there was nothing about him to alarm Bunter. He dropped into the grass beside the fat junior with a casual air; and certainly a keener fellow than Bunter would never have guessed, from his looks and his manner, that he was a crook in incessant fear of hearing the footsteps of his pursuers.

"Hot day, sir!" said the Sprat, casually.

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"Very hot!" assented Bunter. "Lost your hat?"

"Eh? No! I never wear one hiking," said the Sprat affably. "Travel light, that's the idea—the less you carry the better."

"Oh, hiking," said Bunter. "Some fellows in my Form are going hiking these hols. They want me to go with them, but I'm not sure I shall! Too jolly tiring, I think."

"I'd have thought it would just suit a strong, healthy, athletic young gentleman like you, sir," said the Sprat.

Billy Bunter almost purred. He thought he had never met such an agreeable stranger before! This was the first time that anyone had spotted at a glance, that Billy Bunter was healthy and strong and athletic. Obviously a man of judgment!

"Well, I may take it on," said Bunter. "Wharton's awfully keen for me to join up! Still, I rather think I shall go home with Mauly, Lord Mauleverer, you know—a pal of mine at school!" Bunter explained. Swank was one of Billy Bunter's little weaknesses; and he liked to tell even a total stranger that he was pally with a lord.

How's this for a CLEVER GREYFRIARS LIMERICK?

There was a young fellow named
Coker,
Who thought he knew how to play
poker.
When playing one night,
Greene turned out the light,
Then changed Coker's ace for a
"joker."

Eric Scanlon, of 31, Harmsworth Street, Salford, 6, Lancs., has been awarded a Useful Leather Pocket Wallet for the above winning effort. Pile in with your efforts, chums, if you want to win one of these useful prizes!

"That's a jolly good book you got there, sir!" said Micky the Sprat. "I used to read it regular when I was younger. Mind if I look at it?"

Bunter cheerfully passed the Holiday Annual to him. The man in the check suit looked at the picture—with one eye on Bunter's fat and fatuous face. He was thinking hard. This fat schoolboy knew nothing of him, and suspected nothing. Obviously, he was a good deal of a fool! The men who were hunting the smash-and-grab raider would give no attention to a schoolboy with a Holiday Annual under his arm.

Was it a chance of getting word to Skid at the Black Bull?

A stump of pencil appeared in Micky's hand. He turned over the leaves of the Holiday Annual, as if interested in looking at the pictures.

Bunter did not mind. He was not awfully keen on reading, and the polite stranger was welcome to look at the book if he liked. Bunter, leaning back on the fence, did not see what the man was doing with the pencil—he did not see the pencil at all.

As a matter of fact, Micky the Sprat was putting a small cross here and there to certain words on different pages.

It was not likely that anyone looking casually into the Holiday Annual would particularly notice the little pencilled crosses; still less likely that he would turn to page after page, tracing mark after mark, and adding all the marked words together to form a sentence!

That was a mode of communication Micky the Sprat had often used before in his peculiar business dealings; a very safe mode.

"I say, done with my book?" asked Bunter at last.

Micky had finished, and the stump of pencil disappeared into his pocket.

"Here you are, sir!" he said.

He handed the volume back to Bunter. His keen eyes were on the fat face.

In that Holiday Annual, in the crook's secret code, there was now a clue to the plunder hidden in the hollow oak on Popper's Island. How to get that Holiday Annual into the hands of Skid Smith was now the question! No one was in sight—there was no sound in the deep, dusky woods. Pursuit, he knew, was closing in; but it was not at hand yet. Was it possible—could it be possible—to induce this fat, obtuse-looking schoolboy to take the volume to the Black Bull at Lantham?

That was the only chance of saving the loot hidden on Popper's Island, before it was found by the police.

"You happen to know Lantham, sir?" asked Micky, casually.

"Eh? Yes! It's only eight or nine miles from Greyfriars," answered Bunter.

"Ever pass the Black Bull there?"

"Lots of times!"

"I've got a friend staying there," said Micky. "He's got his little boy with him—a young George Smith!"

"Has he?" said Bunter indifferently.

"I was going to give him a look in," said Micky, "but I got a message—I got to get back to London. And he'll be waiting to see me. If you happened to be going Lantham way, sir, I dare say you'd drop him a word."

"I'm not!" said Bunter.

"And I'd like you to show him that book, sir, and say—from me, Alfred Parker—that that's the book he wants for young George. Young George would jest enjoy that book, he would!"

"But I'm not going anywhere near Lantham!" said Bunter calmly.

"I wonder, sir, whether you'd do a man a favour?"

Micky the Sprat was talking with really remarkable calmness and self-possession, considering that every moment he was dreading to hear the footsteps of the hunters closing in.

"I got to get on a train as soon as I've had a bit of a rest. If I could send a message to my friend Smith, it would save a lot of trouble. You've got time on your hands, I've no doubt."

Bunter blinked at him.

He had plenty of time on his hands on a half-holiday. But he had not the remotest idea of using up that time in making a railway journey to oblige a perfect stranger. He considered that it was a piece of the most astounding cheek for the man to ask him—as indeed it was!

"Of course, I wouldn't put you to any expense," went on the Sprat. "Railway tickets—first-class tickets—cost money! I dare say," he added, with an amiable grin, "that, being a schoolboy, you run through your pocket-money fast enough. I always did, as a boy! If a man had asked me to oblige him by taking a message to a friend, and offered a quid, and expenses over and above, I'd have jumped at it, I would, when I was a boy."

Billy Bunter sat up and took notice at that! If that was what the agreeable stranger had in his mind, Bunter was quite prepared to jump at it.

A first-class ticket to Lantham, and a pound to expend in refreshments, liquid and solid, at the Pagoda Teashop there, suited Bunter admirably.

The look on his fat face reassured the Sprat immediately. He had read Bunter's character aright in that fat face.

"Well, I've nothing special to do," said Bunter. "It's a half-holiday, you know! I wouldn't mind going."

"That's kind of you, sir," said Micky. "I'd hate to have old Smith hanging on there waiting for me, when I can't turn up."

Bunter blinked at him thoughtfully. "It's five bob, first-class return to Lantham," he remarked.

Two half-crowns and a pound note appeared in Micky's hand at once.

Billy Bunter's eyes glimmered behind his spectacles. The two coins and the note dropped into his hand. They disappeared into his pocket.

"I'll go," he said.

"You'll ask for Mr. Smith at the Black Bull, sir, and tell him Alfred Parker's sorry he can't come along. But, very special, sir, you'll show him

that book, and tell him, from me, to get one like it for young George." The Sprat was very earnest about that!

"Certainly," said Bunter. "I shall have to take it with me, if I go straight to Lantham."

"You won't forget that, sir? I'm very keen on young George getting one of those books; he'd enjoy it so much. You see, he's my nephew, sir!"

"I'll remember," said Bunter. "Look here! I may as well get off at once. I'm hungry—I mean, I shall just catch the train for Lantham from Courtfield if I go now!"

"Right you are, sir, and I'm very much obliged to you," said the Sprat.

"Not at all!" said Bunter affably.

He heaved himself to his feet, nodded very affably to the man in the check suit, and rolled away up the shady lane.

Micky the Sprat remained where he was, resting his weary, aching limbs, and breathing hard. His own ultimate chance of escape was remote—he had

little or no hope of that. But if that fat, silly schoolboy carried out his instructions, Skid Smith would know where to lift the plunder, before it was found, and the Sprat's share of it would be a nice little nest-egg waiting for him when he came out of the "stone jug."

He could not feel certain of success—he felt far from certain—but he had done all he could; and he felt a deep sense of relief as Bunter's fat figure disappeared up the lane, and there were still no pursuers in sight.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Pon Takes a Hand!

CECIL PONSONBY drew a deep breath.

"Oh, gad!" he murmured silently.

Standing hidden in the hawthorns, only a few yards from the man in the check suit, Pon stared at him through (Continued on next page.)



What "Umpire" doesn't know about cricket isn't worth knowing. If you are in doubt over any cricket problem

write and get his expert opinion. Address your queries to "UMPIRE," c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

WHEN I was a youngster there was a certain sweet shop at which I used to call with a request for a "pennyworth of all sorts." My post-bag in these times often reminds me of those days—I get a pennyworth of all sorts. Sometimes the problems are so weighty that I wonder how the postman manages to carry them up the stairs.

Occasionally I get one which cheers me up for days, and I hope you won't think my hat is getting too small if I quote one such which is just to hand. It is from a reader who lives at Hull, and this is what he says apropos of a chat I had with you previously on the bowling of leg breaks and off breaks:

"I have been holding the ball in a similar fashion to that which you describe, except that my thumb, instead of being close to the first finger, has been half-way round the ball. The result was that I was not getting the desired effect. On Saturday, however, I read your instructions, and carried them out. Result—five wickets for five runs!"

Now that sort of letter encourages me no end. Five for five is jolly good, and here's more power to the spinning fingers of my bowler friend! I do not complain because he isn't even satisfied with five for five. It is the desire to beat our previous best which makes better players of us all. Unfortunately, my friend "stumps" me with that old question of how to bowl a "shooter," so that he can get the opponents who raise their bats before the ball gets there. I have said before, and I have to say it again, that there is no known way of bowling a "shooter" at will. I am afraid a repetition of this statement will disappoint a reader at Great Bookham, which is in Surrey, but I can assure him that if he could learn to bowl a "shooter" at will the Surrey county committee would be very pleased to learn how he did it—and to offer him a place on the staff.

GOOD ALL-ROUNDERS!

WHO is the best all-rounder in first-class cricket? This is a question which seems to interest several of my readers. One cannot really be dogmatic in answering such a question, which must be no more than a matter of opinion. I am prepared to give my opinion for what it is worth, and back it up with evidence.

I consider the best all-rounder in cricket to-day is Walter Hammond, the Gloucestershire man. As a batsman he is, as everybody knows, right at the top of the tree, and I regard him as an all-rounder in the batting sense because his play is so adaptable. He is a natural free hitter, but he can play the waiting game when the situation demands it.

Hammond is also a most useful medium-pace bowler who has started England's attack before now with swervers with the new ball. In addition to this, he is one of the most brilliant fieldsmen we have. Although his brilliance is confined mostly to slip-fielding, I believe he would show himself equally proficient in any other position. There is one other qualification which Hammond possesses as an all-rounder: he is a very capable wicket-keeper, and has more than once "kept" in fine style when the regular stumper of his side has been hurt.

Now for the concrete evidence. In one game against Notts this season Hammond scored a century, caught four men out off other bowling, caught and bowled two himself, and got two others out. Even this, however, was not Hammond's best all-round effort. Playing for Gloucester against Surrey in 1928, he scored over a hundred runs in each innings. In the first Surrey innings he bowled one man and caught four out, and in the second innings he caught six. In the very next match Hammond took nine wickets in one innings, and caught out the other batsman, while he had six wickets in the

second innings. On top of those feats he scored eighty runs in one innings.

At his best, George Brown of Hampshire was another wonderful all-round cricketer, and like Hammond he added to his usefulness as a batsman and bowler by being a most capable wicket-keeper on occasions.

During the present season James Langridge, of Sussex, has definitely entered the lists as a fine batsman-bowler. L. N. Constantine, the West Indies man, is another fine all-rounder, and so are R. W. V. Robins and F. R. Brown. But I think at the present time Hammond takes first prize as an all-rounder.

LOB-BOWLING!

I EXPECT you have noticed that more than once during this cricket season J. C. Clay, the Glamorgan player, has bowled under-hands in county matches, and has even taken wickets with these "lob" deliveries. Doubtless this fact has led to a letter I have received asking me if it is worth while a bowler to cultivate under-hands. Actually there is no reason why lob-bowling should not be cultivated, and in county cricket a few years back there were two or three players—G. H. Simpson Hayward and D. L. A. Jephson, for instance—who never bowled anything else.

I am afraid, however, that it requires more courage than the majority of us possess to cultivate under-hands consistently. We start in our very early days with under-hand stuff, but as soon as we are old enough we all want to bowl in the man's way—that is over-arm. The lobs are considered to be "girl's stuff." And there it is. There is no other reason why a good lob-bowler should not continue bowling lobs until he grows up.

By the way, I have a law question on this head. Can a bowler change from over-hand to under-hand in the middle of an over? The reply is that he can do so provided he tells the batsman of his intention thus to change, and gives him the opportunity of taking fresh guard. The same reply covers the bowler bowling over the wicket or round the wicket: he can change from one side to the other in the course of an over, provided he acquaints the batsman with his intention to do so.

In reply to Michael, of Edinburgh, the ball does not become dead because a bail is blown off the wicket. If the bail or bails are blown off while the ball is in transit from the bowler to the wicket, and that ball hits the wicket, then the batsman is out.

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the openings of the thicket, and stared after Billy Bunter, rolling away up the narrow lane.

Pon's eyes gleamed with excitement.

The dandy of Highcliffe was alone now. Pon & Co. had been on their way to that delectable resort, the Three Fishers, when they encountered Prout and Quelch in Courtfield High Street, and the smash-and-grab raid at Mr. Lazarus' had occurred. All three of them had been rather roughly knocked about by the raider in his flight, and Gadsby and Monson had gone back to Highcliffe.

Pon, however, had not been disposed to give up his visit to the billiards-room at the Three Fishers; and, having set himself to rights after the scuffle, he had walked on his way. His way lay through the woods. Even the young rascal of Highcliffe did not care to be seen openly going to a resort like the Three Fishers, a place that had an exceedingly unsavoury reputation.

He had almost reached the lane that ran between Popper Court Woods and the high fence of the Three Fishers, when he sighted the man in the check suit in the lane, and stopped at once and hunted cover. Pon knew the man at once—it was the smash-and-grab raider of Courtfield, evidently still at large in spite of the active hunt.

Meeting him in such a lonely place was not at all what Pon wanted. He dodged behind a tree, and watched the man pass, intending to keep out of sight till he was gone, and then cross the little lane and clamber over the fence opposite.

Watching him through the hawthorns, Pon made the discovery that he was not passing on his way. He had stopped, and sat down by the fence, by the side of a fat Greyfriars junior—Billy Bunter!

Obviously, Bunter knew nothing of the man—but Pon knew only too much! He remained in cover, watching for the man to go.

It astonished him to see the man, hunted like a hare, sitting there by the side of the fat Owl, and he crept closer through the hawthorns and brambles, taking care to make no sound, and to keep out of sight. Willingly enough, Pon would have handed over the rascal to the law—not so much because he was a rascal, as because he had clouted Pon's head so forcibly in Courtfield High Street.

Pon was hoping to hear the footsteps of some of the hunters, in which case he would have shown up and led them to the man in the check suit. But the hunt, spreading through the woods and the lanes, and along the river, had not yet approached that secluded spot, though there was no doubt that the fugitive was surrounded, and his escape cut off.

Only a few yards from Micky the Sprat and Bunter, Pon heard every word that was uttered; and he saw, too, what Bunter did not see—Micky the Sprat's pencil at work on the Holiday Annual.

He watched in utter amazement.

The man's action seemed utterly inexplicable to him. Any minute the hunt might have closed in, yet the smash-and-grab raider was sitting there scribbling something in a book!

But the subsequent conversation enlightened him.

Bunter, knowing nothing of the happenings in Courtfield that afternoon, suspected nothing, and was probably too obtuse to suspect anything, anyway. But Pon jumped to it at once.

He had no doubt whatever, that Mr. Smith, at the Black Bull at Lantham, was the man who had escaped on the

motor-bike, or some other confederate of the smash-and-grab raider. He could have no doubt that what the raider had scribbled in the Holiday Annual was a message to him. The obtuse Owl was being inveigled into acting as a messenger from one crook to another.

Ponsonby had already noted that the leather bag, stacked with stolen jewellery, with which Micky had fled out of Courtfield, was no longer hanging at his side.

Plainly the man had dropped his plunder somewhere in his flight. It did not take Ponsonby long to add two and two together. There was one explanation of the man's proceedings. He had left the bag of plunder somewhere, and had written a message telling where in that book which Bunter was to show to Mr. Smith, at the Black Bull. Pon felt as certain of that as if the man had told him his thoughts.

Standing there, hidden in the thickets, Pon thought rapidly.

He was rather keen to get into the Three Fishers—it was his last shady game before the end of the term. But he gave up that idea now.

Pon was not very keen on law and order, being rather a lawless young rascal himself; still, he was ready to lend his aid, if it could be done without danger to his precious self, in securing law-breakers like this ruffian. It would be rather a distinction, too, to be the means of laying the smash-and-grab raider by the heels. Other ideas, too, were working at the back of Pon's keen and unscrupulous mind.

He took a last look at Micky the Sprat from the thickets. The man was still sitting there, obviously weary, leaning on the fence, and listening like a hunted animal. Bunter had disappeared; but Pon knew where to pick him up again. He was heading for Courtfield Station, which was more than a mile away by the shortest cuts.

After two or three minutes of concentrated thinking, Ponsonby backed away deeper into the wood, making no sound.

He did not venture to move freely till he was sure that he was out of hearing of the man in the check suit. His fear of Micky the Sprat was deep.

Then he ran, threading his way rapidly through the trees. Bunter, after getting out of the woody lane, had to cross the common to get to the town, and it was Bunter that Ponsonby wanted.

Pon reached the edge of the wood towards the common, and as he ran out from the trees there was a sudden exclamation, and a hand closed on his shoulder.

It was the hand of a police-constable.

The officer released Ponsonby the next moment, as he saw that he was a schoolboy.

"Excuse me, sir!" he said civilly. "We're looking for a man in these woods. If you've seen anything of him—"

"A man in a check suit?" asked Pon, with a grin.

"Yes, sir. You've seen him?"

"I saw him smash Lazarus' window, in Courtfield," answered Ponsonby, "and I've seen him since—the other side of the wood, in the lane by the Three Fishers, sitting down to rest."

"Oh, good!"

Another constable came up, and then Mr. Grimes, the police-inspector of Courtfield. Ponsonby repeated his information for Mr. Grimes' benefit.

Mr. Grimes smiled a very satisfied smile.

"We've got him!" he said. "Sir Hilton's keepers are all along the river, and I've got three men in the grounds

of the Three Fishers, in case he makes a break over the fence. Follow me!"

Ponsonby walked on, smiling, leaving Mr. Grimes and his men to their work. He fancied it would not be long before the smash-and-grab man was paying dearly for that clout in Courtfield High Street.

He hurried across the green, gorse common, in the direction of the town. It was not long before he spotted a fat figure plugging slowly in the same direction.

Ponsonby put on speed. Billy Bunter blinked round at the sound of pattering footsteps behind him.

"Stop!" shouted Pon.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Instead of stopping, Bunter burst into a run. More than once the fat junior had been ragged by Pon & Co., and, seeing the Highcliffian on his track, Bunter had no doubt that another ragging was intended.

"You silly ass!" yelled Ponsonby. "Stop!"

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

He ran hard. The common was rather lonely, and there was no help at hand for Bunter. He tore on, gasping and gurgling, his fat little legs going like machinery.

But the fat Owl of the Remove had no chance in a foot-race with the slim Highcliffian fellow. Pon gained on him fast.

Closer and closer came the pattering footsteps. Bunter gasped, spluttered, and rolled on. Closer and closer—till Pon was within reach of him.

Then Pon let out his foot—hard!

Thud!

Pon's foot landed on a pair of very tight trousers, and Billy Bunter shot forward, with a wild howl, and crashed.

The Holiday Annual flew from under his fat arm. And Pon pounced on it and clutched it up, while Bunter rolled and roared.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Stranded Schoolboys!

"STRANDED!"

Bob Cherry made that remark for about the twentieth time. On the shore of Popper's Island the Famous Five stood in an exasperated group.

They were rather damp and rather muddy, after the scuffle with the escaping man in the check suit. That did not matter so much, but being stranded on the island in the river while the rascal made his escape was intensely exasperating.

"The strandfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But let us be as patient as a monument, as esteemed Shakespeare remarks."

"If ever I get near enough to that chap to give him a omer on the boko—" said Johnny Bull, in a deep voice.

"I wonder," said Bob, "how long we're going to be hung up here? Haven't seen a single dashed boat yet. Nobody coming along the river! This is what Robinson Crusoe must have felt like! If we don't get rescued, old beans, we shall be jolly old Crusoes—unless we swim off."

"I suppose we could swim it," said Nugent. "But—Hallo, there's a man on the bank! It's Joyce!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry, at the sight of Sir Hilton Popper's head-keeper on the riverside.



"Stop!" shouted Ponsonby. "Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter. Instead of stopping, he burst into a run. "You silly ass!" yelled Ponsonby. "Stop!" Clutching the Holiday Annual under his fat arm, Bunter tore on, gasping and gurgling, his fat little legs going like machinery.

But Joyce did not even look round. He was running along the edge of the wood from which he had emerged; and he turned away and disappeared into the trees again.

"After that Johnny again, perhaps!" said Bob. "But if he kept the boat he ought to be miles away by this time—past Friardale, at least."

"May have been spotted in the boat," said Harry. "I wonder what's become of him? We were rather duffers to let him spoof us like that. Oh, good luck! Here comes Coker!"

"The luckfulness is terrific!"

It was not often that the chums of the Remove were glad to see the great man of the Fifth, but they were very glad now to see the Fifth-Form boat pulling up the river, with Coker at the oars. Potter and Greene were not in the boat; having been drenched in the tussle on the river, they had gone in to change. Horace Coker, however, was made of sterner stuff. He had started for a pull on the river, and he was sticking to it; and here he was, pulling up to Popper's Island. He pulled hard, and he pulled often, but he did not make rapid progress; he splashed more than he progressed. Still, even Coker made the boat move, and five pairs of eyes gladly watched him approaching.

As Coker pulled between the island and the towpath on the bank, the juniors shouted to him.

"Hallo! This way, Coker!"

Coker stared round.

For a minute or two he did not spot the juniors on the island. They shouted again and again, and at last he saw them. He stared at them and burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha! You kids there! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling idiot!" began Johnny Bull.

"Shush!" murmured Bob. "That isn't a polite way of asking a man for a lift, old bean! Don't tell Coker what you think of him till he's taken me across."

"Let us address him with terrific politeness!" said Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh. "Politeness is the procrastination of princes, as the English proverb remarks." And the nabob politely lifted his straw hat to the grinning Fifth Form man in the boat. "Handsome and esteemed Coker—"

"Eh, what?" ejaculated Coker.

"Beneficent and philanthropic friend of the poor, will you have the preposterous bountifulness to give us a ridiculous lift across to the atrocious bank?" asked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "So that sportsman stranded you on Popper's Island, did he? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you seen that rotter in our boat?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Have I?" grinned Coker. "I took the boat back from him, and it's at the school boathouse now, if you want it. I wasn't going to let him steal a boat."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed all the Famous Five together.

That roomy old boat was common property among the five, and they had been rather anxious about it.

"Much obliged, Coker," said Harry.

"The obligefulness is absurd!"

"Oh, that's all right," said Coker. "Of course, I wouldn't let him steal your boat! You must have been young asses to let him get away with it. Now you're stranded! Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker roared again, resting on his oars, half-way between the island and the bank. Evidently Coker was highly amused.

"Well, give us a lift across, will you?" asked Bob.

"Will I?" grinned Coker. "No, I won't! I've no use for cheeky fags who pepper a Fifth Form man with peas from a pea-shooter!"

"Don't be a rotter, Coker!"

"Stranded on an island—ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "I rather wondered where he had left you. I fancied you'd be walking home. But on an island—ha, ha, ha!" Coker yelled.

The situation seemed to amuse Coker much more than it did the Famous Five.

"Look here, you gurgling ass, give us a lift!" roared Johnny Bull.

"I'm going up the river," said Coker. "I shall be coming back about tea-time. If you're still there I'll pick you up. I won't leave you stranded all night. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Coker dipped his oars again, and pulled and splashed. The chums of the Remove glared at him in great wrath. Coker was not really an ill-natured fellow, but he evidently considered it amusing to leave the juniors stranded, as he had found them. He pulled.

Between the island and the bank the divided current of the Sark ran hard! Coker pulled, but he made less progress than ever. He made it inch by inch—and indeed, every now and then, when he caught a crab, he drifted back a little down-stream. At this rate Coker seemed likely to remain for quite a long time in sight of the Crusoes of the island. They improved the shining hour, so to speak, in telling Coker what they thought of him.

Coker glared, and grew redder and redder, his ears fairly burning, as they told him. He was anxious to get past, and out of hearing, but the current and

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(Continued from page 13.)

his style of rowing were against him. He hung on within hearing, and the juniors continued to tell him their real, genuine, veracious opinion of his looks, his manners, his intellect, and everything that was his. They had a faint hope that the exasperated Coker might run in to the island, for vengeance, and give them a chance of getting hold of the boat.

But Coker, though not very bright, was too bright for that. He failed to make much progress against the current, but he kept his boat well out from the island. And a sudden idea flashed into Harry Wharton's mind, and while his comrades continued to hurl insults at Coker he slipped behind a big beech-tree, that grew close to the water. Great branches from that beech stretched over the arm of the river, reaching nearly half-way to the bank opposite. One particular branch was right over Coker, ten feet or more above his head. Harry Wharton clambered up the tree on the side hidden from Coker and crawled out on that mighty branch.

"Oh, good egg!" murmured Bob. "Keep it up, you men! Ten to one he won't look up and spot Wharton! I say, Coker, where did you get that face? Is it a face, or a doormat? If it's a doormat, it must have been trodden on an awful lot, from its looks! Why don't you wear a Guy Fawkes' mask? Or perhaps you are wearing one!"

Coker breathed deep wrath. It was really exasperating to have to listen to this sort of thing, because the current in the arm of the river chained him to the spot—assisted by his style in rowing. Coker made a strenuous effort, pulling with terrific force. Unfortunately, both his oars missed the water, with the startling result that Coker flew over on his back, feet and oars in the air.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

"Oooogh!" gasped Coker dizzily.

"Oh, my hat! Oh crumbs! Oooogh!"

He scrambled up, in a rocking boat, drifting downstream. By the time he had recovered his seat, and his oars, he was a dozen yards down—and had to pull up again, which he did slowly and laboriously, but more carefully. By that time Harry Wharton had crawled out to the end of the long branch, which sagged under his weight, dipping towards the water. He had to wait there till Coker pulled up again.

Coker, of course, had his back to him as he pulled; and, anyhow, he was not thinking of the possibility of an assailant dropping from the sky.

Breathing hard, red as a rose, Coker pulled and pulled, and regained the distance he had lost, and the boat glided under the extended branch again. The four juniors on the island watched breathlessly.

Harry Wharton was preparing to swing on his hands on the dipping

branch, to drop into the boat underneath, when there came a sudden and unlooked-for interruption. From a shady path in the wood a hatless-figure burst at a desperate run.

It was the man in the check suit again.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bagged at Last!

MICKY THE SPRAT was having an exciting afternoon. Never, in all his career as a smash-and-grab merchant, had a few hours been packed so full of incident. Once more the shop-raider was on the run.

Oblivious of the fact that Ponsonby of Highcliffe had seen him, and carried the news to the hunters, the Sprat had sat resting by the Three Fishers fence, after Bunter had left him, for some time.

He had little or no hope of escape; but when he felt a little recovered, he clambered up the Three Fishers fence and peered over—and was rewarded by the sight of a police-constable patrolling the grounds within. He dropped back very quickly.

It was only a few minutes after that that he heard the sounds of rustling in the wood, that told of coming enemies, and spotted the plump figure of Inspector Grimes coming up the lane at the same time.

And the sheer instinct of the hunted animal made him take to his heels again, though with no hope of getting clear, unless some very unexpected chance turned up in his favour.

It was towards the river that he ran—and on his way he met Joyce, the keeper, full tilt.

Joyce grabbed at him, but the Sprat twisted desperately and got away, and raced on, with the keeper shouting almost at his heels.

Breathless, perspiring, with hardly a run left in his legs, Micky the Sprat burst out of the wood, on the bank almost opposite to his first refuge, Popper's Island.

A swift glance up and down the tow-path showed pursuers breaking from the wood, in both directions. A glance across to the island showed schoolboys standing there—the schoolboys he had stranded. But the same glance revealed Coker's boat—far out from the bank, but not too far for a hunted man's desperate spring.

Micky the Sprat did not stop to think—hands were almost grasping him. He rushed on across the towpath, and, with a last desperate effort, bounded out over the river, and crashed headlong into Coker's boat.

He landed there on his hands and knees, the boat rocking so wildly that it almost capsized.

Coker stared at him blankly for a split second—before a second had wholly elapsed the desperate man was grasping him, and Coker, taken quite by surprise, went headlong out of the boat.

What might happen to Coker in the river the fugitive had no time to consider. Coker went under, gurgling, and came up spluttering.

Micky the Sprat grasped the oars. Five or six pursuers were on the bank, staring and shouting.

Only a few seconds were wanted for the desperate man to get the oars going, to whiz the boat away round the island with the current, and make a dash for the farther bank. But those few seconds were not granted him.

Harry Wharton, on the branch above, acted promptly.

He had been about to drop in beside Coker, when Micky the Sprat appeared so suddenly and unexpectedly on the scene. Now he let go the dipping branch, and dropped in beside Micky the Sprat.

The boat rocked again under the impact, lurching so wildly that a rush of water came over the gunwale.

"Bravo!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Stop him!" came a roar from Inspector Grimes on the bank.

Micky the Sprat, taken more utterly by surprise than Coker had been, glared at the schoolboy who had dropped, apparently, from the clouds. He grasped an oar to knock him into the water.

Harry Wharton dodged under the oar before it could strike, and butted into the man in the check suit.

Micky the Sprat went over in the bows of the boat. He crashed down on his back, all the wind knocked out of him.

Wharton, panting, threw himself on the gasping rascal.

The boat drifted down the current. Coker was grasping the gunwale. Had Micky the Sprat been still master of the situation, Coker's grasp would have been knocked off fast enough. As it was, Coker was at liberty to clamber in, the breathless rascal struggling under Harry Wharton. Drenched and dripping, Coker gasped and gurgled his way on board in a pool of water.

"Urrrrgh!" said Coker. "Grooogh! Oooogh! That rotter again—Oooogh! Trying to steal my boat this time! Urrgh! Hold him, kid! I'm coming!"

Coker sprawled along the boat, and added his grasp to Wharton's. The smash-and-grab man was fairly on his last legs now, and hardly able to deal with the junior, who was pinning him down. As soon as Coker's hefty grasp was added the game was up.

"We've got him!" panted Wharton.

"I've got him!" said Coker. "We'll jolly well run him in this time—pinching a fellow's boat! There's a bobby on the bank—My hat, there's three or four of them! That's old Grimes over there! Look here, get the oars and pull in, while I hold this sportsman! I've got him all right!"

"Right-ho!" panted Wharton.

"Go easy!" gasped Micky the Sprat, as Coker settled on his chest. "I give in, sir—go easy with a bloke!"

"I'm keeping you safe, my man!" said Coker grimly. "Looks to me as if you're making a regular trade of pinching fellows' boats on the river! You're going to be run in for this!"

Wharton pulled to the bank, while Coker sat on the prisoner. As the boat nosed into the rushes, two or three pairs of hands seized it and pulled it in. Inspector Grimes reached over and grasped Micky the Sprat by the collar.

"All right now!" smiled Mr. Grimes.

"What has he done, sir?" asked Harry.

"Smash-and-grab raid in Courtfield High Street," answered the inspector. "One of them got away on a motor-bike—but this man had the loot. Where's that bag you ran away with, my man?"

"Lost it in the river!" answered the Sprat coolly.

The inspector grinned.

"I'll believe that if we don't find it anywhere ashore," he said genially.

"Wrists together, please——"

Click!

Coker helped the handcuffed prisoner

out of the boat. He stepped ashore with a firm grasp on Micky the Sprat, and handed him over into the many hands that were waiting for him.

Micky, now that the game was indubitably up, took it coolly—it was just one of the little mishaps incident to the career of a smash-and-grab raider. And he nourished a hope that that fat, obtuse schoolboy in spectacles was well on his way to Lantham and Skid Smith. As soon as he was given the name of "Alfred Parker," and shown the book, Skid would know at once what it meant; he had had that sort of message before, many a time. If only that Holiday Annual reached Skid, the hidden plunder on Popper's Island would be lifted that very night—and Micky the Sprat hoped for the best.

In the meantime, he took affairs quite coolly.

"Safe now, my man!" said Mr. Grimes, genially, beaming with satisfaction at his capture.

"I believe you!" assented the Sprat. "Sorry to give you such a run on a 'ot day, sir—all the fault of that beaky bloke what hooked me off the jigger. I hope you've got a taxi handy—I don't mind telling you I'm a bit tired."

Mr. Grimes chuckled.

"You're going to get a long rest," he said reassuringly. "This way!"

Coker of the Fifth turned back to his boat as the police moved off up the bank with the prisoner. He stared as he saw the boat shoot away from the rushes, and Wharton sitting at the oars.

"You cheeky fag!" roared Coker, in great wrath. "Bring that boat back!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Won't you lend it to me for five minutes?" he asked.

"No!" roared Coker. "I won't!"

"Your mistake, old bean—you will!" said the captain of the Remove cheerfully.

And Coker did. He really had no choice about the matter, as the boat was out of his reach. He glared and frowned and brandished a wrathful fist, all of which were passed unheeded by Harry Wharton as he pulled across to Popper's Island. There Bob Cherry and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh jumped in, and Wharton ferried them across to the bank.

"What about borrowing the boat to go home in?" asked Bob. "Coker can walk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he seems to have got back our boat for us, so we'll let him have his," said Harry, laughing. "Here you are, Coker!"

The Famous Five jumped ashore.

"You cheeky young scoundrels!" roared Coker. "Bagging my boat! I'll jolly well—" Words failed Coker, and he proceeded to deeds.

Considering that Coker had recovered their lost boat for them, and that he had come in very useful since, the Famous Five were unwilling to give him what he was asking for. But Coker was not to be denied. A fellow who rushed to the attack, smiting like a sledgehammer, had to receive what he asked for. So the chums of the Remove collared Coker on all sides, and tossed him bodily into his boat. As the hefty Horace sprawled in it, Bob Cherry pushed it off, and it floated out into the Sark.

Then the Famous Five started to walk back to Greyfriars, Coker's voice following them for quite a long distance.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Puzzle for Pon!

BILLY BUNTER sat up. He set his spectacles straight on his fat, little nose, and blinked at Ponsonby of Highcliffe in alarm and apprehension.

Ponsonby had landed only one kick, which had floored the fat Owl of Greyfriars; but Bunter had expected more than one—a good many more—now that Pon had run him down.

To his surprise, the dandy of Highcliffe was giving his attention, not to Bunter himself, but to the Holiday Annual he had dropped.

He had the book open, and was staring into it, page after page—a proceeding that astonished Bunter. He could

HAVE YOU HEARD THIS ONE?

Here's a nutshell story which earns a **SPECIAL PRIZE** for Raymond F. Thorn, of 125, Maple Avenue, Quebec, Pro. Quebec, Canada.



Old Soldier (to raw recruit): "Gettin' on all right, eh?"
Raw Recruit: "Not so bad. But I'm blowed if I can halt right."

Old Soldier: "It's easy. All you've got to do when the sergeant cries 'Halt!' is to bring the foot that's on the ground to the side of the foot that's in the air, and remain motionless!"

NOTE.—Address all jokes and limericks to "Jokes and Limericks" Editor, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

hardly imagine that Pon had chased him and run him down, for the purpose of reading his Holiday Annual; but that was what it looked like.

Bunter heaved himself to his feet at last. Ponsonby seemed so keen on that Annual that Bunter could have escaped easily, and he was tempted to do so, leaving the book in Pon's hands. But there were two reasons against it—one, he had undertaken to show that book to Mr. Smith at the Black Bull at Lantham; the other, it belonged to Bob Cherry, who was absolutely certain to kick Bunter hard if he turned up at Greyfriars without it. The second reason was the more powerful of the two.

"I—I say, you know—" stammered Bunter. "I say, gimme that book! Look here, you beast, gimme my book—see?"

Ponsonby looked at him.

He wanted that book; but he had no intention of telling Bunter why he wanted it. Bunter knew nothing of the scribbled message which Pon was sure it contained, and Pon desired to leave him in that state of ignorance. He was going to keep the book; but even Pon, young rascal as he was, felt some qualms about actually bagging a book by force—such an action was called by the unpleasant name of stealing. And it was likely to be followed by unpleasant consequences.

"Look here, Bunter, you fat freak!" said Pon. "I've been going to get this book, only they're sold out. I'll buy this from you."

"Tain't mine," said Bunter. "I borrowed it from Bob Cherry. I'd sell it to you if it was mine."

Pon compressed his lips. This was rather unexpected. But he meant to have the book, and discover the hidden message in it at his leisure. A hurried glance through the pages had revealed nothing of it.

"Well, look here," said Pon, "I'll buy the book from you, and you can pay Cherry for the book, and he can buy another."

"You give me that book!" said Bunter warmly. "Bob mayn't be able to get another. You say yourself they're sold out."

"You silly ass! He can get one by ordering it. Anyhow, he can have the money back. Here it is."

Billy Bunter blinked at five shillings in Pon's palm. He was strongly tempted to accept that sum, and invent a story that he had lost the book to satisfy Bob Cherry. But even Bunter had his limit. He shook his head.

"I want to show that book to somebody at Lantham," he said. "You give it back to me—see?"

Ponsonby grinned. Certainly he had no intention of letting the hidden message in the book reach the smash-and-grab raider's confederate at Lantham.

A straightforward fellow, in the circumstances, would have told Bunter how the matter stood, and taken the book to the police station for examination there. But Ponsonby of Highcliffe was anything but straightforward. He was, in point of fact, crooked by nature—the worst fellow at Highcliffe, which was saying a great deal.

Schemes were working at the back of Pon's keen and unscrupulous mind for turning this strange adventure to his own profit.

Pon was hard up—his favourite gee-gees had let him down badly of late, and he was winding up the term in debt on all sides. All was grist that came to his mill, and he thought he saw a chance of some very solid "grist" in this affair. So far as his conscience bothered him—which was not very far—he consoled himself with the reflection that he was, at least, defeating law-breakers.

Bunter held out a fat hand for the Holiday Annual. Ponsonby coolly dropped the five shillings into it.

"Look here!" protested Bunter.

"Take it or leave it," said Pon. "This book's mine. I've paid you what it cost. That's fair play."

"But it's Bob Cherry's!" howled Bunter.

"You can pay him the money."

"He wouldn't sell you his book. He wouldn't have anything to do with you. He wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole."

Pon's brow darkened.

"Get out!" he said.

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"You're not going to keep that book!"

"I've paid for it. It's mine now. Buy another in Courtfield, if you like. Anyhow, get out!"

"Gimne that book! I say— Yar-oooh! Leave off kicking me, you beast!" yelled Bunter frantically.

Ponsonby kicked, and kicked again. Billy Bunter ceased to argue about the possession of the book. He fled.

Pon gave him another as he went; and Bunter fairly flew. He vanished through the gorse in the direction of Courtfield. And Pon sat down on a grassy bank to examine his prize.

What he expected to find was a message scribbled in pencil on one of the pages. He turned page after page patiently, from the first to the last, but failed to discover any such message.

He knitted his brows, angry and puzzled.

Distinctly as he watched the man in the check suit sitting beside Bunter under the fence of the Three Fishers, he had seen him with the book open, and the pencil in his hand. That he had written something in the book, Pon was assured. Why else had he stipulated that Bunter should show it to the man Smith at Lantham?

Pon, of course, had not been imposed on by the man's flimsy story of "young George." Even the obtuse Bunter would not have been imposed on, had he known that the man was a smash-and-grab raider.

Only for the purpose of conveying a message could the raider have wanted Bunter to take that book to Mr. Smith at Lantham.

Yet there seemed to be no message in it.

Had he slipped a written page into the pages, and had it fallen out since? Pon was sure not. He would have seen such an action. Besides, the man knew well enough that a loose paper in the book was very likely to fall out as Bunter carried it under his arm. It was not that.

The message was in the book itself—that was a certainty. Yet Pon's keen, searching eyes failed to find any sign of it.

Once more, from beginning to end, he turned the pages, scanning each one carefully as he turned.

There were marks of Bunter's grubby fingers on some of the pages—plenty of them. A detective could have traced that book to Bunter, on the fingerprint system.

But there was nothing else to be found.

Ponsonby wondered whether he had, after all, been mistaken! But how could he have been mistaken? The raider's purpose in sending the book to Lantham was as clear as daylight.

There was a message! Pon believed that it referred to the plunder the man had got rid of in his flight! But whether it did or not, there was no doubt that there was a message—there could be no doubt! It was a baffling and perplexing mystery. The writing was there somewhere—it simply had to be there! Yet it was invisible!

Invisible! That word leaped into Pon's mind, and he thought that he understood. Invisible ink!

He jumped at that explanation!

In his scanning of the book, he had not even noticed the tiny pencilled crosses to certain words on a few separated pages. Had he noticed them, he would never have guessed that they implied a secret code. But invisible ink seemed a plausible explanation of the mystery.

He had thought it was a pencil that

he had seen in the raider's hand. But at the distance he might easily have been deceived about that detail. No doubt it was a fountain-pen—with invisible ink.

If that was the case, the writing was there, unseen—but it could be brought to light by exposing the written page to heat! Time and patience were needed, that was all—and Pon had plenty of both. He could not set to work out of doors; and he rose at last, put the Holiday Annual under his arm, and walked to Courtfield. Bunter had long ago vanished. Ponsonby was thinking as he walked into the town, and in the High Street he dropped into the post office and made a call on the telephone. That call was to the police station at Lantham.

Having got through to the inspector in charge there, Ponsonby proceeded to make that official jump.

"You've had news of a smash-and-grab raid at Courtfield this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes! Who's speaking?"

"I've got information for you," said Ponsonby, without answering the question. "One of the raiders got away on a motor-bike. He's in Lantham now."

"Is he? Who's speaking?"

"He's at the Black Bull, under the name of Smith! You'll find him there if you look for him."

"Who's speaking?"

Ponsonby rang off without replying and left the post office. There was a puzzled and rather angry inspector at Lantham police station. But it was certain that that information would be acted upon. Even if the Lantham inspector suspected that it was a hoax, he was certain to act upon it, to the extent of looking in at the Black Bull and ascertaining whether a Mr. Smith was there, and who and what Mr. Smith was. If, as Pon believed, the man was the fellow who had escaped on the motor-bike, he would be in the "stone jug" as soon as the man in the check suit. In a satisfied frame of mind, Ponsonby sauntered on to Highcliffe School.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter in Lantham!

BILLY BUNTER stepped out of the train at Lantham station and rolled out into Market Street. There he hesitated.

The Pagoda teashop was in sight; and at the Pagoda they supplied remarkably good "grub" to any fellow who could pay for it.

Bunter was in the happy and unaccustomed state of being able to pay for it! He had a whole pound note to "blow."

Naturally, Bunter was tempted to pay his first visit to the Pagoda, and leave the Black Bull till afterwards. It was a quarter of an hour's walk to the Black Bull, too.

But the fat Owl made an effort, turned away from the Pagoda, and started for the Black Bull. After all, that agreeable stranger in the check suit had tipped him a whole pound to oblige him in this little matter; and Bunter had a conscience, of sorts. He was going to deliver, without delay, the message from that hiker—Bunter still believed that the man in the check suit was a hiker, as he had stated. Then he would be able to settle down at his ease and enjoy life.

The Black Bull was in a rather mean street at the other end of the market. There were generally a few loafers hanging about the place; but on the present occasion, as Bunter approached

it, he discovered that there were more than a few! In fact, all the loafers in the vicinity seemed to have gathered there, staring.

Something, apparently, was going on, and Billy Bunter wondered what it was.

Bunter had lost no time in getting to Lantham. But he was quite unaware, of course, that a telephone message had beaten him on the way. So far he had no idea that Mr. Smith at the Black Bull was anything but a friend of that very agreeable hiker in the check suit.

A police-constable in uniform stood outside the building. Quite a crowd surged round the place. Bunter heard remarks on all sides.

"They've got the motor-bike——"

"They're after him——"

"What's he done?"

"Who is he, anyhow?"

"Name of Smith——"

"I've seen him! He was staying here with a friend——"

"He came back without him—I saw him come in on his jigger early this afternoon——"

"What's the trouble—an accident—or what?"

"His name's Smith——"

"From London, I believe——"

"They came together this morning, him and Parker—the other man's name was Parker. I heard them talking in the bar——"

"Parker ain't here now——"

"Smith is! They want Smith for something! They got him in the coffee-room now, asking him questions!"

"Here they come!"

Billy Bunter, as he heard these remarks, and a score more of a similar kind, round him in the crowd outside the Black Bull, felt a cold trickle go down his podgy back.

He had arrived there to see Mr. Smith—to give him the agreeable stranger's message, though, owing to Ponsonby, he was unable to show him the Holiday Annual as he had promised to do. That detail, however, seemed a matter of little moment to Bunter, who had not the faintest idea that it was, in point of fact, the only important part of the whole business. But it did not seem likely now that he would be able to deliver Alfred Parker's message. Even into Bunter's thick head there came a suspicion that that agreeable hiker could not be quite what he had seemed, now that he found that the Lantham police were at the Black Bull after his friend Smith!

He blinked through his big spectacles at the little party that emerged from the Black Bull—on which the eyes of all the crowd were fixed.

A man walked between an inspector and a constable. He was not handcuffed, but the constable held his arm. The man's ferrety eyes roved from side to side, obviously watching for a chance to bolt.

Bunter wondered whether that was Mr. Smith!

"They got him!" came a murmur round the fat junior.

Bunter poked a man near him.

"I say, who's that man?" he asked.

"Man named Smith," was the answer. "Came here on a motor-bike this morning with a friend."

"Oh crikey!" murmured Bunter.

"You're making a mistake," Bunter heard Mr. Smith say, as the crowd opened to allow the three to pass. "I've been nowhere near Courtfield this afternoon."

"You'll be detained for inquiries——" the inspector was answering, when Mr. Smith, with a sudden jerk, wrenched his arm away from the constable and bolted!

There was a roar at once. The inspector and the constable jumped in



Only a few seconds were wanted for the desperate man to get the oars going, to whiz the boat round, and make a dash for the farther bank. But those few seconds were not granted him. Harry Wharton, on the branch above, acted promptly. Letting go his hold, he dropped into the boat beside Micky the Sprat!

pursuit, and a score or more people closed round the desperate man and grabbed at him. It was an utterly desperate attempt. The rascal had no chance! He was grabbed on all sides, and held, struggling, while the inspector and the constable hurried up, and a moment later he was handcuffed. Followed by a buzzing crowd, Mr. Smith was marched away to Lantham police station.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Evidently he could not deliver his message now! Neither did he want to! Even to Bunter's obtuse brain, it was clear now that that agreeable hiker in the check suit was some rogue who had made use of him to get a message delivered to another rogue! The fat Owl shivered at the thought of his narrow escape of getting mixed up with a pair of rascals wanted by the police. So far from desiring to see Mr. Smith now, Billy Bunter was only anxious to keep at a safe distance from that gentleman.

He rolled away in haste.

His destination was the Pagoda.

It might have occurred to Billy Bunter that he had better not use the pound he had received from a dubious character. But it was now past tea-time, and Bunter was hungry—fearfully hungry! When Bunter was hungry, all other considerations vanished into nothingness.

He rolled into the Pagoda. There, he dismissed the man in the check suit and Mr. Smith from his mind. He was done with them, anyhow. He devoted his whole attention to much more important things.

Riches are said to take unto themselves wings, and fly away. Certainly Bunter's pound was not long in flying.

A pound seemed quite a lot of money for a fellow to spend on a little feed at

a teashop. But it was not really a lot when a fellow ordered expensive things right and left.

Bunter calculated carefully as he proceeded, and he made his little bill come to exactly a pound. He had not had enough, of course; still, he felt that he had done rather well. He finished the feed with several shilling ices, and was tempted to have a few more. They were grateful and comforting on a hot day. He still had the five shillings that Ponsonby had fairly forced on him in exchange for Bob Cherry's Annual.

Bunter considered the matter—and hesitated. He had refused—distinctly refused—to sell a book that did not belong to him. It was Bob's book, and Bunter had refused to sell it to Pon.

Pon had taken it, and given him the five shillings it had cost Bob, by the strong hand. Bunter turned it over in his fat mind whether, in the circumstances, he might not regard that five shillings as a loan from Pon, and expend it on tuck!

Had he been still hungry there was no doubt how he would have decided the problem. But, though he had not had enough—Bunter seldom or never had enough—he had undoubtedly placed himself outside a rather extensive feed. He manfully resisted the temptation to "blow" Pon's five shillings on further supplies, and rolled out of the Pagoda, fat and sticky and happy, and took the train back to Courtfield.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Pon Stands Bunter a Taxi!

"P ON!"

"Good gad!"

Gadsby and Monson stared at Pon. His occupation surprised them. The two Highcliffe fellows

were strolling out after tea to walk into Courtfield and see the "pictures."

They came on Ponsonby on the road, walking slowly towards Highcliffe, with a book open in his hands, apparently reading as he walked. They were surprised to see Pon reading at all—it was not much in his line—and still more surprised when they observed that the rather large volume in his hands was the Holiday Annual. Pon's reading, when he read at all, was generally a pink paper about horses.

"What on earth have you got there?" asked Monson.

"What are you up to?" inquired Gadsby.

Pon glanced at them over the book, and grinned.

"I'm not readin'," he answered. "I'm lookin' for somethin'. Come in with me, and I'll tell you all about it."

"We're goin' to the pictures! Why didn't you come in to tea?"

"I've been rather busy!" grinned Pon. "There's somethin' in this book—more than meets the eye! I'll tell you later."

And Pon, with a nod, walked on, still scanning the pages of the Holiday Annual as he went. Gadsby and Monson, puzzled, continued on their way to Courtfield. The picture house was near the railway station, and as they passed the latter edifice a fat figure came rolling out, with big spectacles flashing back the rays of the summer sun.

"Greyfriars cad!" remarked Monson. "Fat Jack of the Bonehouse!" observed Gadsby.

Billy Bunter blinked round at them. Those remarks, from the Highcliffe fellows, would have caused trouble had the hearer been any of the Famous Five, or a fellow like Toddy, or Squiff, or
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Smithy. But Bunter was a fellow whom it was safe to chip.

He rolled on a little faster, anxious to get away from the Highcliffians. He was still feeling a lingering twinge where Pon's boot had landed that afternoon, and he did not want any more of the same from Pon's chums.

Gadsby winked at Monson, and they walked after Bunter. The pictures could wait, while they extracted a little fun from this fat fellow, who was evidently too funky to give trouble.

"How does he carry it all about?" asked Monson.

"Goodness knows!" said Gadsby. "I should think he would get along easier if he turned over and rolled!"

"What about turnin' him over and rollin' him?"

"Good egg!"

Billy Bunter quickened his pace. Remarks like these were neither grateful nor comforting, and he was anxious to get away. But the two Highcliffians quickened their pace also.

Bunter blinked round at them.

"I say, you fellows, you lemme alone," he said. "You wouldn't be so jolly cheeky if Bob Cherry was here!"

Gadsby's reply was to tip Bunter's hat off.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

He plunged after his hat, recaptured it, and rolled on. The grinning young rascals walked behind him.

Bunter blinked round several times, and observed them in the rear. He was growing alarmed.

In Courtfield High Street he was safe from a ragging, with plenty of people about. But between Courtfield and Greyfriars lay a long country road, across the common, and there the hapless Owl would be at the mercy of the Highcliffians.

Bunter had no fancy for being turned over and rolled, even if it was, as Gadsby suggested, an easier way for the fat junior to get along. He slowed down.

Gadsby immediately walked into him from behind.

"Ow! Gerraway!" gasped Bunter, as he staggered.

"What are you blockin' up the pavement for?" demanded Gadsby. "I suppose you know that a fellow can't walk round you? Too far to walk."

"You cheeky beast!" gasped Bunter, and he rolled on again, with the Highcliffians following.

It was clear that the two young rascals intended to follow him out of the town, and give him "beans" on the lonely common. They were in a mood for mischief, and Bunter was an easy fellow to rag. More and more uneasy the fat Owl felt as he rolled on.

When the open common came in sight at the end of the street, Billy Bunter halted. A blink round showed him that Gadsby and Monson were still just behind. He simply dared not walk across the common with those two young sweeps on his trail.

Turning, he rolled back up the High Street. Gadsby and Monson turned and followed; easily reading the alarmed thoughts of the fat Owl, and quite enjoying the situation.

There was a crowd outside Mr. Lazarus' shop, staring at the scene of the smash-and-grab raid of a few hours before. Billy Bunter joined them, and loitered about for ten minutes or so, hoping that Gadsby and Monson would get tired of the game and clear off. But Gadsby and Monson loitered also.

Billy Bunter rolled back towards the railway station.

He had made up his fat mind.

He hated the idea of walking across

the common, anyhow. Much rather would he have taken a taxi. Now he simply dared not walk across the common. He was going to take a taxi—and Ponsonby's five shillings were going to pay for it.

Bunter felt that he really had no choice in the matter—and if Pon did not like it he could lay the blame on his playful friends.

Outside the station was a cab-rank. Billy Bunter stopped there, and signed to a taxi-driver.

"Oh, gad!" chuckled Gadsby. "We've made him take a taxi! He's too jolly scared to walk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Monson.

Billy Bunter blinked round at them. They were immensely entertained by the idea that he was put to the expense of a cab fare on their account. In the circumstances, however, Bunter considered that the laugh really was on his side.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter, "give Ponsonby a message for me, will you? Tell him I'll let him have that five shillings back next term."

Gadsby and Monson stared at him.

"What are you babblin' about, you fat ass?" asked Gadsby.

"I met Ponsonby this afternoon on the common," explained Bunter; "he lent me five shillings! Tell him I'll settle after the hols."

And Bunter stepped into the taxi, leaving the Highcliff fellows staring, unable to make head or tail of what he had told them.

The taxi rolled away with the Owl of the Remove.

"What did the podgy piffler mean, Gaddy?" asked Monson.

"Blessed if I know! Let's get to the pictures—we can't rag him in a taxi!"

And they went to the pictures.

Bunter, fat and comfortable, rolled off to Greyfriars in the taxi. Pon—certainly without intending it—was standing him that taxi, which was rather an entertaining thought to William George Bunter.

Bunter, in the taxi, reached the gates of Greyfriars as five rather tired fellows reached them from another direction. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at the fat junior as he alighted from the cab.

Bunter paid the taxi-driver, and grinned cheerily at the Famous Five.

"Been robbing a bank?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Well, you fat villain, where did you get a taxi fare from? You were stony when we saw you last."

"Some fellows can afford to hire taxies," said Bunter loftily. "And I suppose a friend can lend me five shillings, if he likes."

"Poor old Mauly!" said Johnny Bull.

"It wasn't Mauly!" snapped Bunter.

"As it happens, it was Pon—"

"Pon!" ejaculated the Famous Five together.

"Yes; I met him this afternoon," said Bunter carelessly. "He lent me five bob. I say, you fellows, there's been a smash-and-grab raid in Courtfield this afternoon."

"Not really?" grinned Bob.

"Yes; I saw the hole in Lazarus' plate-glass window. They were saying that a man got away with a bagful of stuff," said Bunter. "You fellows never hear anything."

The Famous Five chuckled. As a matter of fact, they knew rather more about that affair than Billy Bunter did.

"Where's my 'Holiday Annual'?" asked Bob. "I suppose you didn't eat it?"

"Oh, Pon's got it!" said Bunter.

"Pon's got my Holiday Annual!" yelled Bob.

"Yes; he grabbed it away from me on Courtfield Common. I put up a terrific fight," said Bunter, blinking at the astonished juniors. "I fancy Pon's got a black eye. I think his nose is broken, too. He looked a wreck when I had done with him. But—but he bolted with your Holiday Annual, old chap."

Bob Cherry took the fat Owl by a fat ear.

"That won't wash, Bunter," he said quietly. "Ponsonby's every kind of a worm; but he's not a thief—anyhow, not of Holiday Annuals. What have you done with my book?"

"Ow!"

"Where is it?" roared Bob.

"Wow!"

"Have you lost it?"

"Yow-ow!"

"By gum, I'll jolly well—"

"What is this?" A sharp voice broke in—that of Mr. Quelch—the master of the Remove. "Kindly do not make a disturbance at the school gates, Cherry. Take fifty lines!"

Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout had returned from their walk. Mr. Quelch was looking a little cross. Prout was looking as if he was melting. For some miles Quelch had had to accommodate his pace to that of Prout, which was about that of a very old fatigued snail. Bob let go Bunter's ear quite suddenly at the voice of his Form master.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" he stammered.

Mr. Quelch frowned and walked in at the gates. Mr. Prout puffed and panted, and waddled in. And Bunter rolled in under the wing of his Form master, rubbing his fat ear. Inquiry into the matter of the missing "Holiday Annual" had to be postponed.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Missing Annual!

LORD MAULEVERER groaned.

"Hikin'," he said faintly.

"Hiking!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Good gad!"

"The hikefulness is the proper caper in the glorious and ridiculous summer-time," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It will do you good, Mauly," said Frank Nugent.

Groan!

"You'll enjoy it no end," said Johnny Bull.

Groan!

There was a chuckle in Study No. 12 in the Remove. After prep that evening the Famous Five had called in at that study to see Mauly; but Mauly, generally glad to see the cheery Co., did not seem inspirited on this occasion. The bare idea of hiking roused feelings in the breast of his lazy lordship, which could only be expressed by groaning. So he groaned.

"We're going on a jolly old hike," said Bob. "It's gorgeous, Mauly! No good telling a bloated millionaire like you that it's cheap. But think of the health and the fun."

"But—but hikers hike on foot," said Mauly.

"Generally," assented Bob. "Of course, they would hike on their heads if they wanted a change. But it's usual to hike on foot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

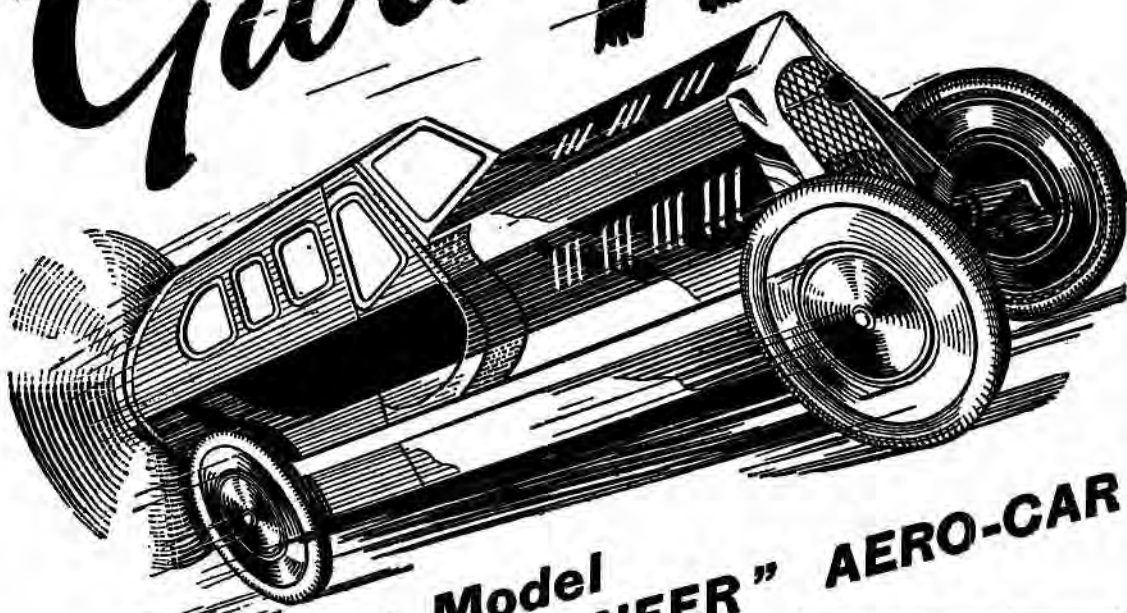
"I—I suppose a man couldn't hike in a car?" suggested Mauly. "If you fellows like to hike in a car, I've got a car at home—"

"Fathead!"

"It's more comfy in a car," suggested

(Continued on page 22.)

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MICKY THE SPRAT!

(Continued from page 20.)

Lord Mauleverer. "I like hikin' all right, of course—splendid idea!—but I'd rather hike sittin' down. Let's have the car, and it's a go!"

"Ass!"

"We'll fix up a starting-place, and meet there," said Harry Wharton. "And we want you to come, Mauly. You'll enjoy it no end when you get going."

Groan!

"Think of walking thirty miles in a day—" said Bob encouragingly.

Groan!

"And camping under a haystack at night—"

Groan!

"And all sitting round under one umbrella when it rains—"

Groan!

"And baking in the sun—"

Groan!

"And cooking your own grub on a paraffin stove!"

Groan!

"We'll make Mauly cook—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh gad!" said Mauleverer. "This is worse than Bunter. Bunter says he's comin' with me for the hols, and I don't see how I'm goin' to stop him. I thought that was the limit. But it wasn't. This is."

Bob Cherry burst into a chortle.

"Is Bunter coming with you for the hols, Mauly?"

"Yaas. He says so, anyhow."

"Then come on the hike. Fancy Bunter on a hike!"

Lord Mauleverer sat up and smiled. The mental picture of Billy Bunter on a hike seemed to cheer him.

"Bunter wouldn't stick it," he said. "He would drop off after the first mile. Dashed if I don't! I'll come!"

"Done!" said the Famous Five together.

"Of course, a fellow might bring a car, in—in case it was wanted," added Lord Mauleverer cautiously. "And—and a fellow might bring his man—what? My man, Chivers, is a very useful man."

"Bring 'em both," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, good!"

"And we'll send your man home in your car—"

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but I say—" protested Lord Mauleverer.

"That's all right; it's settled," said Bob. "Now, you men, let's go and dig up Bunter. The fat villain's been dodging me ever since we came in; but we shall catch him after prep. He's got to cough up my Holiday Annual."

And the Famous Five left Study No. 12, leaving Lord Mauleverer with a very thoughtful expression on his face. He liked the company of the cheery Co., and he liked the idea of spending the summer holidays with them. But he did not like the idea of exertion.

Hiking with a Rolls car and a valet seemed to Mauly an improvement on the scheme; but evidently it was an improvement that was not going to be adopted. Still, there was balm in Gilead, so to speak. Billy Bunter had fastened on the good-natured, long-suffering Mauly for the holidays. And if it was a hike, there was a great probability that Bunter would drop off before the hike had gone very far. That made the idea of a hike rather attractive.

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Leaving Mauleverer to his meditations, the Famous Five went down the Remove passage to Study No. 7. In that study prep was over, and Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were going down, and Billy Bunter was taking a rest in the study armchair. He was calling out to Peter as the Famous Five arrived.

"I say, Toddy, if you see that beast Cherry, tell him I'm gone to Quelch's study, will you?"

Peter Todd chuckled.

"Cherry, Bunter has gone to Quelch's study," he said. "There he is, sitting in the armchair and saying so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Toddy walked away, and the Famous Five crowded into Study No. 7.

Billy Bunter blinked at them uneasily.

"I—I say, you fellows! I'm afraid I've got no time now," he said. "I've got to get along and see Mauly. I'm going with Mauly for the hols, you know."

"We know," chuckled Bob.

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say—"

"Where's my Holiday Annual?" inquired Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I told you that Pon grabbed it! If you want it, you'd better go over to Highcliffe and ask Pon for it."

"Now, look here," said Bob. "I want that book! I paid five shillings for it, and I can't afford to chuck away five bob! Where is it?"

"I tell you that Pon—"

"And you told us that Pon lent you five shillings!" said Bob. "The two yarns don't seem to fit together, old fat bean."

"The—the fact is—"

"Cough it up!"

"The—the fact is, Pon grabbed it, and—and—he said he'd pay for it," stammered Bunter. "He shoved five bob into my hand, and—and kicked me, and—and snaffled the book!"

"What utter rot!" said Harry Wharton. "If Pon wanted a Holiday Annual, he could buy one at the bookshop in Courtfield."

"He said they were sold out," said Bunter. "Anyhow, he did! I told him I couldn't sell him Bob Cherry's book—and—and—and so I—I—I took the five bob as a loan, see?"

"Wha-a-t?"

"I had to have a taxi from Courtfield. Those beasts Gadsby and Monson were following me! Of course, I shall pay Pon back," added Bunter, with dignity. "I'm expecting a postal order—"

Bob Cherry picked up the inkpot from the table.

"Where's my Holiday Annual?" he asked.

"I tell you Pon's got it!" yelled Bunter. "Don't you believe me, you silly ass?"

"Believe you? Not quite! What have you done with it?"

"I tell you—yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as the ink began to trickle. "Ow! Keep that ink away, you beast! Pon's got it! I'll swear—"

"If you do, we'll jolly well bump you!"

"I mean, I'll swear Pon's got it!" yelled Bunter. "If you drip that ink over me—grooogh! Oh, you beast, it's gone in my mouth! Gurrerrgggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrgggh! Gurrerrgggh! Wurrerrgggh!" "Where's my Holiday Annual?" inquired Bob. "I'll keep this game up as long as you do, Bunter! You can have all the ink!"

"Urrerrgggh! Grooogh! Gug-gug-gug!"

Billy Bunter squirmed out of the armchair, and made a rush to escape. Johnny Bull caught him by a fat ear, and jerked him back. There was a bump and a roar as Billy Bunter landed on the study floor.

"Yaroooh!"

"Turn him over," said Bob. "Hand me that fives bat! I can't make the fat idiot out, but we'll get the truth out of him, if a fives bat will do it."

"Ow! Wow! Keep off!" shrieked Bunter. "I tell you Pon's got it—he took it away from me on Courtfield Common—yaroooooh! He gave me the money for it! Look here, I'll pay you the five bob—"

"Shell out, then!"

"I mean, when my postal order comes—"

Whack!

"Whoooooooop!"

Whack! Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Now where's my Holiday Annual?" asked Bob.

"Oh lor'! Oh crikey! Wow! I tell you Pon's got it! The beast kicked me, and took it away!" groaned Bunter.

The Famous Five stared at him. Amazing as the story was, they could not help realising that Bunter was, against all probability, telling the truth! Neither the ink nor the fives bat had caused him to vary the tale; so they could only conclude that it was true.

"Mind," said Bob warningly, "I'm going over to Highcliffe to-morrow morning for my Holiday Annual. That means a row if you're lying, Bunter!"

"Ow! Beast! I tell you Pon took it away from me!" groaned Bunter. "He made me take the five bob—"

"Leave it at that, then," said Bob.

"If Pon gave you five bob, that's his own affair; I know I'm jolly well going to have my book back, and I'll jolly well punch his head, too, for his cheek in taking it. You shouldn't have let him take it!"

"I—I fought like a—a tiger—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

The Famous Five left Study No. 7, leaving Bunter to dab at the ink.

What the strange affair meant, they did not know; but they knew one thing, and that was that in the morning they were going to call on Ponsonby at Highcliffe School and make him hand over Bob's Holiday Annual. On that point, at least, there was no doubt!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby's Little Scheme!

"GRATERS, old bean!" said the Caterpillar gravely.

Ponsonby stared at him.

Pon was standing in his study doorway at Highcliffe, with a book under his arm, waiting for Gadsby and Monson to join him in the study. Rupert de Courcy came along and stopped to nod and smile and make that remark.

"What the thump do you mean, you ass?" asked Ponsonby.

The Caterpillar made a gesture towards the volume under Pon's arm.

"I said graters, and I mean graters," he remarked lazily. "Your taste is improvin', Pon! I see you've got a Holiday Annual there! Quite a nice book—but hardly in your line, what? Your taste generally runs to a pink paper about gee-gees! May I, as a friend, hope that this improvement is goin' to be permanent?"

Ponsonby scowled, and put the volume hastily behind him.



"Where's my Holiday Annual?" asked Bob Cherry, holding the inkpot over Bunter's fat head. "I tell you Ponsonby's got it!" yelled Bunter. "Don't you believe me?" "Not quite! What have you done with it?" "I tell you—yaroooh!" roared the fat junior, as the ink began to trickle. "If you drip that ink over me—grooogh! Oh, you beast! It's gone into my mouth! Gurrerrgggh!" "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Famous Five.

"Oh, don't be a silly goat," he snapped.

"Silly goats," said the Caterpillar, "are like poets—born, not made! So I can't help it, any more than you can help bein' a shady blighter, old bean! Franky, old tulip." He turned to Courtenay, the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth, who came down the Fourth Form passage. "Hold on, an' hear the good news! Pon bein' your cousin, it will buck you up!"

"Eh, what?" said Courtenay, stopping.

"Let Franky see the book, Pon—why are you hidin' it? Franky, Pon's chuckin' up pink papers, and takin' to Holiday Annuals! Ain't you glad to hear it?"

"Very—if it's true," said Courtenay dryly.

"Here come Gaddy and Monson," said the Caterpillar, as those two youths appeared in the offing. "Have you men heard the good news? Pon's takin' up good and improvin' literature, and chuckin' pink papers! I'll tell you what—let's all sit round and read that excellent book together!"

Gadsby and Monson grinned, and went into the study. The Caterpillar's remarks were cut short by the slam of the door.

"Bad manners," said De Courcy, shaking his head, as he stared at the shut door. "Shockin' bad manners, Franky, what? Shall we go in an' teach Pon manners?"

"Oh, come on, and let him rip!" answered Courtenay, and he seized his chum by the arm and walked him away to the stairs.

Ponsonby laid the Holiday Annual on his study table. Gadsby and Monson stared at it. It was the same volume that they had seen Pon scanning in the

road; and his interest in it was a puzzle to them.

"Did you blow five bob on that?" asked Gadsby.

"Yes!"

"More ass you," said Gadsby. "It's not a new copy! Look at those grubby finger-marks all over it."

"Bunter's left his trade mark on it," said Ponsonby.

"You didn't buy it from Bunter?" asked Monson, staring.

"I did!"

"Is that what the fat idiot meant by what he said to us?" asked Gadsby. "He told us to tell you he'd settle the five bob you lent him after the hols."

"I never lent him five bob. I gave him five bob for this book," answered Pon. "He told me it belonged to Bob Cherry, and I gave him the money to give to that rotter for it. He can get another copy."

"If he touches the tin!" grinned Gadsby. "It mayn't reach him, in Bunter's hands!"

"That's his look-out! I've paid for it, and it's mine."

"Blessed if I make you out! If you wanted it, you could buy a new copy," said the mystified Gaddy. "Did you specially want a copy with the marks of Bunter's grubby paws all over it?"

"If you'll shut up a minute, and use your ears instead of your chin, I'll explain!" said Ponsonby impatiently.

Gadsby and Monson settled down in armchairs with cigarettes, and Pon proceeded to tell the strange tale of the afternoon's happenings. His friends listened in wonder.

"My only hat!" said Gadsby when he had finished. "I've heard that they got the smash-and-grab man on the river, and the other man at Lantham. Then it was really through you that they got them!"

"They're both safe now," said Ponsonby coolly. "Neither of them will be looking for the loot from Lazarus' for a year to come at least. That loot will stay where the smash-and-grab sportsman parked it!"

"Where's that, I wonder?" said Monson.

"We can find out."

"You fancy there's a clue to it in that Holiday Annual?"

"I'm absolutely certain of it. I've told you what the man did and said—and it can't mean anything else." Pon tapped the Holiday Annual with his slim forefinger. "The tip's in this book—and we've got to find it!"

"But haven't you looked—"

"Of course I have, ass; I've searched it through a dozen times or more! He must have used invisible ink."

"Oh!" said Gaddy and Monson together.

"The usual way of makin' invisible ink show up is to hold the book to the fire," said Pon. "Get a fire goin'."

"Some job!" said Gadsby. "There must be two or three hundred pages—"

"It's worth it. I've heard that the jewellery and things taken from Lazarus' shop are worth more than five hundred pounds."

Gadsby and Monson stared fixedly at Cecil Ponsonby.

"Are you mad?" asked Gadsby. "I know you're not very particular, Pon—but even you can't be thinkin' of handlin' stolen goods? Why, you silly ass, they'd send you to chokey along with those two rotters if you did anythin' of the kind—if you touched so much as a watch or a ring in the lot!"

"Don't be a bigger fool than you can help, Gaddy! Of course, I don't mean anythin' of the kind."

"Then what the thump do you mean?" demanded Gadsby uneasily. "You ought to have taken the book to the police station if you think it contains a tip to the loot."

"I'll tell you what I mean! That smash-and-grab man covered miles and miles before they got him—in the woods, up and down the river, all over the place. He seems to have given them a long run for their money. He's not likely to tell them where he parked the stuff; the fact that he hid it at all shows that he means to keep it dark. Of course, he wanted to get word to his pal to lift it. And when he finds that his pal has been snaffled, too, what do you think his idea will be? To leave it where it lies till he comes out of chokey?"

"I suppose so. But what—"

"They'll search for it—with miles and miles to search. Will they find it in a hurry without a clue?"

"But you think you've got a clue—"

"Talk sense! What I know I'm keepin' to myself! Will they find it in a hurry without a clue?"

"Hardly! Weeks, or months very likely, if they find it at all. But what's the sense of keepin' it dark, if you can find out where to put your finger on it?" demanded Gadsby.

"I'm goin' to wait for the reward."

"The—the reward!"

"Five hundred pounds' worth of stuff—and the loss fallin' on old Lazarus, or an insurance company? When they've hunted for it for about a week they're certain to offer a reward. It's always done."

"Oh gad!"

"Fifty pounds at least—that's only ten per cent, or less. Now do you see the idea?"

"Well, my Aunt Juliana!" said Monson, staring.

Evidently Cecil Ponsonby had thought the matter out and seen a handsome profit for himself in the transaction.

"I—I say, that's sailin' pretty near the wind, isn't it?" asked Gadsby uneasily. "A man's bound to tell what he knows—"

"Nobody knows that I know anythin', so that's all right. Bunter never even saw the man scribble in the book. He hasn't the faintest idea why I wanted it. We simply sit tight till the reward's out, then—by sheer accident, of course—we drop on the stuff and unearth it. I'm lettin' you fellows into it as my pals, but it's not goin' any further."

Gadsby whistled.

"I—I suppose it's all right," he said. "We don't touch the stuff. It's a bit thick, though."

"What rot! Fifty pounds isn't picked up every day," said Ponsonby; "and the reward will be that much when it's out."

"If that man talks, now they've got him—"

"If he does, it's all washed out, of course. But I fancy he won't. Now, get the fire goin' and let's see if we can spot any invisible writin' in the book."

Neither Gadsby nor Monson seemed quite easy about Pon's cunning scheme. But they made no demur, and a fire was lighted in the study grate. When it had burned up, Pon opened the book at the first page, exposing it to the heat. Gadsby and Monson sat and watched him. The paper scorched, but no sign of writing came to light. Pon turned to the next, and then the next.

"That's goin' to take some time, Pon, with a book that size!" remarked Gadsby, with a yawn.

"We'll leave you to it, old bean," said Monson, rising.

Pon rose from before the fire with a flushed, heated face. The task was not a specially agreeable one on a warm summer's evening.

"You won't!" he said. "If you're in this with me you're goin' to take your turn! Here you are!"

"Oh gad!"

Not very willingly Monson took a turn; then Gadsby took a turn; then Pon took a turn again. Twenty pages or more were scorched without result. By that time all three were fed-up with the tiresome task. There was a tap at the door, and Ponsonby shut the book hurriedly as it opened and the Caterpillar looked in.

"What the dickens do you want?" barked Pon irritably.

"Nothin', old bean!" answered the Caterpillar amiably. "Just looked in to mention that it's dorm, and a prefect is inquiren' for you."

"Oh!"

The Caterpillar lounged away. Ponsonby put the Holiday Annual on his bookshelf.

"Plenty of time to-morrow," he said.

And the Holiday Annual, its secret still unrevealed, was left in Pon's study, and Pon & Co. went to bed.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry Means Business!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Get a move on!"

"I think I'd rather not come."

"Think again!"

"Look here, you beast—"

"Take his other ear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Leggo! I'm coming, ain't I? I—I—I want to come! Leggo my ear, you beast!"

And Bunter came!

It was the following day, and morning classes were over at Greyfriars School. There was plenty of time to bike over to Highcliffe and get back before dinner, and the Famous Five as soon as they were released from the Form-room headed for the bikeshed, taking the fat Owl with them.

Billy Bunter preferred not to accompany them. A bike ride in a hot sun was no catch to Bunter; also, he thought it possible that there might be a row and perhaps a ragging at Highcliffe. But Bunter's presence was necessary, as it was from Bunter that the Holiday Annual had been taken.

"I say, you fellows, my bike's punctured," said Bunter. "You never mended those punctures for me, Bob! I've asked you lots of times! Now I can't ride the jigger."

"That's all right; we've borrowed Toddy's bike for you."

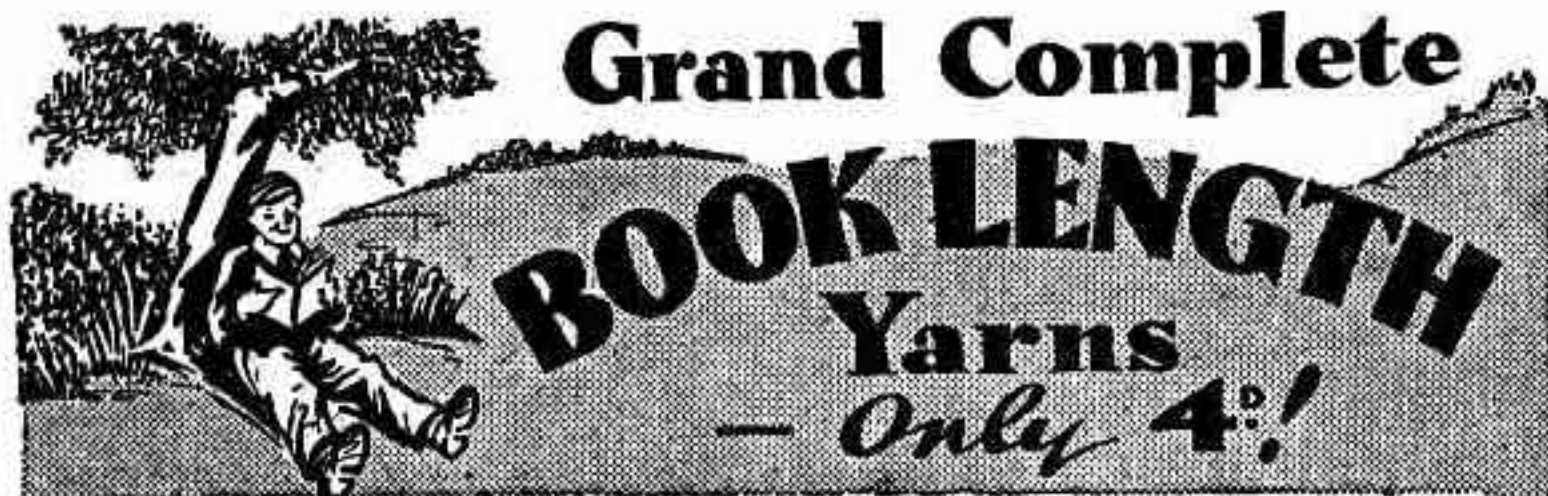
"I don't like Toddy's bike—"

"The likefulness of the esteemed Bunter is a matter of terrific unimportance," remarked Hurreg Jamset Ram Singh.

"Beast!"

Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled out the machines and started for Highcliffe, Bunter perched on Toddy's bike. The fat junior gasped and groaned all the way, and was in a melting state by the time Highcliffe School was reached. There the bikes were left at the porter's lodge, and Harry Wharton & Co. walked in.

All the Famous Five were in a determined mood, and Bob Cherry's usually sunny face was grim. What Pon's motive could possibly have been, none of them could guess—or begin to guess. But they had no intention whatever of



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letting him "get away" with such high-handed proceedings. The fact that he had handed Bunter the price of the book did not alter the fact that he had taken Bob's property by force—and the money had never reached the owner of that property. Not that Bob would have touched it. He wanted no dealings of any sort with the cad of Highcliffe.

So far as he could see, Pon had acted like a bullying ass, with no motive except to display cheeky impudence towards Greyfriars fellows. Bob Cherry had come to Highcliffe for his own property, and he was not prepared to take five shillings—or five pounds, for that matter—instead of it. And he was strongly inclined to punch Pon's cheeky head, into the bargain.

"Top of the mornin', old beans!" The Caterpillar came up to greet the Greyfriars fellows. "Quite an unexpected pleasure! Franky, old pet, here's the Greyfriars blokes—an' they've brought Bunter to gladden our eyes! I was afraid that I wasn't goin' to see Bunter again before the hols," added the Caterpillar solemnly.

"Glad to see you fellows," said Frank Courtenay, coming up. "I've heard that you had a hand in bagging that smash-and-grab man yesterday."

"Wharton dropped on his jolly old napper!" grinned Bob. "Any news of the stuff he got away with? He hadn't it on him."

"I hear that he's supposed to have hidden it somewhere, and the police are hunting for it," said Courtenay. "It's hard luck on old Lazarus, unless he had his stock insured. Anything up?" he added, reading the countenances of the Greyfriars fellows.

"Well, yes," said Harry slowly. "We've come over for something—and if possible we'd like to avoid trouble. Ponsonby—"

"Dear old Pon!" said the Caterpillar. "What's Pon's latest?"

Wharton explained. The two Highcliffe fellows listened in astonishment. No more than the Famous Five could they account for Pon's proceedings.

"It must have been meant as a lark," said Courtenay blankly. "Ponsonby will give you the book, of course. I can't make it out."

"Well, we can't either," said Harry. "We don't want any trouble—if Pon hands Bob's book over quietly. Where is he?"

"They went up to the study, after class," murmured the Caterpillar. "They've got something on. Perhaps they're reading the jolly old Holiday Annual in a happy family circle! Perhaps!"

"Come with us!" said Courtenay abruptly.

And he led the Greyfriars fellows into the House, and up to the Fourth Form passage. There was a murmur of voices in Pon's study as they approached the door.

"Dash it all, it's jolly hot here, with that fire goin', Pon!"

"Can't be helped, ass!"

"Well, look here, you take a turn! I've done three pages."

"Take a turn, Monson."

"Oh, bother! It's jolly hot."

What Pon & Co. had a fire in the study for, on a blazing summer's day, was a mystery. However, that did not concern Harry Wharton & Co. Frank Courtenay gave a sharp rap at the door and turned the handle. He threw the door open and stepped in.

A fire was burning in the grate, making the room very uncomfortably warm. Gadsby was fanning himself by

the open window—Pon was comforting himself with a cigarette, and Monson was stooping before the fire, with the Holiday Annual in his hand, exposing a page to the heat. He started and turned as the door opened, and dropped the book, with a thud, to the floor. It lay open, revealing a scorched page to the view.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Ponsonby savagely; but he broke off at the sight of Harry Wharton & Co.

He made a jump at the "Holiday Annual," grabbed it up, and held it behind him. Gadsby and Monson exchanged a startled glance.

"What do you Greyfriars cads want here?" asked Ponsonby, with a bitter look at the Co.

"We want my book that you took away from Bunter yesterday on Court-field common!" rapped Bob Cherry. "And if you give me any cheek, I'll give you a thrashing in return for it."

"If you've come here to kick up a row—"

"You can have a row or not, as you like, you cheeky cad! But you're going to hand over my book!" roared Bob.

"Hold on, you fellows!" said Courtenay. "Let me speak! Ponsonby couldn't possibly intend to keep the book—that's rot! Look here, Ponsonby, you seem to have played a rotten trick on Bunter yesterday, taking away from him a book that he told you didn't belong to him. Hand it over, and don't make a fuss about it!"

"I paid the fat sweep for the book!" said Ponsonby. "Cherry can buy another copy for the same money."

"Cherry can do nothing of the sort!" interrupted the owner of that name. "It was thundering cheek to take my book away, and I've come here for it! And if it wasn't for these fellows, I'd knock you across the study, to start with!"

"Bunter's got the money—" "I say, you fellows, I haven't!" squeaked Bunter. "I had to spend that five bob on a taxi, because Gadsby and Monson were after me—"

"Are you keepin' the money and askin' for the book back as well?" sneered Ponsonby.

"You can settle that with Bunter," said Bob. "I'm here to take what belongs to me."

"I told those beasts to tell Pon that I'd settle next term," said Bunter. "I'm expecting a postal order—"

"Shut up, Bunter!" Harry Wharton took five shillings from his pocket and laid them on the study table. "There's your money, Ponsonby! Now hand over the book."

Ponsonby breathed hard. He had not expected this; though really he might have expected it. But he did not intend to part with that Holiday Annual if he could help it.

"I don't want your money," he said sullenly. "I paid for the book, and it's mine. Bunter took the money."

"Even if he did, he had no right to sell another fellow's property—and you took the book from him by force. Anyhow, there's your money back."

"Are you handing over that book, Ponsonby?" asked Bob Cherry, in a sulphurous voice.

"No, I'm not!" said Ponsonby, between his teeth. "Look here, the book's got rather damaged—it's a bit scorched! You don't want a damaged book. If Bunter's spent the money I gave him, I'll pay over again—and you can buy a new copy!"

The juniors stared at Ponsonby. Knowing nothing of the secret of that particular copy of the Holiday Annual, they almost wondered whether Pon was wandering in his mind in making such an offer.

"You're willing to pay twice over for a book that you say is damaged!" said Harry Wharton. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say! Here's the money."

"This," said the Caterpillar, "beats me hollow! This is beyond my feeble intellectual powers. Can you guess what Pon's up to, Franky?"

Courtenay could only shake his head in blank wonder. Obviously, Pon had some motive—and a strong motive. But what it was, nobody could imagine.

"If Cherry's willing—" began the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth.

"Cherry's not willing!" said Bob curtly. "I don't know what Ponsonby's game is, and don't want to know; but he took my book by force from a Greyfriars fellow, and I'm going to take it back, and he can keep his dirty money. Will you hand over that book, Ponsonby?"

"No, I won't. And if you make a row here I'll call up a master!" said Ponsonby savagely.

"You must hand over Cherry's property, Ponsonby," said Courtenay. "If you call up Mr. Mobbs he will make you."

"No need for Mr. Mobbs to make him. I'll make him!" snorted Bob, and he made a jump at Ponsonby.

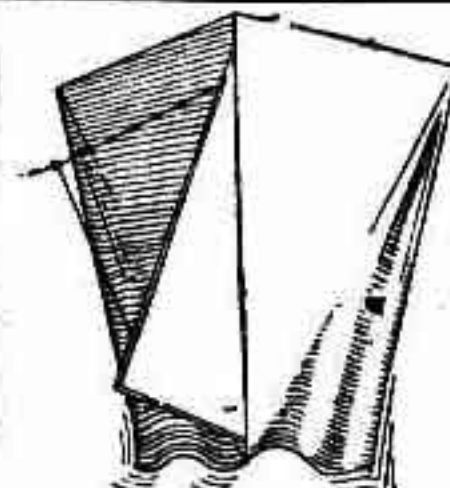
The next moment the Holiday Annual went to the floor as Ponsonby struggled furiously in Bob's powerful grasp.

Gadsby and Monson made a dive for it together. Harry Wharton shoved them back and picked up the volume. Bump!

Cecil Ponsonby went to the floor with a crash. He lay gasping on his back, Bob glaring down at him with gleaming eyes and clenched fists.

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Bob. "Get up and put up your hands! We'll jolly well see whether you'll bag my belongings and refuse to hand them over! Get up, you cur!"

(Continued on page 28.)



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ALLISON OF AVONSHIRE!

By JOHN BREARLEY



WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

Simon Allison, once part-owner of the great Allison Motor Works, invents a powerful supercharger. Spurred on by a thug named Valetti, Len Allison, the old man's nephew and "boss" of the works, enlists the services of a masked hunchback to steal the plans. The raid is carried out, and old Simon is badly battered. The "plans" the hunchback steals, however, are fakes. With his crippled father to support, Bill Allison, a crack left-handed bowler, leaves Mike Doyle, a mechanic, in charge of the workshop, and joins the county club as a pro. Bill very soon establishes himself as a match-winner. Later, the hunchback makes another attempt to steal the plans, but is beaten off. "The only thing we can do," says Mike Doyle boldly, "is to go to your cousin's house and scare the daylight out of him—unless you'd sooner I went alone!"

(Now read on.)

Surprise Number One!

THAT settled it. Bill Allison reddened. In a moment, whatever qualms he had entertained about Mike's bold plan—and they had been slight enough, anyway—were swept away.

Besides, he could see with half an eye that Mike—this strange, new, and rather ruthless Mike—was in no mood for further delay. Nor, if it came to that, was he himself. A sudden thrill ran through him at the prospect of tackling Len face to face. Maybe, as Mike said, drastic action now might put an end to the Allison feud and the vicious deeds of Valetti and the hunchback once and for all.

Without another word Bill squared his hefty shoulders and reached for his cap. Then, having helped to lock up cottage and workshop securely, he followed Mike silently out into the night.

The cathedral clock was just booming out its eleventh sonorous stroke when the firm of Allison & Doyle reached Avonport, both tired, both limping a little, but both filled with an iron determination.

Mike walked with his hat pulled well down to hide the strips of medical plaster on his cheek, and, as a slight drizzle was falling, the fact that he

had also turned up his coat collar as high as possible attracted no unwelcome attention from other passers-by.

Nevertheless, after hastily crossing the brightly lit High Street, Bill kept to the darker, less frequented roads, only checking his stride when at last the partners turned into a long, broad avenue in the best residential quarter of the town.

Large houses, set well back from the pavement, lined the avenue, with Len's, the largest, most opulent of all, stand-massively on a corner at the lower end. His place, indeed, was one of the most swagger residences in Avonport—a huge, detached, rather too ornate mansion, built in the days when his late father, Jacob Allison, had been at the zenith of power and prosperity.

A thick, laurel hedge, topped by densely foliated trees, screened it from the vulgar gaze. In the shadow of this bulwark Bill and Mike halted, staring long and keenly up and down the road. No one was in sight, however. With a nod Mike slipped in through the wrought-iron gate, Bill following, tense with excitement.

Inside curved a spacious, semi-circular lawn, surrounded by a wide gravel drive. Beyond that the house loomed up bulkily, all in darkness save for a soft rainbow splash of light floating out through the stained glass windows beside the door.

"H'm!" Mike chuckled cynically, and stepped on to the lawn. "Must cost Leonard a pretty penny to keep up this big dump. No wonder he's so hungry for cash. Well, come on—we'll have a look all round first."

Soft-footed, cool as an icicle, he led on. Bill's heart beat fast, though secretly he was thrilled to the core.

They stepped lightly across the gravel again and skirted a laurel shrubbery at the side of the house. There, however, a locked gate beside the garage barred the way, but Mike promptly surmounted that obstacle by shinning up the side wall. Cautiously he walked along the top, then dropped down on to a flower-bed, Bill following.

Before them stretched the spacious gardens of the house—dark, peaceful, and ending in a high wall—a blacker blur against the blackness of the night. For a minute or so the partners stood rigid, taking their bearings, and then, satisfied that there was no one about—not even a dog—to raise the alarm, they stole along the flagged path deeper into the grounds.

Almost immediately, however, Mike stopped again and pointed in mute inquiry to a single lighted window, high up in the top story of the house.

Bill edged a trifle closer.

"That's Len's study," he breathed. "I used to come here sometimes before the—the Allison feud broke out between dad and my uncle, so I know the place fairly well!"

"Good! Looks as though Len's in there!" Satisfaction glimmered in Mike's deep-set eyes. He turned, nodding towards the garden wall. "What's on the other side yonder?"

"Nothing—just a lane that leads down to the river, then open country. We're on the edge of the town now."

"I see! Nice, quiet back entrance, eh?" replied Mike meaningly. "All right, lad. Now we've looked round the house a bit let's go in and look at the master!"

"You're going to the front door?" exclaimed Bill, who had half-expected Mike, in his present reckless mood, to break into Len's place by other more lawless means.

His masterful pal nodded calmly.

"Sure. This is a real polite visit, ain't it?" he grinned, and led the way back.

Five minutes later Mike planted a horny thumb on the electric bell-push, and kept it there till the sound of agitated footsteps inside came to his ears.

Hastily the door was opened, and a stout, pasty-faced, sleepy-eyed man, in a shabby uniform, peered out, with a frown of surprise. Next moment, however, the butler's drowsiness vanished after a single scared blink at Mike's

lean, plastered face and gimlet eyes. Uttering a grunt of apprehension, he made as though to slam the door again forthwith.

But Bill was much too quick for him.

Out shot the lad's foot, and back swung the door once more, jolting the butler off his balance. Before he could recover, the determined visitors were inside the house, and this time the door was closed quietly.

"Why, you—you— How dare you? What does this outrage—?"

"Cut it out, Fatty!" Mike transfixed the frightened, spluttering servant with a chilly stare. "And don't raise your voice, either. Now, listen—we've come to see your boss, and we know he's in because there's a light in his window! So don't bother to give us any lies—get me?"

Stern and formidable, the mechanic towered over the man, who shrank away from him, muttering.

"But there's just something you can tell us before we go on up," continued the saturnine ex-racer. "We want to know if Mr. Allison has been out to-night with Mr. Valetti. If so, when did he go—and how long has he been back?"

The butler gasped. He seemed to have some difficulty in finding his voice again.

"I—I don't understand," he muttered. "What d'you mean, you ruffians? Neither Mr. Allison nor Mr. Valetti have set foot outside this house to-night. They've been discussing business in Mr. Allison's study since seven o'clock this evening. And—and they're still in there, confound you!"

House of Mystery!

"HEY?"

Bill and Mike uttered the same explosive ejaculation in exactly the same tone of helpless amazement. Bill, particularly, felt as though he had blundered straight into a stone wall in the dark.

Neither Len nor Valetti had been out all the evening! The news was a bombshell that shattered all Mike's theories.

If this butler was telling the truth—and shift-eyed beggar though he was he seemed to be too scared of Mike to be lying—then Corsica Phil Valetti certainly could not have been outside the Kelsey cottage, with Joe the Hump, round about eight-thirty! And that despite the clue of the Turkish cigarette-end!

Had someone else dropped it there, after all? Was it just a tantalising coincidence? Bill had to admit to himself then that he was in deep water. All this mystery, this tangled web of conflicting evidence, gave him the feeling of being right out of his depth.

Then, suddenly, Mike's short, unpleasant laugh broke in on his thoughts. His hard-bitten partner had taken a grip on the lapels of the butler's coat, and was rocking the man, gently but firmly, to and fro.

"Oh, they haven't been out, eh? Neither of 'em?" he drawled. "H'm, and let me see—you're the fellow, I reckon, who swore that neither of 'em had been out of this house on a certain night when Mr. Simon Allison, of Kelsey, was assaulted and robbed! D'ye remember?" Mike shot the question at him sharply. "Ye-es, I can see you do! And now you're giving us the same old tale again, eh?"

The butler panted, and tried hard to free himself from Mike's grip and disguise his obvious trepidation.

"What I've told you is true," he growled sullenly. "And it was true that other time! I tell you both Mr. Allison and Mr. Valetti came in at seven o'clock, and went straight to the study. At half-past, I took them up some sandwiches and coffee. Mr. Leonard told me then that on no account whatever were they to be disturbed." The man broke off, to glower defiantly at his questioners. "And since then, I'll swear, neither have come out of the study once, and the light's been burning all the time. It still is. And—and they're still up there, you—"

"Never mind the compliments, Fatty!"

Mike gazed pensively at the floor; Bill gazed at Mike. Although his partner's face was imperturbable as ever, the young cricketer guessed that he was utterly nonplussed. He had been so positive that Corsica Phil had played his part in the night's raid. And now—

"Huh, looks as though we're up against another cast-iron alibi, eh, lad?" growled the Irishman moodily.

A moment later his teeth met with a resolute click.

"All right—Len and Valetti are upstairs, so we haven't wasted our time. We'll still have a little heart-to-heart talk with them, anyway!" he snorted. "Go ahead, Fatty! Lead the way. And don't dawdle, either, unless you want me to get cross!"

Thus, with the "visitors" close on his heels, the badly rattled man shuffled across the hall. Up three flights of stairs marched the queer little procession, their feet making no sound on the thick pile carpet. Then came a corridor, leading to the back of the house. At the end of this the butler halted and pointed nervously to a closed door.

"The master's study!" he whispered. Without a word, Mike thrust past him and put his ear to a panel.

A slight frown creased his brow. Though he listened intently, he could hear nothing, neither Valetti's brassy voice, with its slight foreign lisp, or Len's, with its throaty "Oxford" accent. He darted a grim look at the shrinking butler, and nodded to Bill, who promptly crossed to his side.

Next Week's

BUMPER BILL OF FARE!

Topping the list is an extra-special holiday story by FRANK RICHARDS entitled:

"THE GREYFRIARS HIKERS!"

in which all your favourite characters appear prominently. Bunter? Oh, yes, he's there, too—"hiking" in every limb! Don't miss this scream of a yarn, whatever you do.

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"ALLISON OF AVONSHIRE!"

and more interesting tit-bits of information concerning Harry Wharton & Co. in the

"GREYFRIARS HERALD,"

not forgetting "A FIRE'S" interesting answers to readers' cricket queries.

Make sure of your copy by ordering it NOW!—Ed.

The tall youngster was in a fever of impatience now. At last he was about to come face to face with his cousin and Phil Valetti, and the prospect made his every muscle tingle.

"Carry on!" he grunted.

Mike turned the handle sharply, flung the door open wide, and both strode into the room together.

And both stopped dead in their tracks! For, although the air was heavy with the stale reek of Turkish tobacco, and two empty plates and coffee-cups stood on the table, Len's study was deserted.

Of its owner and Corsica Phil Valetti there was no sign!

The Secret of the Study!

FOR the first time in his life young Bill Allison was privileged—or, rather, startled out of his skin—to see Cannonball Mike Doyle's hot Irish temper flare up and boil right over!

One bitter glance the ex-racer flung into the empty room. Then, beside himself with anger and disappointment, he seized the butler by the shoulders, and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Ye fat thief of the world!" he roared, in pure Irish brogue. "So ye'll be after lyin' to me, will ye? Be gosh, me fine bluffer, I'll knock the fat head off ye, so I will, and—"

"Chuck it, Mike!" Hastily Bill stepped in, gripping a steel-muscle arm just in time. "Have a heart! Can't you see—this fellow's just as surprised the room's empty as we are! Here's another proper mystery now!"

The young Avonshire star was right. If ever a man had honest bewilderment written large on his features, that man was Len Allison's butler.

Scared stiff though he was, there was no doubt that he had expected to find his master and Corsica Phil Valetti in that study, and their absence was as great a shock to him as it was to the exasperated Mike.

"I—I can't understand it!" gurgled the butler, cowering under Mike's burning eyes. "Honest, I swear I never heard them come out. And—and I've been listening carefully, waiting to lock up and go to bed the moment Mr. Valetti left the house. I—I—"

"Are they in any other part of the place?" asked Bill quietly, though he knew what the answer would be.

The butler shook his head like a man in a daze.

Bill and Mike exchanged significant glances.

All their suspicions, which had suffered a temporary check, were awake again now. They felt they were treading on firmer ground. Why had Len and Valetti entrenched themselves in the study, apparently for the evening, and then sneaked out of the house so unobtrusively that not even a vigilant servant knew they had gone? And why the study-light left burning?

As Mike said, everything pointed to careful preparations of yet another cast-iron alibi!

"Uh-huh! So we're on the trail of some queer work at last, eh?" nodded Mike, relapsing into his old coolness. "Bill, I'm glad we came here to-night. I've an idea we're going to find out something interesting yet! Fatty!" He gave the butler a look that made him wince. "Are you absolutely sure they haven't gone out?"

"If—if they did, I didn't hear them! Honestly!" stammered the man. "I'd have heard them if they'd gone out of

the front door. And to go through the side door, they'd have to pass my room. I—I don't understand."

"So you said before. Well, they've gone out. And unless they flew out of the window—in which case they'd have broken their necks—how th' blazes did they go out?" growled Mike.

Slowly he began to pace up and down, examining the study with quick, restless glances. No one spoke. The only sound was the soft pad, pad of his feet on the thick carpet.

Like his partner, Bill had a queer feeling that something important would happen yet—though what, how, and when was beyond him. There was something about this room where Len and Valetti met to "discuss business," and then vanished into thin air, that got on the lad's overstrained nerves.

It was a large, sombrely-furnished apartment, richly panelled in old dark oak. Two portly armchairs were placed in front of the cavernous fireplace, and a ponderous, well-filled bookcase extended almost the length of one wall. On the opposite side, close to the window, stood Len's large, old-fashioned bureau, and the sight of this brought a somewhat piratical gleam into Mike's eyes.

For a moment, to the obvious horror of the quaking butler, the mechanic looked as though he had half a mind to force the lock and search the desk. Indeed, his hand was already in his pocket, fumbling for his knife, when Bill awoke to action.

In one long, noiseless stride, the youngster sprang to Mike's side, eyes blazing with sudden, wild excitement. His left hand jerked stiffly into the air in a fierce gesture of warning. With the other, he gripped Mike's arm and swung him round.

"In the corner by the bookcase!" he hissed, and his big fists swung up, clenched and ready.

Someone was entering the room at last. But—not through the door!

As Mike crouched and whipped a hand to his hip-pocket, a panel opened in the wall, sliding back into its socket behind the bookcase, with scarcely a sound.

Another moment, and Len Allison stood framed in the narrow aperture, while over his shoulder appeared the hard, swarthy face of his sinister confederate, Corsica Phil Valetti!

(Watch out for some startling developments in next week's thrilling chapters of this popular sporting story.)

MICKY, THE SPRAT!

(Continued from page 25.)

"We've got it, old bean," said Harry. Ponsonby panted.

"That's not the book!" he gasped desperately. "That's another copy—"

"It's got a lot of scorched pages, and you said that Bob's book had got scorched," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "And here are Bunter's fingerprints all over it! What are you telling lies for?"

Ponsonby staggered to his feet. He was quite desperate at the prospect of losing the book before he had discovered its secret.

"Give me that book!" he panted. "I tell you—"

"Rats!"

"The ratfulness is terrific!"

"What the thump can there be about that special copy of the Holiday Annual?" asked Courtenay, in wonder.

"What do you want it for, Ponsonby?"

"That's my business. I'm going to have it! Hand over that book, Wharton, you hound!" yelled Ponsonby, and as the captain of the Remove replied only with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, Pon ran at him with clenched fists.

Bob Cherry stepped in.

"You will have it!" he said grimly.

And Pon had it! He had it right and left! For two or three minutes Pon put up a fight that amazed his friends and his enemies. But it booted not. Knocked right and left, Pon went down at last.

"Want any more?" roared Bob.

A groan was the only answer.

"Better cut," said Nugent.

And the Greyfriars fellows left the study, Bob with the disputed volume under his arm. Courtenay and the Caterpillar walked down to the gates with them, the former apologetic, the latter deeply perplexed. Ponsonby sat up, groaning.

"Well, that's that!" said Gadsby.

"After all, it was a bit thick, bagging a fellow's book, Pon! You couldn't expect him to stand it."

"Gone now, anyhow," said Monson.

Ponsonby dragged himself to his feet. He leaned on the table.

"I'll get it back!" he muttered thickly. "I'll get it back again from that rotter! Oh, my eye! Oh, my nose! Ow!"

"Better go and bathe 'em, old bean!" said Gadsby.

Which was good advice, and Pon acted on it. But his eye and his nose

remained in a highly decorative state for a long time to come.

Greyfriars School broke up for the summer holidays a few days later.

Harry Wharton & Co., before they left, had a little more news of the smash-and-grab merchants. Alfred Parker, alias, Micky the Sprat, and 'Skid' Smith were sent for trial, and as the result of that trial was a foregone conclusion, neither was likely to be seen in public again for a year or two, at least.

Questioned by the police, Micky the Sprat maintained his story that he had dropped the bag of plunder while swimming in the river. Nevertheless, search for it went on, up and down and round about the route that the rascal had followed in his flight.

Mr. Lazarus took his loss with great philosophy—no doubt because it was covered by insurance. The Courtfield and County Assurance Co., probably, felt a little less philosophical on the subject.

In a few days, as Ponsonby had astutely calculated, there was a reward offered for the discovery of the lost jewellery, the sum of £50 being offered by the insurance company to the lucky finder.

Pon gritted his teeth when he heard of it.

Had that "Holiday Annual" been still in his hands he was assured that he would have penetrated its secret and picked up the £50 reward. And he told Gadsby and Monson, with savage emphasis, that he would still get hold of it.

"Those rotters are goin' hikin' these hols," said Pon. "Easy enough to find out where they go! We'll go hikin' too—and we'll rush their camp one night. And that's that!"

And Gadsby and Monson—very keen on that £50 reward—agreed that it was not a bad wheeze.

Blissfully ignorant of those hostile intentions on the part of their old enemies, Harry Wharton & Co. went home for the holidays, to meet again in a few more days for the "hike." And that hike was destined to turn out the most exciting hike ever!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the next yarn in this grand holiday series. It's entitled: "THE GREY-FRIARS HIKERS!" You can only make sure of reading it by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

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No. 46 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

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THE NEW Greyfriars Herald

EXTRA GOOD EDITION

STOP PRESS RADIO MESSAGE

SOS! Launch a lifeboat! Dabney and Fry have just threatened to change places in our punt—C. R. Temple, Somewhere on the Broads, Norfolk.

£10 REWARD

The above sum will be paid (in I.O.U.'s) to any reader recommending a really reliable hammock that won't collapse as soon as I sit in it.—W. G. Bunter, Box No. 84, "Greyfriars Herald."

MAKING POTATO-SCRAPINGS OF HIM



Two minutes later a couple of kitchen hands were observed staggering out of the side door, carrying a bath-load of potato-scrappings.

Reverently (states our correspondent) I raised my hat, then, in a state of considerable alarm, went in to look for fishy. What penalty the law would exact from fishy for making potato-scrappings of a man I knew not, but it was bound to be a pretty severe one.

Much to my surprise the "guy" I had supposed to be reposing in the dustbin in the form of potato-scrappings was still alive and kicking. But there wasn't much kick left in fishy, who was discovered sneaking towards the exit, tenderly nursing his jaw.

"Didn't you make potato-scrappings of the guy?" I inquired.

"Now-ow! No, I guess not!" moaned fishy. "I figured I'd make potato-scrappings of him all right. But he made potato-scrappings of me instead!"

Fishy has gone right off fish and chips now!

AS OTHERS SEE THEM

What I Think of James Walker

By SIR JIMMY VIVIAN

You don't need to tell me a Remover chap's got an awful nerve to start writing about a Sixth-Former—I know it already! If we were not breaking up for the holidays, I'd think twice about it.

Walker's reputation at Greyfriars is not of the best. Most chaps would tell you he's a smoky cad and a bullying outsider and leave it at that. But I feel I shouldn't be doing justice to Walker by simply putting it in that way.

As most of you know, although I'm a real live baronet, I was brought up in the slums. I don't mind telling you that Walker of Greyfriars compares very favourably with most of the fellows I used to know in those days!

Understanding Walker is as easy as falling off a log. He's more fool than knave—that's all. There's a strain of weakness in Walker. Probably he's

LESSON FOR ROAD HOGS

REMOVITE'S RACING ADVICE

From the north-east coast comes news of an exciting road-side adventure in which four Greyfriars men figure prominently.

We say "men," but it would probably be more correct to say two men and two women. Penfold and Newland belonging to the former category, and Angel and Kenney of the latter!

Penfold and Newland were cycling. Angel and Kenney were motorizing in one of Angel's pater's big cars. Angel, who was at the wheel, recognised the Remover fellows pedalling along in front of him and thought he'd indulge in his own peculiar brand of humour. Sounding his horn in a series of terrifying blasts he accelerated wildly and bore down on the cyclists as though his car was completely out of control. Penfold and Newland gave one startled look over their shoulders and pedalled blindly into the hedge to avoid being run over.

They were unseated and flung into the ditch, but they didn't mind that much, thinking them-

Penfold and Newland went along in Angel's car to the nearest police-station and saw the hold-up man safely disposed of. Then they had a brief interview with Angel and Kenney. The Fourth-Formers were smiling sticky smiles when they came out of the station.

"Awwfully kind of you chaps!" Aubrey Angel remarked. "Thanks, mummy!"

"Quite a pleasure!" Penfold retorted calmly. "Personally, I'm glad to have had the opportunity of teaching a couple of tenth-rate road hogs that cyclists have their uses sometimes, and are not to be altogether despised! Think we ought to rub the lesson in, Newland?"

"I'm jolly sure of it!" grinned Newland.

So they rubbed the lesson in—by rubbing the road hogs' respective noses in the dust! Somehow we fancy Angel and Kenney aren't likely to go road-hogging again this year!

SURPRISING ZOO DISCOVERY

You can't dodge the old, familiar faces (writes Harold Skimmer, from an address in London).

Only yesterday, while on a visit to the Zoo, I unexpectedly ran into another chap from the Greyfriars Remove. I had just walked up to a den of sea-lions and was gazing at them with that whimsical interest which my friends know to be one of my outstanding characteristics (can it, you fathered I—Ed.) when something attracted my attention particularly to one of the beasts. It must have been something in the creature's expression, something almost human.

"Now where have I seen that brute before?" I asked myself.

It couldn't have been at the Zoo, this being my first visit for ages. I tried to recall previous encounters with sea-lions, and could only bring to mind seeing a trained one in a circus at Courtfield last year—and this wasn't that one. It seemed impossible that I could ever have met this particular sea-lion before, and yet there was something familiar about it.

I looked at it hard. The beast's expression was fearfully pathetic and my humanitarian instincts surged upwards with a rush. Taking from my waistcoat pocket the portion of halibut I had brought with me for my own lunch, I flung it through the bars. The sea-lion grabbed it wolfishly and ate it as though he hadn't had a meal for days.

"Poor old fellow!" I cried, sympathetically.

"I should jolly well think so, too!" said the sea-lion, greatly to my astonishment. "I say, Skimmer, old chap, do you know, I've been in this cage for two solid hours and they haven't brought me a scrap of tuck yet!"

"Bunter!" I yelled, recognising the

DICKY NUGENT'S WEEKLY WISDOM

"Sea-lion" at last. I thought there was something about you! What a t o n e a r t h a r e y o u d o i n g t h e r e ?"

"Some dashed silly keeper shoved me here!" snorted Bunter. "One of the sea-lions has escaped and he mistook me for it, if you ever heard such rot! Go and tell them you know me, there's a good chap!"

Of course, I trotted off immediately and explained the mistake to an official. He was extremely reluctant to part with Bunter at first; but after a great deal of difficulty, I convinced him that his captive was a human being and not a sea-lion, and he gave orders for Bunter's release. Some chaps may think I'm exaggerating slightly. But nobody who knows my strict regard for the truth will doubt what I say for a moment!

(We happen to know that Bunter hasn't been anywhere near the Zoo this week. But if he had been, we'd be quite willing to believe Skimmer's fanciful yarn!—Ed.)

POTTED INFORMATION

By Our Staff Lunatic

Gosling, the school porter, has a distinct recollection of Henry VIII visiting the school. It is said that after taking one long look at Gosling's face, Henry never smiled again.

The Ghost of Greyfriars is a headless monk which is said to haunt the school ruins at the time of the full moon. Mumble, the gardener, has often seen it late at night when returning from visits to the Cross Keys.

The paper used weekly in making the "Greyfriars Herald" is long enough to stretch once round the earth, and would make almost a complete chapter of Mr. Quelch's "History of Greyfriars."

There is a flower-bed near the gates where no flowers will ever grow. It is generally understood that Lord of the Sixth once looked at it.

Countdown was rocked from end to end recently by a tremendous earthquake. Bunter had slipped up on a banana skin in the High Street.

HE BROUGHT TEARS TO THEIR EYES!

We are informed that Hoskins' recent recital of popular old sentimental songs was a very moving performance.

By the time Hoskins had finished, practically the entire audience had moved!

WE'VE GOT THEM, TOO!

Ogilvy says that one of the principal attractions in Scotland this August is a balloon race.

But why go to Scotland? You can see a jolly good race of balloons in England, if it comes to that—the Bunter family!

CAN YOU CANOE?

If you want to learn, by all means do so. But we advise you to have nothing to do with the so-called "Redskin chief" Fisher T. Fish is exploiting as a canoe instructor at Margate this year.

We don't mind telling you that Fishy's protégé knows as much about canoeing as we know about Sanskrit. Furthermore, he's not even a Redskin. The fact is, he's an Englishman from Courtfield, and his name is not Running Water, as Fishy announces, but Turner Tappe.

LONZY'S LITTLE LETTERS

Dear Editor.—One of the problems besetting those ubiquitous propagandists of pedal peregrinations colloquially designated "bikers" is, what species of habiliments to assume for the purpose of their perambulations.

I would suggest that an equilibrium between the extremes of a protective superabundance liable to generate an inordinate increment in audacious activity and a deficiency of attire calculated to stimulate the desideratum. But I would add to this one word of caution designed to appeal to all juveniles endowed with a prudent disposition: **WEATHER YOUR LITTLE CHEST PROTECTOR.**

Recreatively yours,
ALONZO TODD.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



Under pressure from Wingate, Skimmer & Co. set out on a five-mile run. They finished almost on their hands and knees—an hour behind the winner, Harry Wharton!

Bob Cherry is the squash racket champion of the Lower School. Squash is a very fast game, calling for plenty of stamina—and, Bob always has plenty of that!

When he was in the sanatorium sitting from a cold, Bunter was allowed breakfast in bed, which he tends with junior care. Who better than Bunter to do that when well!

Mr. Frost has an unusual collection of sporting guns—jellies of old days in the "Rocking"—which he tends with junior care. Who better than Bunter to do that when well!

Coker, of the Fifth, firmly believes he should be made a prefect. He has often ordered laces about him—but a pen-shooter cured him when he tried it on Dicky Nugent!

(Lonzy has solved the problem of What to Wear When Hitting in his own inimitable way. But with the exception of his last remark about chest protectors, we're not a bit the wiser!—Ed.)