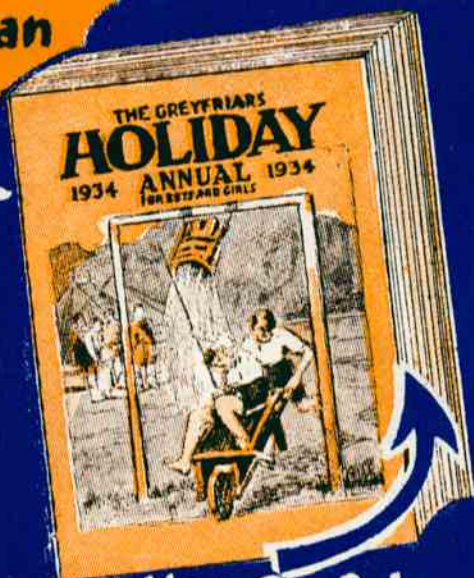


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THE HUNTED HIKERS!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Catching Tartars!

"OLD ON!"

The Greyfriars hikers held on. That sudden, hoarse hail from the shadows rather startled them.

Exactly where they were, Harry Wharton & Co. did not know, except that it was somewhere in Wiltshire.

They had had a long hike that afternoon, and all the party, except Billy Bunter, had agreed to keep on till they "hit" the Thames.

Fellows who did not live in that part of the country seldom had a chance of seeing the little stream which was the source of the mighty river that rolled under London Bridge. They were quite keen to see Father Thames in his babyhood, so to speak.

The weather was fine; a glorious sunset was followed by a fine starry evening. But after dark the way became a little doubtful. They had to head north to "hit" the Thames somewhere near Cricklade. They hoped they were now heading north. But a possibility existed that they were heading east or west, or even south. One country lane seemed very much alike another, and signposts were few. Short cuts by footpaths across meadows, instead of simplifying the matter, rather added to the difficulties.

Still, hiking was hiking, wherever it led, and the chums of the Greyfriars Remove hiked on cheerily. Billy Bunter, as usual, grunted and grouched in the rear. Bunter did not specially want to see the Thames. He would not willingly have walked a quarter of a

mile to see the Ganges or the Orinoco. What Bunter wanted was a rest, and a supper. Every few minutes Bunter suggested camping. He had started his suggestions a quarter of an hour after the afternoon's march had started. The other hikers turned a deaf ear—or, to be more exact, six pairs of deaf ears.

But they halted as a hoarse voice came from the shadows of the tall hedge beside the lane and requested them to "old on!"

Billy Bunter sat down at once, Bunter was good at sitting down. If a hike could have been done sitting down, Bunter would have been an enthusiastic hiker. Lord Mauleverer followed his example. Mauly was always ready for a rest. But the Famous Five of the Remove stood and looked at the figure that emerged from the shadows of the hedge.

It was deeply dusky in that Wiltshire lane, overhung by trees, in spite of the bright stars. But they made out a powerfully built man, with a thick, bull neck, swathed in a red-spotted muffler that could have been seen on the darkest night. Under one brawny arm he had a large stick, with a big knob at the end. His stubby face was in need of a shave, and still more in need of a wash. His best friend would not have called him a handsome man. He stood in the path of the schoolboy hikers, and scanned them with two little piggy eyes, sharply. Harry Wharton & Co. had happened on a good many tramps during that summer hike, and they realised now that they had happened on the most unpleasant-looking one of the lot.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob

Cherry cheerily. "Want anything, old bean?"

"You've got it, sir!" said the red-spotted man.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Harry.

The big tramp grinned.

"Anything you might 'appen to 'ave about you," he answered. And he slipped the big, knobby stick down into a horny hand in a very significant way.

"Yes, you look that sort," said Bob Cherry, with a nod. "I guessed that one the moment I saw you."

"The guessfulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh; a remark that made the footpad start and blink at the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Will you have it now," inquired Johnny Bull, "or when you can get it?"

"I'll 'ave it now, and I'll 'ave it sharp!" said the big man. "You come along and wake up a bloke when he's jest settled down for the night. I never was a violent man—not me!—but I don't mind telling you that I'll crack your 'eads all round if you don't 'and it over!"

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Billy Bunter, in great alarm.

The Owl of the Remove scrambled up in haste ready to retreat. Lord Mauleverer picked himself up in a more leisurely way, ready to join in the scrap. Although the hulking tramp did not suspect it, he was booked for the scrap of his life before he succeeded in robbing the Greyfriars hikers.

"You're all right, Bunter," said Bob Cherry reassuringly. "If our heads are going to be cracked, it won't be a new experience for you. Yours has been cracked for a long time."

—STARRING HARRY WHARTON & CO., OF GREYFRIARS!

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Iking, I s'pose?" said the red-spotted man, staring at the juniors.

"Just that," said Frank Nugent. "You're right—or nearly right. We call it hiking ourselves."

"Well, down with them packs," said the red-spotted man—"and sharp! I'll look through 'em! And turn out your pockets! You look as if you'd got some spondulicks."

"I'll tell you what," said Bob Cherry genially. "If you can put us on the right road for Cricklade, we'll stand you a shilling."

"You keep on, and take a dozen turnings, some right and some left, and I dessey you'll get to Cricklade about morning," answered the big man. "And don't worry about the shillin'. I fancy this 'ere job is going to be worth more than that."

He came a little closer to the hikers, gripping his big cudgel.

"Down with them packs!" he snapped.

The big tramp towered over the schoolboys, sturdy as they all were. And the knobby stick looked dangerous. And there was no doubt that the red-spotted man was going to use it, if he met with resistance. But the Greyfriars hikers were tougher propositions than he fancied.

Bob Cherry unslung his rucksack.

There were plenty of things packed in the rucksack, including a Holiday Annual, which was rather a solid article in itself. Unslung it, Bob held it by the straps.

"Look here!" roared Johnny Bull. "Are you taking orders from that frowy waster?"

"Must give the man what he's asked for, old bean," answered Bob mildly.

"That's sense, that is," said the big man. "If I 'ave to land you one with this here stick, you'll know it! Blow me pink!"

"I'll jolly well—" began Johnny Bull wrathfully.

"That's enough from you," said the red-spotted man truculently. "Any more from you, and you get a wallop—see? I'm going to—Whooooop!"

He broke off with a howl as Bob Cherry's well-laden rucksack whirled through the air, and caught him on the side of his bull neck.

The tramp did not seem to have expected that. As is so often the case, it was the unexpected that happened.

Ho staggered over. He would have recovered his balance in a moment, and then, no doubt, the big stick would have got to work. But he was not granted the necessary moment. Harry Wharton's clenched fist landed on his unshaven chin, and he sat down in the lane. Frank Nugent and Lord Mauleverer grasped him, and rolled him on his back. Johnny Bull jumped on him immediately, landing on his chest, and there was a gasp from him like the air escaping from a punctured tyre. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grabbed his stick from his hand, and flung it over the tree-tops.

The next moment the red-spotted man was struggling fiercely. But he struggled in the grasp of six pairs of strong hands, and they were much too much for him. For several hectic minutes the big tramp heaved under the hikers like an earthquake. Then, with his arms and legs firmly held, his tousled hair was grasped by Bob, who proceeded to bang his head on Wiltshire.

Evidently the tramp found Wiltshire hard. Fearful yells and roars came

from him as his head smote again and again on that celebrated county.

"Ow! Ooogh! Chuck it! Blow me pink! Woo-hoo! I give in! Let a bloke alone! Oh, my 'ead! Oh, jiming! Ow!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Man Down!

I SAY, you fellows!" It was a yell from Billy Bunter. "I say—Yaroooh! Help!"

The fat Owl of the Remove was out of sight, and out of mind, till his frantic yell reminded the hikers of his existence.

While six hikers were handling the red-spotted man, Billy Bunter had backed away in the darkness. Bunter disliked tramps at close quarters. He disliked the idea of that big stick landing on his fat person, or his fat head. Leaving the other fellows to deal with the ruffian, Bunter backed away, and, unfortunately, backed over the edge of the ditch at the side of the dim and dusky lane. Quite unintentionally Bunter sat down in the ditch.

Luckily it was a dry ditch. But though there was no water in it, there were weeds and nettles—especially nettles. And thistles! Billy Bunter sat on a bunch of thistles, and sprawled over in the stinging-nettles! And then

Harry Wharton & Co. are on "tramp"—and everywhere they go, mysterious tramps follow them! You will discover why when you read this lively tip-top story of the Greyfriars chums on a hiking holiday!

the voice of Bunter, like that of the turtle of old, was heard in the land, and heard on its top note.

It passed unheeded by the Famous Five and Mauly. They had their hands full for some minutes with the tramp. And when the red-spotted man ceased at last to resist, and gasped and gurgled instead, they still held him fast. They had him down, and he was so big and so very brawny, and so very savage, that they were rather dubious about letting him get up again.

"I say, you fellows," yelled Bunter, "I've fallen in the ditch!"

"Got him!" said Bob Cherry.

"Got the rotter!" panted Johnny Bull.

"The gotfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, come and help me out!" shrieked Bunter. "I say, I tell you I'm in the ditch!"

"That's all right," called back Bob. "Nobody else wants the ditch, Bunter. You can have it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" yelled Bunter.

"Hold this brute!" said Harry Wharton breathlessly. "I've barked my knuckles on his beastly chin! Bang his head again if he wriggles."

"You bet!" grinned Bob.

"Let a bloke gerrup!" yelled the tramp. "I'll smash yer! I'll out yer! You mark my words—"

"I'll mark your napper instead!" said Bob, and taking the tramp by his tousled mop again, he banged Wiltshire.

"Yooo-hooo-hooooop!"

"That enough?" asked Bob genially.

"Ooogh! My 'ead! You wait till

I get loose!" panted the ruffian. "You can't 'old me 'ere all night, and as soon as I get loose, look out to 'ave your teeth knocked out!"

"Nice man!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

"I say, you fellows!" Yell from Bunter, as he struggled in the ditch. It was only four or five feet deep, but that was more than enough for Bunter. "Come and help me out!"

"We're looking after our friend here," answered Lord Mauleverer. "You might keep quiet, Bunter, old bean! This fellow is makin' row enough."

"Beast!"

Bunter was heard rolling and scrambling. There was a sound of a bump. Apparently he had tumbled back into the ditch after trying to clamber out. A fendish yell announced more nettles.

"Now," said Bob, "what are we going to do with this beauty? He says he's going to do a lot of dentist work if we let him get up. I don't know what you fellows think, but I'd rather leave my teeth where they are."

"Same here!" chuckled Nugent. "Bang his head till he promises to be good!"

"Bang!"

"Yarooop!"

"Will you be good now, Weary Willy?" asked Bob.

"You wait till I gerrup! You jest wait!" yelled the tramp. "Oh, won't I black your eyes! Won't I smash your smellers! Won't I knock your teeth through the back of your 'eads! Blow me pink!"

"That doesn't sound like promising to be good!" said Bob. "I'm not sure he'd keep a promise, either! I've got a sort of impression that he's a rather unscrupulous sort of chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm stung!" came Bunter's yell from the darkness. "I say, this ditch is full of nettles!"

"You can have them all, old fat bean. Now, look here, you men," said Bob. "We can't sit on this gentleman all night, as he has pointed out. I'm ready for a rest, but I don't want to camp on a dirty waistcoat. But we can't let him extract our teeth, as he has undertaken to do—not to mention our eyes and noses, that he seems rather keen on! I think we'd better tie his fins."

"Good egg! Here's a rag that will do," said Frank Nugent, jerking off the crimson-spotted neckcloth.

"Jolly good idea!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Put his paws behind him, and tie him up."

"You let a man go!" roared the tramp, struggling again. "I tell yer, I'll smash you all up into little bits the minute I get on my feet."

"What an inducement to let him go!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hikers did not let him go. They rolled him over, pinning him down, and dragged his hands forcibly behind him. The red-spotted muffer was wound round his brawny wrists and knotted, and knotted, and knotted, till it seemed nearly all knots. By the time the knotting was finished, it was certain that the ruffian would never be able to get his hands loose without assistance. Having thus prevented him from doing any further damage, the hikers left him gasping in the road and turned their attention at last to William George Bunter. Bunter's voice had formed an incessant accompaniment to the proceedings; like the unending melody of Wagnerian music, though perhaps not quite so melodious.

Wharton flashed on an electric torch, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,334.

and the fat Owl was revealed, struggling in the thick herbage in the ditch. He was dusty, he was stung, and he was breathless, and he was boiling with wrath and indignation.

"Beasts!" he roared. "Can't you help a fellow out? Catch me coming hiking with you again! Beasts!"

"Serve you jolly well right, you fat funk!" growled Johnny Bull. "You were backing out of the scrap instead of lending a hand with that hulking brute!"

"Beast!"

"Well, out you come!" said Bob Cherry, reaching down. "Put your silly head this way, and give me hold of your ear—"

"Leave my ear alone!" roared Bunter. "You silly idiot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and grasped an extended fat hand and dragged. Billy Bunter came rolling out of the ditch at last and collapsed in the lane, gurgling.

"Hallo, look out!" exclaimed Wharton, flashing the light round.

The tramp had struggled to his feet. He could not use his hands, but it seemed to have occurred to him to use his feet. He tramped across to the group of juniors by the ditch, his little piggy eyes gleaming with ferocity, and he was landing out with a large and heavy foot when Wharton spotted him. The juniors dodged the kick promptly, and Bob Cherry grabbed the extended leg, catching hold of a tattered trouser end.

"Got him!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Blow me pink!" gasped the red-spotted man, hopping wildly on one leg. "Leggo! I'm going over—"

"You are!" agreed Bob, giving the uplifted leg a jerk. The ruffian went over headlong into the ditch vacated by Bunter. A fearful yell announced that he, like Bunter, had found thistles and nettles there!

"That's that!" said Bob. "We may as well be getting on. You can have the ditch to yourself, Weary Willy; Bunter's done with it!"

A stream of lurid remarks answered from the ditch. With his hands tied behind him, the tramp found it harder to scramble out than Bunter had done.

"Come on," said Harry Wharton. "Come on, Bunter!"

"Beast! I can't move!" howled Bunter. "I've broken my leg falling into that ditch!"

"Good-bye, then. See you next term at Greyfriars."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Sure you can't walk, Bunter?" asked Bob.

"Owl! Yes!"

"Then I hope you made your will before you left Bunter Court! If you're still there when that tramp gets out of the ditch, I don't think he'll leave a lot of you. Come on, you men!"

The hikers marched on.

There was a patter of feet behind them. The bare idea of remaining on the spot till the enraged tramp got out of the ditch was enough for Bunter. He found that he could not only walk, after all, but run! And for a considerable distance after that Billy Bunter did not lag behind.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Wrong Way!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! That's a car!"

"Thank goodness!"

Headlights gleaming through the deepening gloom of night

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flashed suddenly on the eyes of the tired hikers. For a long time they had seen nobody but the man they had left behind in the ditch. They were quite glad to see a car, and to get a chance of asking their way. Not only Bunter was tired by this time, but all the party, and they were thinking of giving up the Thames for that night and camping. After all, as Bob Cherry remarked, the Thames would still be there on the morrow. Still, it was quite possible that they were within an easy march of Cricklade; and they hailed the car as it came, to get information.

"Hold on!" bawled Bob Cherry.

The group of dusty hikers stood full in view, in the glare of the headlights as the car came on. Behind the glaring lights, however, the car and its occupants were almost unseen. They had a dim glimpse of a chauffeur driving, and three hats in the car behind him. The horn honked loudly; but as the car drew nearer it slowed, and they heard an exclamation in a familiar voice:

"That crew!"

It was the voice of Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe. He stood up in the car staring out at the hikers. His comrades, Gadsby and Monson, stared, too.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That Highcliffe lot! Have they been following us across Hampshire and Berkshire? Pon's a stickler, and no mistake."

The hikers chuckled. It was a good many days since they had seen Pon & Co., and the last meeting had been in Sussex. They had wondered sometimes whether the Highcliffe trio were still hunting them. It was not an easy task to track the hikers, hiking across country by any route that happened to take their fancy. But Ponsonby of Highcliffe was undoubtedly a stickler. Here he was again!

"So I've found you again!" said Ponsonby, his eyes gleaming at the dusty hikers.

"The foundfulness is terrific, my esteemed and rotten Ponsonby!" answered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Still after that jolly old Holiday Annual?" grinned Bob Cherry. He tapped his rucksack. "I've got it here, old bean!"

"I say, you fellows, let's ask 'em if there's an inn near!" groaned Billy Bunter. "My legs are dropping off!"

"Lost your way?" asked Ponsonby.

"Well, we're heading for Cricklade," said Harry. "But we don't seem to have got there. We stopped your car to ask the way—but I suppose it's no use asking you."

"Why not?" said Ponsonby. "We're not friends; but I suppose I can tell a fellow his way if he's lost it. We've just come from Cricklade, as it happens. Keep on about a quarter of a mile, and turn to the left at the crossroads, and you'll be there in about twenty minutes."

He sat down and signed to the chauffeur to drive on.

The hikers stood out of the way, and the green Austin car shot onward again.

Bob Cherry stared after it.

"May not be after us, after all," he said. "It's jolly obliging of Pon to tell us our way, considering! I rather wished I hadn't chipped him about that jolly old Holiday Annual now! But who'd have expected him to give us a tip?"

"I say, you fellows, come on, I'm almost dropping!" groaned Bunter.

The rear light of the car vanished. Harry Wharton & Co. resumed their way. They tramped on through the dusky night, and reached the crossroads mentioned by Ponsonby. There they

turned to the left, as instructed, and hiked on, hoping and expecting every moment to see the lights of Cricklade.

But no lights broke the gloom of the summer night. The lane they were following narrowed, and dwindled, and ended at last in a gateway, with a rough track continuing it beyond over what looked like pasture land.

"We've been a good bit more than twenty minutes," remarked Nugent, "and—this doesn't look like the way to a town."

"May be on the other side of that field!" said Bob.

"Yes, if—"

"If what?"

"If Pon wasn't pulling our leg!" said Nugent. "I'm beginning to think that he was!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm almost dropping—"

"Well, drop quietly, old fat porpoise!"

"Beast!"

The hikers stood in the gateway, staring about them in the gloom. Fields and hedges and trees encircled them, and before them was that wide, seemingly endless stretch of pasture. The least suspicious fellow in the party could not help suspecting now, that Ponsonby had been pulling their leg, and deliberately misdirecting them. But to turn back and seek another route did not seem very hopeful.

"The rotter!" growled Johnny Bull. "Of course, he was stuffing us! Catch that cad Ponsonby doing any fellow a good turn."

"Well, it looks rather like it," said Harry. "But we may as well keep on. As we don't know the way, one's as good as another! Let's look for a place to camp."

"I say, you fellows, let's camp here! Let's camp at once! I say—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

The hikers tramped on through the open gateway, following a cart-track across the extensive field. There was a chance that they were on the right track, and, anyhow, they had to look for a suitable spot for camping. But no lights, save from the summer stars, gleamed over the dusky fields. They halted where a little brook meandered along, crossed by a bridge of a single plank.

"Camp here," said Harry. "It's pretty plain now that that Highcliffe rotter was stuffing us, and we shan't see Cricklade or the Thames to-night. This looks a good spot for a camp."

It was quite a nice spot. There was plenty of water in the glistening little brook; and close by the end of the plank bridge was a clump of trees, with wide-spreading branches. Round about, the grassy plain seemed to stretch to infinity; though doubtless in the daylight signs of local habitation might have been seen. All the hikers were glad of a rest by this time, and with considerable relief they dumped down their packs and camped.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Pon's Little Plot!

CECIL PONSONBY grinned as the green Austin ran on after parting with the Greyfriars hikers.

Having misdirected the hikers, and sent them tramping away from their destination, Pon was feeling rather amused and bucked. Gadsby and Monson were grinning, too. They had not had much luck, in their warfare with the Greyfriars hikers, and they were

rather glad to score at last—and a little lying did not come amiss to Pon & Co. The three young rascals were smoking cigarettes as the car ran on down the dusky lane, and the hikers disappeared in the other direction.

"We've spotted the rotters again!" remarked Ponsonby. "I began to be afraid we'd lost them. We won't lose track of them again until we've bagged that Holiday Annual from that brute Cherry."

Gadsby and Monson exchanged a glance and a grin. They had no objection to spending the holidays touring the country in Pon's car. But they did not quite believe that Pon would succeed in getting hold of that much-disputed volume, or that it was worth getting hold of if he succeeded. Pon easily

right, I don't quite see how we're going to snoop the book! There's six of the brutes, without countin' that fat freak Bunter, and only three of us. And, to be candid, we shouldn't care about tacklin' them man to man. With the odds against us—"

"More ways than one of killin' a cat," answered Ponsonby. "I came jolly near snafflin' the book the night they camped in the barn back in Sussex. But if we can't get it without a scrap, we might pick up a few bargees along the river to help at ten bob a time. It's worth it!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Gadsby. "That's a bit thick, Pon!"

"Don't be an ass! We're up against those cads, and we're not goin' to stick at trifles."

exclaimed Gadsby, startled, staring out of the car into the gloom of the trees.

"Elp!"

"Somebody in trouble," remarked Monson. "Somebody who's left his 'h's' at home."

"Elp!"

"Nothin' to do with us," said Ponsonby indifferently. "We're not stoppin'. It's time we got in to dinner."

Pon was not the fellow to worry himself much about the troubles of others. But the chauffeur slowed down the car.

"What are you stoppin' for, Jervis, you fool?" snapped Ponsonby irritably.

"Man in the road, sir—"

"Well, let him get out of the road! Keep on!"

"Dash it all, we don't want to run the man over!" exclaimed Gadsby. "Chuck



"Down with them packs!" snapped the tramp. "If I 'ave to land you one with this 'ere stick, you'll know it!" "I'll jolly well—" began Johnny Bull wrathfully. "Any more from you," said the big man, "and you'll get a wallop. I'm going to—whoop!" He broke off with a howl as Bob Cherry's rucksack whirled through the air and caught him on the side of his bull-neck.

read their expressions, and he gave them an unpleasant look.

"I've told you it's a cert," he said. "There's no doubt that that Holiday Annual was in the hands of that smash-and-grab man at Courtfield at the end of the term, and that he put a message in it for his confederate, tellin' him where he had hidden the plunder. The insurance company have offered £50 reward for the finder—and with that book in our hands, we can find it."

"Um!" said Gadsby.

"Both the thieves are in prison, and can't look for it themselves," went on Ponsonby, "and the smash-and-grab man makes out that he lost it in the river near Greyfriars. It's a dead cert for us—if we can get hold of that book that he put the message in."

"If you're right!" murmured Monson.

"I know I'm right!"

"Oh, all serene! But even if you're

"But look here, Pon," said Monson argumentatively, "if there's a jolly old message in the book, those bounders must have spotted it before now. They know what we're after, and they must have searched the book from end to end a dozen times."

"I know that! But they haven't found it—it's some sort of a secret code used by crooks, I suppose."

"Well, if they haven't spotted it, how are we goin' to spot it, even if we get hold of the jolly old Annual?"

"Brains!" said Ponsonby coolly. "You and Gaddy ain't much use in that line; that's where I come in!"

"Swank!" grunted Gaddy and Monson together. And they smoked in silence as the car ran on.

Suddenly, from the darkness of the shadowy lane, there came a call:

"Elp!"

"Hallo! What the thump's that?"

it! He's right in the middle of the road!"

"Some drunken tramp!" snapped Pon.

"Well, even if he is, we don't want to have to attend an inquest on him. Pull up, Jervis!"

The chauffeur was already braking. In the glare of the bright headlights a rather strange figure was seen in the road ahead. It was that of a big, brawny man, with a stubbly, unwashed face—evidently a tramp. His hands, for some unseen reason, were behind him as he stood in the road facing the oncoming car.

Standing in the middle of the road he forced the car to stop; there was no room to pass him on either side, and the chauffeur certainly had no idea of running him down, whatever the lordly Pon might have said.

The green Austin came to a stop, and

Ponsonby scowled at the big man as he lurched to the side of the car. He looked far from an agreeable man to meet in a lonely lane; but three fellows, with a chauffeur, had nothing to fear from him.

"What the dooce do you want?" snapped Ponsonby. "What are you stoppin' my car for?"

"Skuse me, sir!" The big man spoke civilly. "I want 'elp! I've got my 'ands tied behind my back!"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Ponsonby, in astonishment.

"I'd take it kindly, sir, if you'd let my 'ands loose," said the tramp. "Some young rascals tied me up like this here for a joke, they did! It won't take you long, sir. Let your shover untie me." The big man turned, showing his hands bound behind his back with a big, dirty, red-spotted muffler. "Them young 'ounds tied me up, and left me in a ditch, they did!"

"What had you been doing?" grinned Gadsby.

The red-spotted man made no answer to that question.

Ponsonby regarded him very curiously. As he had met hikers in the lane, coming from this direction, he could make a shrewd guess at the identity of the "young rascals" who had tied the tramp's hands with his own muffler.

"Were there seven of them?" he asked. "One a fat blighter in specs and one a darkey?"

"That's the gang, sir!" answered the tramp, blinking at Ponsonby. "Not friends of yours, sir?"

He could guess that much from Pon's words.

"Hardly," said Pon. "But I know them! A mob of hikers?"

"That's 'em, sir! If you'll let your man untie my 'ands—"

"Safer to leave them tied, I fancy," remarked Monson. "Look here, Pon, if those Greyfriars men tied him up, they had a reason. You're only to look at him to guess what it was."

"I give you my word, sir, that I was doing no 'arm! Jest stopped to ask for a little 'elp on the road, sir."

"Can it!" said Gadsby. "Leave him alone, Pon!"

"Rot!" said Ponsonby. "Even if he's a footpad—and he looks it—I suppose you're not afraid of him robbing the three of us, with Jervis to help. I'm goin' to let the man loose."

Gadsby and Monson could only stare. It was utterly unlike Pon to take any trouble for anybody; and certainly it seemed unlikely that the big ruffian deserved help at anyone's hands. But the dandy of Highcliffe had his reasons. He stepped out of the car.

"Step back, my man!" he said.

The red-spotted man stepped away from the car, and Pon followed him to the side of the lane. There he began to untie the thick, knotted muffler.

Gadsby and Monson, lost in astonishment, gave up the problem; and Jervis, the chauffeur, sat with a wooden, expressionless face. They heard the murmur of Ponsonby's voice as he spoke again to the tramp, but the tone was too low for them to catch the words.

"Step a bit farther back from the car! I've got somethin' to say to you," murmured Ponsonby. "Might be worth a fiver to you."

The tramp stared round at him blankly. Then he moved farther from the car, so that Ponsonby could speak without being overheard.

"What's your name?" asked Ponsonby.

"'Erbert 'Iggs."

"Trampin'—what?"

"I've been out o' work a long time, sir!" answered Herbert Higgs.

"You look it!" agreed Ponsonby. "And if you heard that there was a job goin' it would scare you away rather, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Higgs grinned.

"I dare say you'd like to get even with those fellows who tied you up—what?" asked Ponsonby.

The red-spotted man's eyes glittered.

"Wouldn't I just!" he said.

"Could you find a friend or two to help you handle them?"

"Easy, if I knowed where to find them agin," answered Herbert.

As he spoke he blinked at Ponsonby. He had hoped to get his hands untied when he stopped the car. But certainly he had not expected to hear anything like this, from an expensive looking young "toff" like Ponsonby.

It dawned on him that this young "toff" was a fellow who knew the hikers, and disliked them—and was not at all particular in his methods of dealing with persons he disliked.

"Well, look here," said Ponsonby, in a low voice, "I don't like that crew any more than you do. One of them's got something that belongs to me. I want it back. I can tell you where to look for them. It's pretty certain that they turned left from the crossroads, up this lane, and they'll most likely camp when they find the road doesn't lead any where. Anyhow, you can pick them up in that direction."

"I get you, sir!" said the red-spotted man, eyeing Ponsonby very keenly and curiously. His hands were free now, and he was rearranging the red-spotted muffler round his bull neck.

"They're rather hefty in a scrap," went on Ponsonby. "You'd better get a couple of fellows like yourself to help. Get what I want from them, and bring it to me at the Cow and Sheep, near Cricklade, and it's worth a fiver to you. Are you on?"

"Ain't I?" grinned Herbert.

"It's a go, then!"

"But what've they got that belongs to you, sir? You'd better make that clear if I'm to get 'old of it."

"It's a book—a book called the Holiday Annual!"

"Blow me pink!" said the big tramp. His astonishment was depicted in his staring face. Why a fellow should be willing to stand a five-pound note to get hold of any book in existence was an amazing mystery to Herbert Higgs.

"It's not the value of the book, but I want it," said Ponsonby. "They got it away from me, and I'm determined to have it back, by hook or by crook. But I can't handle that gang—and you can."

"I get you, sir."

"It's carried in a rucksack, by one of the gang named Cherry—a rather hefty fellow, with a mop of flaxen hair—"

"I know 'im!" Herbert's eyes glittered. "That's the bloke what banged my 'ead on the ground."

"It may have his name written in it," added Ponsonby carelessly. "That doesn't matter. Get hold of the Holiday Annual that fellow carries in his rucksack, and bring it to me, and I'll pay you for it. And I'll stand you ten shillings in advance now, and chance it."

Herbert Higgs nodded. The whole thing was so strange and mysterious to Herbert that he might have suspected that this young "toff" was pulling his leg for some sort of a practical joke. But cash was cash! The ten-shilling note that Ponsonby slipped into his hand was a proof of good faith.

"Leave it to me, sir!" said Herbert.

"If you're staying at that inn you

mention, you bet I'll come along some time to-morrow with that there book, sir."

"Done!" said Ponsonby.

He walked back to the car and stepped in.

"Get on, Jervis!"

The chauffeur drove on, and the red-spotted man disappeared in the shadows behind. Gadsby and Monson looked inquiringly and expressively at Pon.

"What's this game, Pon?" asked Gadsby.

"What were you confabbing with that ruffian about?" asked Monson. "I saw you give him money. What the thump did you give him money for?"

"Why shouldn't I help a poor man on his way?" said Pon blandly.

"Oh gad!" said Monson and Gadsby together.

And they gave it up.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Little Way I

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"I'm tired!"

"Lend a hand, fathead!"

"I've told you I'm tired!" said Billy Bunter, with dignity.

"Kick him!"

"Beast!"

Between the clump of trees and the brook, over which lay the plank bridge, the Greyfriars hikers were camping. They had the glimmer of the summer stars to camp by, and it was light enough. All the hikers, in point of fact, were rather tired, having made a long march that day, and kept it up rather unusually late. But many hands make light work, and six of the fellows, at least, did not want to slack or dodge their share of the work.

Lord Mauleverer, in his own way, was perhaps as lazy as Bunter—but his way was quite a different way. Lazy as he was, Mauly never dodged his "whack" in the work, or in carrying the baggage—and Billy Bunter dodged both with great care and caution.

The tent was going up, and all hands—except Bunter's—joined in the pegging. Except where all hands were required, as in pegging the tent, division of labour was the rule—a useful rule in a hiking camp. One fellow fetched water, another prepared the stove, another unpacked the provender, another got out the sleeping outfit, and so on.

Billy Bunter sat on a log by the trees and watched the other fellows at work—which was Bunter's usual contribution to camping. Setting Bunter a task was not much use—either he didn't do it, or he did it badly; his idea being to make the fellows understand, jolly clearly, that everything couldn't jolly well be landed on him!

Still, the Greyfriars fellows were rather accustomed to making allowances for Bunter. It was agreed, too, that he had a lot of weight to carry about!

But Billy Bunter could not even sit down and watch the other fellows at work without grousing. Blinking at six busy juniors through his big spectacles, he informed them of the important fact that he was not merely tired, but very hungry.

Bunter's fatigue, and Bunter's healthy appetite, were the two most important matters in the universe just then. Other fellows might be tired, and other fellows might be hungry; but that was a trifle light as air in comparison.

"I say, you fellows, what about a fire?" he asked. There were no preparations going on for a camp-fire.

"Warm enough to-night without a fire," answered Harry Wharton, "and we're all a bit tired."

"Plenty of firewood among these trees," suggested Bunter. "It ain't cold now, but it will be cold later. Why not have a fire?"

"Oh, all right! Gather some firewood, then!"

Snort from Bunter! If a camp-fire depended on Bunter gathering firewood, a camp-fire was improbable.

"Perhaps you didn't hear me say that I was tired!" said Bunter, with crushing sarcasm. "Deaf, perhaps! I say, you fellows, we shall want a fire for cooking."

"Cold supper, save time!" said Wharton tersely.

"I don't see any need to save time on a hike. We've got lots of time. Look here! We've got stuff to make a stew. And I'm hungry."

"Well, you can make a stew, if you like, while we're fixing up the camp. Not a bad idea."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Blow!" said Bob Cherry. Unpacking his rucksack, it slipped, and many articles dropped to the ground, including the Holiday Annual, which was all the reading matter the hikers carried with them on the hike. It came in useful on occasions when they had to sit somewhere out of the rain. Also the juniors were very curious about that volume, which Ponsby believed to contain some secret and mysterious clue to the plunder hidden by the smash-and-grab man near Greyfriars School, weeks ago. They had examined it a good many times in search of that supposed clue—without finding anything of the kind.

"Clumsy!" remarked Bunter.

Bob gave him a glare.

"You fat villain! I've got a lot of stuff in this bag that you ought to carry! Lend a hand picking these things up."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'm sitting down!" Bunter made that statement as if it furnished a complete explanation and adequate reason for not doing any work.

"Pick up some of these things, you fat slacker! Pick up that Holiday Annual, you stodgy porker!"

"Shan't!"

Bob Cherry picked up the Holiday Annual. Instead of returning it to the rucksack, however, he hurled it at Bunter.

The literature in the Holiday Annual was by no means heavy. But the volume itself had a fairly good weight! It smote Bunter on his manly chest, and bowled him off the log like a fat skittle.

"Yarooooooh!" roared Bunter, as he landed on his back.

"Well bowled!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!" roared Bunter. "I'd give you a jolly good wallop, you beast, if I wasn't so tired! Wow!"

"Well, I'm not too tired to give you one!" growled Bob. "If you don't want it, shut up! Are you too jolly lazy to light the stove and make the cocoa?"

"You know I don't like making my hands oily, you beast!"

"What about mine?" yelled Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Get me the oil-can, you fat villain! Where are those matches? The stove's empty! Hand me the oil-can, you fat tramp."

"I've told you a dozen times, at least, that I'm not going to touch the oil-can! Some fellows like to keep their fingers clean!" added Bunter crushingly.

"Well, you're not one of those fellows, to judge by the look of your paws." Bob Cherry sorted out the can of paraffin for the stove, Bunter sitting on the log again, and blinking at him. "Can't you get up, Bunter?"

"No, I jolly well can't!"

Bob Cherry came over towards the fat

junior, and lifted the oil-can. Billy Bunter found that he could get up—and quite quickly—as a spurt of paraffin came from the neck of the can. It just missed him.

"Beast!" shrieked Bunter, as he dodged.

"You see, you can get up, if you try!" grinned Bob. "I fancy you could fill that stove, too, if you tried hard. Try! I'm going to pour the paraffin down your neck, if you don't!"

"I—I—I'll fill the stove!" gasped Bunter. "Keep off, you beast! I'm not the fellow to dodge work, I hope! Everything gets landed on me, as you jolly well know! Gimme the can, you rotter!"

Bunter took the can.

His system of filling the cooking-stove was to swamp the oil all over it, and over the earth round about it. This

PENKNIVES FOR LAUGHS!

Fred Townshend, of 18, Alfred Street, St. Helens, Lancs., has caught the judge's eye with the following amusing storyette:



Brown: "I found a shilling in the park yesterday."

White: "It must be mine—I dropped one there yesterday."

Brown: "Oh, but this was two shillings."

White: "Um! Must have broke as it fell from my pocket!"

NOTE.—All jokes and Greyfriars limericks should be sent to: "Limericks and Jokes" Editor, c/o MAGNET, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

made it fairly certain that he would not be called upon to fill it another time.

"Stop that!" roared Bob. "Do you want to set fire to half Wiltshire, you potty porpoise?"

"Am I spilling any?" asked Bunter calmly.

"You fat villain, you've spilt half of it! Give me the can!"

Billy Bunter grinned, and handed back the can. He sat on the log again, and watched Bob filling the stove—or, rather, putting in what paraffin was left. Bob grunted, and put down the can.

"Now, that spilt oil has got to be mopped up!" he said.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Harry. "It will soak away."

"Better mop it up, I think! As you spilt it, Bunter, you'd better mop it up," suggested Bob.

"Beast!"

"Well, if you'd rather I did it, all right," said Bob. "Happy to oblige."

"What are you going to mop it up with?" asked Nugent.

"Bunter's face."

"I say—beast—gerraway!" yelled Billy Bunter, as Bob strode to him, and grasped him by the back of a fat neck.

"I say—Yaroooooh! Leggo! Oh crickey! Oh lor! Grooo-hoooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the hikers.

With a grasp of iron on the back of Bunter's neck, Bob Cherry mopped up the spilt oil, using Bunter's fat features for the purpose.

Fiendish yells and howls and gurgles came from the fat Owl of the Remove. He did not, as he had stated, like oil on his fingers. Still less did he like it on his face! But it was there that he got it!

"Urrg! Wurrgh! Gug-gug-gug—" gurgled Bunter. "Leggo! I'll wallop you! Oh crickey! You beast! Wow! You rotter! Grooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There, I think that will do!" gasped Bob. "Nothing like being tidy, Bunter. Clear up as you go along, you know! Mustn't leave spilt oil about!"

"Yurrrrggh!"

Billy Bunter squirmed away as he was released. His fat face was dripping with paraffin. He gurgled and spluttered frantically. Even Bunter realised that he was in need of a wash.

"Grooooh! Where's the soap?" gurgled Bunter.

"Soap!" yelled Johnny Bull. "You want soap! This is the first time you've asked for soap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The soapfulness of the esteemed Bunter is not usually terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Beast! Gimme some soap!"

shrieked Bunter. "I'm all oily! Ow! Grooooh! Where's that soap, you beasts? Urrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Nugent tossed the fat Owl a cake of soap, and Bunter rolled down to the brook to wash. For the first time since the hike had started, Billy Bunter had a thoroughly good wash. Really, it was not before he needed one.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Strategic I

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Who's that?"

"Who the dickens—"

"The whofulness is terrific, and—"

Billy Bunter blinked at the hikers in astonishment. He had washed and washed, but there was still a lingering scent of paraffin about him. His face was red and shiny, and for once quite clean. It was indeed as clean as a new pin.

Gasping after his unaccustomed exertions, Bunter rolled back to the camp. By that time the cocoa was made for supper, the meal served out, and the hikers were sitting in a cheery circle, supping. They all stared at Bunter as he came up, the bright starlight glistening on his shining face.

"Welcome, little stranger!" said Frank Nugent.

"I thought there was nobody about, but ourselves," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Where did you spring from? Who are you?"

"Yaas. Who are you, begad?" asked Lord Mauleverer.

"You silly asses!" yelled Bunter.

"Wharrer you mean? Making out that you don't know a chap? Wharrer you mean, you silly idiots?"

"That sounds like Bunter's voice,"

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said Bob Cherry, with a puzzled look. "Might almost fancy it was Bunter speaking."

"You know it's me, you silly fat-head!" roared Bunter.

"Are you Bunter?" exclaimed Bob.

"You can't be!"

"You blithering idiot, you know I am! Wharrer you mean?"

"But your face is clean!" gasped Bob.

"Why—you—you—cheeky idiot, I'll—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if you're Bunter, you can sit down and have some supper," said Harry Wharton.

"Sure you're Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"He's washed," said Johnny Bull.

"That accounts for it. You can't expect a chap to know you again after you've washed, Bunter."

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter snorted. He realised that this was a little joke of the hikers.

A wash made a difference to Bunter's appearance; but not such a difference as all that.

"I'll tell you what, old fat bean," said Bob.

"If you ever want to disguise yourself, don't you go in for false beards or moustaches, or anything of that kind. Just pack a cake of soap in your pocket; then, when nobody's looking, wash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the hikers.

"The washfulness would be a complete and terrific disguise," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Billy Bunter disdained to reply.

Besides, his jaws were too busy for frivolous conversation. He sat down and dealt with the foodstuffs.

He washed down the solids with a big tin mug of cocoa.

"Any more cocoa?" he asked.

"Lots in the tin, and the water's on the boil."

"Well, make some more," said Bunter.

"I like three cups, as you know. I think you might as well have made it all at once. Just like you to keep a fellow waiting."

"Just," agreed Bob Cherry.

"And if you go on waiting till I make it, old fat man, you'll still be waiting when we go back to Greyfriars next term."

"The waitfulness will be terrific!" agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Blacking all round, as usual," said Bunter scornfully.

"If there's anything I really hate, it's to see a lot of lazy fellows slacking, when there's jobs to be done. I call it sickening."

"Well, what about turning in?" asked Bob, passing by the scornful remarks of the fat Owl like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"We've got to turn out early in the morning. We're jolly well going to find the jolly old Thames to-morrow!"

"I'm not turning out early," said Bunter positively.

"Good!" said Bob.

"We'll be careful not to wake you up when we start, old fat man. If you want to see us again before next term, you'll find us somewhere along the Thames, if you look long enough."

"If you mean that you'll start without me, Cherry—"

"Just that, old porpoise."

"And glad of the chance," growled Johnny Bull.

"Any more cake?" asked Bunter.

Wharton shook his head.

"No; you've scoffed the lot."

"I think you might have packed another cake. You know I like cake. Selfishness all round, as usual. I

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shouldn't wonder if I were to grow selfish myself in the long run," said Bunter bitterly. "If I followed the example of you fellows, I might."

"He—he—he might grow selfish!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Bunter might, you men. He might! Oh, fan me, somebody!"

"The mightfulness is terrific!"

"Well, I hope I shan't; but associating with you fellows, I might," said Bunter.

"There's a proverb, you know, that evil communications corrupt good manners. Is there any jam?"

"You finished the jam this morning."

"And you haven't got any more since—knowing how I like jam," said Bunter sarcastically.

"Well, I might have expected it."

"What about drowning him in the brook before we turn in?" suggested Johnny Bull thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

"Let's turn in," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"There's still some biscuits and apples, Bunter, if you've got room for them."

"I don't care much for biscuits or apples. Still, I'll have them. I say, you fellows, don't turn in till I've finished supper. I don't want to sit here alone."

"Like our jolly old company?" grinned Bob.

"Well, it's not much in the way of company, but it's better than nothing," explained Bunter.

"That's where it's different from your own, old fat man. Yours is a good deal worse than nothing. I'm going to bed."

"I haven't finished eating yet."

"You never have! Good-night!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter was not likely to have finished eating, so long as there was anything left to eat.

Indeed, the morning's supply for breakfast would hardly have been safe from him, had not the hikers packed it away out of his reach.

Bunter got busy with the biscuits and apples as the other fellows spread ground-sheets in the tent, and turned into their blankets.

He snorted with scorn, and travelled through the biscuits and the apples.

By the time he had parked them in his capacious interior, six juniors were fast asleep in the tent.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

No answer.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter.

"Shurrup!" came a sleepy voice from the tent.

"Can't you lot a fellow go to sleep, you fat chump?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Shut up!"

"Look here! Is there any toffee?"

"My hat! You've woke us up to ask if there's any toffee?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"I'll give you toffee, if I get up to you!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rose to his feet. He had eaten all that was available, and sleep was the next item on the programme.

But Billy Bunter had been thinking while he packed away the biscuits and the apples.

When he turned in he wanted a good sleep; he did not, most emphatically, want to turn out under the early rays of the rising sun.

Certainly he was at liberty to sleep as long as he liked, if he did not mind the hikers going on without him.

But he did mind. Evidently it was an occasion for strategy and Bunter had thought of a stratagem.

He rolled across to the log near the trees, where he had been sitting when Bob buzzed the Holiday Annual at him.

That valuable volume lay where it had fallen in the grass after ambling Bunter. Bob had been too busy to field it at the moment, and afterwards it had alighted his memory. Billy Bunter picked it up, and glanced towards the tent with a fat grin.

Then he rolled in among the shadowy trees, blinking round for a hiding-place for the volume. It was easy enough to find one; he shoved the Holiday Annual out of sight in a hollow under the roots of an ancient beech, and crammed a few handfuls of grass after it. That hidden volume was not likely to be spotted in a hurry.

Grinning, Bunter rolled back to the camp. When Bob came to pack his rucksack in the morning he would miss the volume, of course, and look for it, to pack. He was welcome to look for it as long as he liked; while Bunter enjoyed the long, long rest that was so necessary to him.

Any other small article the hikers might have left behind, if they could not find it, but not that Holiday Annual. Not only its own interesting nature, but the fact that Ponsonby of Highcliffe was desperately determined to get his hands on it, made it extremely unlikely that Bob would be willing to march without it.

Although the chums of the Remove had, so far, utterly failed to spot any secret message in the book, they examined it every now and then in leisure moments in the hope of success. Pon's fixed belief that the message was there naturally had an impression on them. Certainly no member of the party would have been willing to part with that Holiday Annual with its secret still undiscovered.

Billy Bunter was quite assured on that point. So he was also assured that he was not going so early in the morning.

He chuckled as he rolled into the tent.

"Ooooooh!" came a sleepy voice.

"Who's that? Get off my neck, you blithering idiot!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Owl! Wow! Who's stamping on my face?" yelled Frank Nugent, waking up suddenly.

"Oh, really, Nugent, you might make room for a fellow!"

"You fat villain—"

"You bloated bandersnatch—"

"I say, you fellows, now you're awake," said Bunter calmly.

"I don't forget to call me early. If I don't happen to wake up—it's not likely, but if I don't happen to—give me a call. I want to get going early; none of your rotten lazy slacking, you know."

"You fat idiot!"

"Yah!"

And Bunter encased himself in a blanket and went to sleep.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"WAKE up!"

It seemed to Billy Bunter that he had only just closed his eyes when that stentorian roar awakened him. He came out of balmy slumber with a jump.

"Owl! Tain't rising-bell!" gasped Bunter.

"Beast!"

"Roll out, porpoise!"

Bunter sat up and blinked. Although it seemed to him that he had only been asleep about a minute, that couldn't really have been the case, for it was



"Can't you get up, Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry. "No, I jolly well can't!" snorted Bunter. Bob Cherry came over towards the fat junior, and lifted the oil can. Billy Bunter found that he could get up—and quite quickly—as a spurt of paraffin came from the neck of the can. "Beast!" he shrieked, as he dodged.

broad daylight, and the summer sun was shining in at the opening of the tent. All the other fellows were up and out, and a sound of splashing near at hand told that they were taking an early dip in the brook.

"I say, what's the time?" asked Bunter peevishly.

"Nearly seven."

"Beast! Call me again at nine!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"We shall be a good many miles away at nine, old porpoise! If you go to sleep again you take your chance."

Bunter gave a sleepy grin. He fancied that the march would not begin as soon as Bob supposed. His strategy was coming in now.

"If you're not keen on my company, I'm certainly not keen on yours," he answered loftily. "I shan't get up till nine. If you start without me I shan't promise to follow you. Mind that!"

"Well, it would be awful to lose you, of course!" gasped Bob. "But we shall risk it, old fatty, if you're not ready."

"Don't make a row, Cherry! I can't sleep if you're making a row. Tell the other fellows to keep quiet, will you?"

"You fat chump—"

"For goodness' sake shut up and let a fellow sleep," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "You're like a sheep's head—all jaw. Can't you be quiet?"

"Well, snooze if you like; nobody's going to wait for you, you fat slacker," said Bob. "I dare say you'll wake when the tent comes down."

"Beast!"

Bob Cherry left the tent, and Bunter's eyes closed again. In about twenty seconds he was snoring.

Even a savoury scent of frying bacon failed to attract him. He slept on while the Famous Five and Lord Mauleverer had their breakfast. It was a glorious

morning in early September, and all the hikers were looking forward to the day's march and "hitting" that elusive river, the Thames. If they hit the river somewhere near Cricklade, the idea was to go down the youthful stream, past Lechlade. If they hit it somewhere near Lechlade, they could go down it towards Oxford, having a look at the celebrated White Horse Vale of Berkshire.

Exactly where they would hit it, they did not know, as they did not quite know where they were at present; but in the daylight it would be easy to pick up the way. While they discussed the day's hike, Bunter snored contentedly in the tent; and he snored on while they washed up, heedless of two or three friendly calls from without.

But he ceased to snore when the tent came down.

If Bunter was to be left behind, as seemed to be the idea, the tent certainly was not to be, and the hikers unpegged it and it came down for packing. There was a muffled roar under the fluttering canvas.

"I say, you fellows, what the thump—Yurrrgh! I'm smothered with something! Wurrgh! Gorroff! Ow!"

The canvas heaved wildly as a fat figure kicked and struggled under it. A red and infuriated face emerged at last, and Billy Bunter glared at the grinning hikers.

"Beasts!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Crawl out, old fat bean, if you don't want to be packed up in the tent!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

Bunter crawled out.

While the cheery hikers packed tent and sleeping outfit, the fat junior dressed himself, without bothering

about washing, no doubt considering that that extra wash-overnight would last him the day.

Then he blinked round for provender,

"Where's brekker?" he demanded.

"We've finished brekker, thanks."

"I mean my brekker!" roared Bunter.

"If you won't let a fellow sleep in peace, do you think you're going to starve him?"

"If you want any grub, fatty, you'd better root after it quick," said Bob. "We're starting under ten minutes."

"Didn't you cook my brekker?"

"Ask me another."

"Beast!"

The hikers finished packing the tent. Little packing remained to be done, and it was clearly their intention to start. Bunter, however, knew more about that than they did.

"Where's the cooking stove?" demanded Bunter.

"Packed!"

"How am I going to cook my brekker, then?"

"Is that a riddle?"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter. "Lucky there's some cold beef and ham. I can manage on that. But I shall have to boil water to make tea."

"Boil away!"

"One of you unpack the stove—"

"Yes; I can see us doing it!"

"I can manage on lemonade. Lucky there's some lemonade! If you fellows think this is treating a fellow decently—"

"My hat! I shall be rather glad to get out of the sound of those dulcet tones!" remarked Bob. "Take your time feeding, Bunter; take plenty of time."

"I mean to!" growled Bunter.

"Now, we've only got to shove a few
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things into the rucksacks," said Bob. "Let's see, where's that jolly old Holiday Annual? I didn't pick it up after heaving it at Bunter last night. It's in the grass somewhere, you fellows. Look round."

Billy Bunter grinned over the cold ham and beef. He had an idea that the fellows would have to look round a long while before they spotted that Holiday Annual in the grass.

"Can't see it," said Frank Nugent. "The carefulness of the esteemed Annual is not terrific."

"Blessed if I can, either," said Bob, puzzled. "But it must be here. It dropped near this log after biffing on Bunter. Did you see where that Holiday Annual dropped, Bunter?"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you he-he-heing about, you fat duffer?"

"He, he, he!"

"Have you seen that Holiday Annual, you fat chump?" roared Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! How could I have seen it?" demanded Bunter. "I say, if you're going to be a long time, you may as well unpack the stove, and I can cook some rashers and eggs—"

"We're not going to be a long time, you fathead! The dashed thing must be here somewhere, right under our noses!" grunted Bob.

"He, he, he!"

"Well, it's not here," said Harry Wharton at last, after the hikers had rooted up and down, and round about, for a good ten minutes.

Billy Bunter, having finished what there was to eat, lay down in the grass, rested his head on a pack, and reposed. It was not eight o'clock yet, and Billy Bunter had no idea of beginning a day's hike so early, if he could possibly help it. This time he could help it! The longer his fat little legs remained at rest, the better Bunter liked it. Ten o'clock, Bunter considered, was a good time for starting—or eleven! Or after lunch—that was a still better idea!

Bunter stretched himself in luxurious repose, and nodded into balmy slumber once more, while the puzzled and exasperated hikers searched and searched for the missing Annual.

"What the merry thump can have become of it?" exclaimed Bob. "Nobody can have come along and sneaked it, I suppose?"

"Oh, my hat! Pon—" exclaimed Nugent.

"It's impossible," said Wharton decidedly. "Pon can't know where we're camping, and if he did, he could never know that the Annual was lying in the grass; he would think it was in the tent."

"Of course he would!" agreed Frank. "But—where the dickens has the thing got to? I remember Bob heaving it at Bunter—it must have dropped somewhere near this log."

"It's jolly well performed the vanishing trick," said Johnny Bull. "If Pon was anywhere about—" Johnny glanced round, over the wide expanse of grass and bushes and clumps of trees.

"Hallo, who's that?"

A burly figure, in a red-spotted muffler, was coming down the cart-track across the pasture, from the gate through which the hikers had passed the previous evening. Three other dingy, dusty, and frowzy figures followed it.

"That tramp again!" exclaimed Bob.

"Oh, my hat! And a jolly old gang of them this time!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

And the hikers forgot all about the missing Holiday Annual, and gathered together in a group, with rather grim faces, as Herbert Higgs & Co. arrived at the camp. They did not need telling that it meant trouble.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Scrap!

"GOTCHER!"

— That was the red-spotted man's remark as he arrived. His three tough-looking comrades grinned.

They were fellows a good deal like Herbert Higgs to look at, though not quite so burly. Evidently they were tramps of the same kidney. Herbert had taken a tip from the last encounter with the Greyfriars hikers, and now he

had come in force. Harry Wharton & Co. were sturdy fellows, and had heaps of pluck; but they had no chance in a tussle with four hefty tramps, and both sides were quite aware of that fact.

Wharton cast a rather anxious look round. It was a lonely spot—wide-spreading pasture-land, bordered here and there by green woodland and fences. Far in the distance was a trail of smoke against the sky, from some farmhouse out of sight. There was no building to be seen. Obviously, there was no help at hand. Hikers, camping in lonely places, had to take these chances; and the Greyfriars hikers undoubtedly wished, at that moment, that they had picked out a rather less solitary spot. Bob Cherry quietly drew the frying-pan out of a pack.

"Gotcher!" repeated Mr. Higgs brightly. "Been looking for yer a long time, I've! Now I gotcher!"

"The gotcherfulness seems to be terrific, my worthy and unwashed friend!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Herbert Higgs stared at him. Then his piggy eyes fixed vengefully and venomously on Bob Cherry.

"You banged my 'ead last night!" he said.

"I'll bang it again this morning, with pleasure!" answered Bob ably.

"Look here!" growled Johnny Bull. "Sheer off—see? You may be too tough for us in a scrap, but we'll give you a large size in scraps, if you push for trouble, all the same."

"See you!" grinned Herbert. "The scrappfulness will be preposterous!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. He took a grip on a stick. The hikers were prepared for a desperate resistance.

"Oh crikey!" Billy Bunter suddenly opened his eyes and blinked in alarm at the four tramps. "Oh lor! I say, you fellows—"

"Back up, Bunter!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Bunter jumped up. But he did not back up! He backed off! He had not liked the red-spotted man's looks the night before. Still less did he like them in company with three more dusty rascals of the same stamp.

"Where are you going?" roared Johnny Bull. "Buck up, you fat funk!"

"I—I—I'm going to—to—to fetch help!" gasped Bunter. And he went—though whether it was to fetch help or not, was another matter. Anyhow, he went!

Really, it was not a heavy loss! Bunter's help as a fighting-man would not have been very valuable.

Herbert Higgs & Co. drew nearer to the group of hikers. Herbert's eyes fell on an open rucksack, in which Bob had intended to pack the Holiday Annual—when he found it. He pointed to it.

"Whose is that there?" he asked.

"Eh? That's mine!" answered Bob, surprised by the question.

"Your name's Cherry, ain't it?"

"Yes. Though I'm blessed if I see how you know!" said Bob, still more surprised.

"That's the cove!" said Herbert to his friends. "Get 'old of that there sack, Jud!"

Jud made a grab at the rucksack. Bob Cherry swung round the frying-pan, and it landed with a loud crack on the tramp's wrist. The man Jud gave a fearful howl.

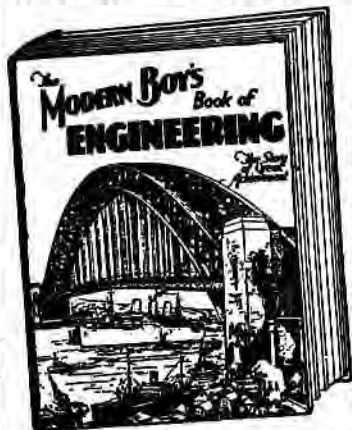
"Hands off our property, please!" said Bob.

"'Andle 'em!" roared the red-spotted man.

And the four tramps made a rush together.

The next few minutes were wild and whirling.

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Of Cecil Ponsonby's part in these lawless proceedings, the hikers, as yet, knew nothing. They supposed that the red-spotted man had gathered his friends, and hunted out their camp, for purposes of robbery, after his failure to rob them the previous evening. They were not the fellows to be robbed without a struggle. A stick, a frying-pan, and four pairs of fists, put in some good and hefty work; and, brawny as the gang of tramps were, they were far from getting things all their own way.

The red-spotted man went over, yelling, as he got the frying-pan on his bullet head. Jud howled and dodged as Hurree Janset Ram Singh lashed with his stick. Another of the ruffians, getting Bob's right fairly in the eye, staggered over the packs, and sprawled.

For a minute or two it looked as if the hikers might beat the enemy off. But Herbert Higgs scrambled up, red

with fury, crimson as the spots on his muffler, and yelled to his comrades to come on. And weight told, and the hikers were driven out of their camp, still defending themselves valiantly. But they retreated in a group, with their faces to the foe, prepared to carry the struggle on.

Higgs & Co., however, seemed satisfied, for the moment, to drive them away from the packs. They remained in possession of the camp.

The red-spotted man, breathing hard, pounced on Bob Cherry's rucksack, and turned its contents out in a heap on the grass. According to what Ponsonby had told him, the Holiday Annual should have been there. As certainly it would have been, but for Billy Bunter's strategic dodges. As it happened, it was not there.

"Tain't 'ere!" growled Herbert. "Blow me pink! Look through them

other bags and things, you coveys! That there book is worth a flyer to us!"

"It won't take us long to find it, 'Erbert," said Jud, "and we'll find a few other things, too, I fancy."

The tramps proceeded to cast loose the packs, scattering the hikers' property in the grass. They were looking specially for the Holiday Annual, but there were a good many things that took their fancy, and they were not the men to go empty-handed.

"Look here! We're not standing this!" exclaimed Johnny Bull savagely. "We're not going to have our things pinched by that crew!"

"Looks as if we can't help it!" said Nugent. "We can't handle those brutes!"

"Let's jolly well try, anyhow!" growled Johnny.

(Continued on next page.)



"Linesman," whose helpful and interesting information proved so valuable to MAGNET readers last season, has once more been engaged to answer intricate Soccer problems. If you want an expert opinion, write to "LINESMAN," c/o THE MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and then watch for his reply in this paper.

PHYSICAL FITNESS I

WE have reached the period for the big switch-over in the games sense—the footballer is kicking the cricketer off the playing pitch. My readers will be switching over, too; all worked up now for a good football season. I hope you will have your "best ever."

Your Editor has passed on to me the task of giving a helping hand towards this best and most enjoyable season ever. My reply is—at your service.

If there is anything about football you don't know and would like to know, write to me. News about the prominent players; information as to how they do things; the way to improve your game; how to solve your difficulties; problems connected with the rules. On these questions, and any other football questions you send to me I am ready to make reply. The more queries I get the better I shall be pleased.

There are certain problems peculiar to the start of a new season. So for a few minutes let us talk of them. In the first place football demands, first and foremost, physical fitness. No player can perform the maximum of service to his side, or enjoy his game to the full, unless he is fit to go the whole ninety minutes. The boy who plays football regularly does not need a lot of training every week. There are first-class footballers who only train an hour or so three or four evenings a week. George Mills of Chelsea, is one of them. He works in an office during the day. But he is usually as fit as they make them.

Exercises which keep the wind right are very important—punch-ball and that

sort of thing. A little practice in the gymnasium is a good thing, too. And then, of course, there must be those running exercises. Football is getting faster and faster. Pace isn't everything. I know that. But the footballer who has skill, combined with pace, is doubly useful.

DISCOMFORT OF STIFFNESS I

A WORD about this speed business, however, to put it in its proper perspective. So far as football is concerned, the value of pace is not a matter of doing a hundred yards or so in "evens." It is speed off the mark which stands the footballer in good stead. How quickly can you do the first ten yards of a sprint? In that distance the efficient footballer slips his opponents and finds himself clear. So practise starting. This is a part of the regular routine of the first-class player.

And don't imagine that because you play in some position other than the attack that you need not bother about pace. The full-back who is a master of the art of position play can save himself a lot of running about. But the full-back who is fast, as well as brainy, is even more useful to his side.

The first effect of coming back to football is, of course, stiffness of the limbs. Not very pleasant this. I expect you have all experienced it—the feeling that when you sit down you don't want to get up, and that when you are up you don't want to sit down. I was chatting the other day to George Hardy, the trainer of Tottenham Hotspur, a club just back in the First Division. He assured me that there is no known way in which people can dodge

this stiffness of the limbs after they have indulged in unusual and strenuous exercise.

"I will tell you what your readers can do to reduce this discomfort of stiffness to the minimum," he said. "Tell them that hot water baths and hard rubbing with a rough towel are very helpful. Tell them also," he added, "that it is no use having this treatment some hours after the opening match. They must have it almost immediately."

That is the tip which I pass on from a man who knows—who has spent almost a lifetime getting footballers fit and keeping them fit.

BALL PRACTICE I

THERE are many football exercises which are a help towards all-round efficiency at the game. I know that many of you don't like humdrum practice. I am not too keen on it myself. But there is no reason why practice should be humdrum. There are ways in which it can be made quite interesting—and yet be really beneficial.

The manager of Arsenal, Mr. Herbert Chapman, realises the necessity of giving his players the sort of training in which they will be genuinely interested. And as Arsenal are champions of the First Division I think we can agree that what is good enough for the Arsenal players is good enough for other players. So here is one idea of ball practice which has been thought out by the Arsenal manager.

Four players go out to a hard lawn tennis court. And they play a game of lawn tennis—with this difference—that the ball is a football, and they kick it from one side to the other. There are two men at each side of the net, and they score the points as in lawn tennis.

It is the competitive element about this sort of practice which keeps the players interested. And all the time they are playing this game of "football lawn tennis" the players are adding to their efficiency as footballers. They have to kick with both feet at all sorts of angles. Will you try it? Even if there are only two of you with a spare half-hour, and only a bit of waste ground, you can easily mark it out roughly like a tennis court, and have a game which you will enjoy—and which will make you better footballers.

That will do for this week. Now don't forget—write to me about your football notions and problems.

"LINESMAN."

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Harry Wharton dabbed a stream of crimson from his nose.

Brief as the tussle had been, all the hikers had been severely handled. As a matter of fact, it was useless to renew the combat, in which they had already been defeated. The enemy was too strong for them, and that was that! It went against the grain to see the rascals rooting through their property with thievish fingers; but it was futile to attempt to stop them, when they knew that they couldn't.

"Can't be helped!" said Lord Mauleverer philosophically. "This is one of the jolly old bad patches in hikin'. If they don't go through our pockets we shall be lucky!"

"They won't go through my pockets so long as I can hit!" growled Johnny Bull, in a sulphurous voice.

"Same here, old bean; but we couldn't stop them all the same," said his lordship. "We'll put up a scrap if they come for us again. If they get hold of our cash we'll make them earn it, by gad!"

The stick and the frying-pan had been lost in the scuffle. The hikers had only their fists. Angry and exasperated as they were, they realised that they would get off cheaply if the footpads were satisfied with going through the packs, and did not attempt to go through their pockets.

For some time, at least, Herbert Higgs & Co. were contented to root through the packs, scattering things far and wide, and picking out whatever articles took their fancy.

The hikers, from a little distance, beside the brook, watched them savagely. The red-spotted man came towards them at last, with the others at his heels.

"Back up!" murmured Bob. "We're for it now!"

"We'll jolly well fight till we drop, anyhow!" said Johnny Bull, between his teeth.

The hikers faced the enemy resolutely.

"Look 'ere!" began Herbert.

"Where's that blooming book?"

"That what?" exclaimed Wharton, astonished by the unexpected question.

"I'm arter that there book!" growled Herbert. "Tain't in the packs! Book called the 'Oldday Annual! You got it about yer?"

The hikers stared at him blankly.

"You—you—you're after my Holiday Annual!" stammered Bob Cherry, in utter amazement.

"Jest that!" growled Herbert Higgs.

"And you'd better 'and it hover afore I give you a one!"

"What do you know about a Holiday Annual, and what do you want it for?" asked Wharton quietly.

"That ain't neither 'ere nor there!" retorted Mr. Higgs. "I want it, and I'm a-going to 'ave it—see?"

"Pon!" said Nugent, with a deep breath.

All the hikers jumped to it at once! Almost any kind of plunder was glist to the red-spotted man's mill; but he could not be supposed to want a Holiday Annual, or even to be aware that there was such a book among the property of the hikers—unless Ponsonby was at the bottom of the affair. The Greymfriars fellows knew now to whom they owed this attack.

"Are you 'anding over that there book?" demanded the red-spotted man.

"As it happens, we have lost it," said Harry. "We were looking for it, when you came up! But, in any case we wouldn't hand it over! You can go back to that cur who set you on to us, and tell him to try again!"

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"I ain't 'ere to jor!" said Higgs. "One of you has got that there book in his rags—I know you got it! Come on, you coveys—that there book ain't all they got in their pockets. We got to clear pretty quick arter this, and we're a-going to take all we can with us!"

"Wot to, 'Ebert!"

And there was another rush of the four ruffians. Six hikers stood up to it gallantly, fighting hard.

It was a desperate fray.

The schoolboys had plenty of pluck, and Higgs & Co. had their hands full for quite a long time.

But it ended as it was bound to end—the schoolboys had no chance against the four burly ruffians.

Every one of the gang was rather damaged by the time they got the upper hand; but they did get it, and the hikers, bruised and breathless, were stretched in the grass. Three of the ruffians, grasping them, held them down, while Herbert Higgs, after mopping a crimson-streaming nose, began to go through their pockets. It was rough luck for the Greymfriars hikers.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

BUMP! "Ow!" spluttered Billy Bunter.

He sat down.

The man he had bumped into staggered and reeled. He was a sturdy, stocky man, with a red, weather-tanned face, and a wooden leg. His right leg, from the knee down, was a wooden stump. But he seemed remarkably active on it, for, having reeled on his sound leg, he recovered himself on the wooden one, and regained his balance. He stared down at Bunter, who sat and spluttered breathlessly.

"You clumsy young lubber!" ejaculated the wooden-legged man.

"Wow!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Wow!"

"Running into a man!" exclaimed the stocky gentleman indignantly. "Can't you see where you're running, with those head-lights of yours?"

"Urrgh! Wurrgh!" said Bunter.

Billy Bunter, in full flight from the hikers' camp, had dashed into a footpath through a stretch of green woodland. There he was out of sight of the hikers and the tramps; but he was unaware of the fact, as he did not waste time looking back. He charged on like a demented buffalo, and he did not even see the wooden-legged man coming along the shady path, till he crashed. What breath he had left, which was not much, was knocked out of him by the collision.

He sat and gasped stertorously.

"Took aback, and no mistake!" said the wooden-legged man, who seemed to have been a seafaring gentleman by his expressions. "Took aback and run down! Well, do you want me to navigate round you? Stir a stump!"

Standing on his sound leg, the red-faced man poked Billy Bunter with the wooden one.

"Wow!" gurgled Bunter, as he got the poke in his fat ribs. "Yow-ow! Beast! Urrrrrrgh! Keep off! I haven't any money! The other chaps have got all the money! I left mine at home! Ow! Help! Police! Wow!"

"You yowling, 'owling swab!" said the one-legged man. "Do you reckon I'm a tramp arter your money, or what?"

"Oh! Aren't you?" gasped Bunter.

"Shiver me!" said the red-faced man. "Douse my head-lights!"

"I—I say," gasped Bunter, blinking at him and staggering to his feet. He realised that the seafaring stranger was not a connection of Herbert Higgs & Co. "I say, help! They're robbing them—"

"Who's robbing who?"

"Those tramps!" gasped Bunter. "A gang of them, robbing us! They—they're scrapping like anything—"

"And you setting another course full sail?" grinned the wooden-legged man. "You look it! Where are they? If anybody's being robbed, he won't have to ask Bobby Bunce twice for 'elp! Set me a course, you fat lubber!"

"I—I say, there's a gang of them—dozens—I mean, four of them!" gasped Bunter. "I—I think I—I'll go for more help—"

Bobby Bunce took him by the arm. "Set a course!" he said tersely.

"Wow!" gasped Bunter.

He understood that by setting a course, he was to show Mr. Bunce the way. With a grip on his arm like a steel vice, Bunter had no choice in the matter, though he certainly would have preferred to go farther afield.

Mr. Bunce seemed very willing to render help, but the fat Owl did not see what a wooden-legged man could do against a gang of hetty tramps.

However, as there was no choice, Bunter turned back, and led Mr. Bunce to the open fields he had left behind. There, the wooden-legged man could see for himself what was going on, though the hiker's camp was rather at a distance.

Harry Wharton & Co. were engaged in their last fierce scrap with the tramps.

"Shiver me!" ejaculated Mr. Bunce, and, letting go Bunter, he raced across the fields.

Considering that he had a wooden leg, he moved with amazing speed, hopping a good deal like a very active kangaroo.

"Oh orrikey!" gasped Bunter.

He leaned against a tree, and blinked after Mr. Bunce through his big spectacles. He was interested to see what happened when Bobby Bunce arrived at the camp; but he was not anxious to participate therein.

Leaving the fat Owl behind, Mr. Bunce bore down on the hikers' camp, his eyes gleaming from his tanned face. The juniors were down now, three of the roughs holding them in the grass, while Herbert Higgs started to go through their pockets. They did not notice the approach of the wooden-legged man till he was quite near.

"Avast!" roared Mr. Bunce as he charged.

The red-spotted man jumped up, and whirled round on him. Probably he did not expect much trouble with a wooden-legged man.

But it was the wooden leg that gave him trouble.

"'Ere, you 'ook it!" said Herbert Higgs. "See, 'ook it! Don't you come barging in 'ere!"

"Help!" roared Bob Cherry.

And the hikers began to struggle again.

Mr. Bunce came straight on, evidently resolved to intervene. Higgs made a stride at him, with a brawny fist clenched.

Up came the wooden leg like a flash of lightning, and it was jammed fairly into Herbert Higgs' waistcoat.

"Oooooooh!" gurgled Herbert.

With a horrible gurgle he staggered backwards and sat down. He did not attempt to get up again. He clasped both horny hands to his waistcoat and gurgled hideously. Herbert was hors de combat.



"I say, you fellows, what the thump—yurrrrrgh—I'm smothered with something—wurrgh—gerroff—ow!" The canvas heaved wildly, as a fat figure kicked and struggled under it. A red and infuriated face emerged at last, and Billy Bunter glared at the grinning hikers. "Beasts!" he roared.

Leaving him for dead, as it were, the wooden-legged man turned on the others. They jumped up to tackle him, leaving the junior to themselves for the moment. Mr. Bunce's wooden leg flashed out again, and Jud joined Herbert in the grass, winded and gurgling. Then Mr. Bunce had hold of the two others by their necks, and was crashing their heads together.

Harry Wharton & Co. scrambled up, to rush to the aid of their unexpected rescuer.

He did not seem to need aid. He brought the heads of the two tramps together with a fearful crash, and they yelled with anguish. Then he pitched them into the grass. They rolled and howled.

"Avast, you swabs!" roared Mr. Bunce. "Avast, you piratical lubbers!"

He hopped at the two sprawling tramps and jabbed at them with his wooden leg. They squirmed and scrambled wildly to escape. Getting to their feet, they raced away across the field. Clearly they had had enough of the seafaring man and his wooden leg.

Mr. Higgs and Jud, however, could not scramble up and run. They were in a state of collapse, groaning and gurgling horribly.

The combat was over. Like Caesar of old, Mr. Bobby Bunce had come, and seen, and conquered.

From a safe distance Billy Bunter blinked at that brief, but thrilling scene, his little round eyes almost bulging through his big round spectacles. Now he came rolling towards the camp. Evidently the danger was over.

"Well, my only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, staring after the two fleeing tramps, then at the two groaning ruffians in the grass, and then at the wooden-legged man. "My only summer bonnet!"

"I say, thanks!" gasped Harry Wharton. "It's awfully good of you to help us like this."

"The thankfulness is terrific!" panted Hurree Jarnset Ram Singh.

"Frightfully good of you, dear man!" said Lord Mauleverer gratefully.

Mr. Bunce grinned a good-natured grin.

"All right!" he said. "All serene, my hearties! Glad I came along in time! I clapped on full sail when that fat cove told me what was going on."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"You're a sailorman?" he asked.

"How'd you guess that, sir? Ay, ay, I've been a sailorman—lost a leg mine-sweeping in the War-time. Boatman now—work on the Thames. Name of Bobby Bunce, at your service!"

"Jolly glad to meet you, Mr. Bunce," said Frank Nugent. "Those villains would have cleared us out down to the skin if you hadn't come along and chipped in."

"They seem rather keen on clearing out themselves now you've barged in, Mr. Bunce," grinned Johnny Bull.

Two of the tramps had vanished. Herbert Higgs and Jud were beginning to crawl away through the grass. They seemed anxious to rejoin their friends at a distance as soon as possible. They gurgled and groaned as they crawled.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! All safe now, Bunter—you can roll in."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You fat funk!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "I ran for help—"

"You ran, and no mistake!" agreed Bob.

"The runfulness was terrific."

"I ran for help!" roared Bunter,

"and I'd like to know what would

have happened to you if I hadn't fetched help? Where would you be? I ask you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Bunce. "He was running, you can lay to that—he ran me down, right in the bows, and I tell you he was putting on speed, for a heavy craft broad in the beam!"

"Well, it's lucky Bunter barked, as it turns out," said Bob Cherry. "Jolly lucky you were coming this way this morning, Mr. Bunce!"

"That's all right," said Bobby Dunce. "Look here, if you're hiking I'll stand by to convey you on your course, in case those piratical swabs are in the offing. What course was you steering?"

"We were going to start for the Thames, if we could pick up the way," said Harry Wharton.

"That's my way," said Mr. Bunce. "I'm going back to my boathouse below Lechlade. If that'll suit you—"

"Fine!" said Bob. "We won't keep you waiting long—"

"No hurry," said Bobby Bunce.

The hikers had found not only a rescuer but a guide in the wooden-legged gentleman, for which they were duly thankful. And Billy Bunter was not slow to point out that they owed it all to him, and to his bright idea of running for help while the scrap was on. Bunter, as usual, received no gratitude whatever!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Those Who Hide Can Find!

BILLY BUNTER sat in the grass, his podgy back to the trunk of an elm, taking it easy, with a cheery grin on his fat face.

Every other member of the hiking

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(Continued from page 13.)

party had collected damages in the scrap with Herbert Higgs & Co., and they bathed their features in the brook and rubbed and dabbed, and put themselves to rights as well as they could. They were not the fellows to make a fuss about a hard knock or two, but there was no doubt that they were feeling rather sore.

Having repaired damages as well as possible, they had to gather up the property that the tramps had upset and scattered, and repack it. Owing to the fortunate arrival of Bobby Bunce, they had lost nothing, after all—Herbert Higgs & Co. at the finish had been only too glad to escape, without bothering about plunder. It was quite a little time before the hikers were ready for the road, and then the question of the missing Holiday Annual still remained to be solved.

No doubt it was fortunate that it had been missing, or it could hardly be doubted that the red-spotted man would have "snaffled" it—and as they knew now that he had been set on by Ponsonby, the disputed volume would have got into the Highcliffe fellow's hands. But now that Herbert Higgs had vanished over the horizon, Bob wanted that Holiday Annual, and none of the hikers felt disposed to march without it. What had become of it was an utter mystery.

Mr. Bunce, in his hearty way, helped the hikers with their "dunnage," as he called it, and then helped them to look for the missing volume. But he had no more luck than the hikers. The missing volume was not to be found.

Bunter sat and grinned.

He was getting the rest he needed, and which was ever so much better than slogging along in a hot sun. If the other fellows wanted exercise, they, too, were getting what they wanted—rooting up and down, hunting for that elusive volume. It was, Bunter considered, as good as hiking. So it was all right for everybody. And Bunter sat and grinned, without the slightest intention of revealing the mystery.

It was not till he caught some words from the baffled and exasperated hikers that Bunter became serious, realising that the matter had a serious side.

"Mr. Bunce says it will take two hours to get as far as Lechlade," said Harry Wharton. "We came the wrong way last night. Time's getting on."

"Blow!" said Bob Cherry. "We can't go without that book!"

"Well, we can't get any lunch till we get to somewhere where there's some shops!" said Harry.

"Blow lunch!" said Bob, crossly.

"The grub's run right out," remarked Nugent. "Mr. Bunce says there's a refreshment place near his boathouse. We can get some lunch there—and time's getting on."

Billy Bunter ceased to grin.

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If there was no grub left, and if a walk of two hours was needed to arrive at grub, obviously Bunter's rest that morning could not be so lengthy as he had designed.

The matter was getting serious!

"Well, you fellows can cut, if you like," said Bob. "We can't keep Mr. Bunce waiting about, anyhow. Blot I'm not going without that Holiday Annual."

"We'll stick to you, old bean," said Johnny Bull.

"The stickfulness will be terrific!"

"I can't imagine what's become of the dashed thing," said Bob. "But it must be somewhere about—that stands to reason."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, if you can't find that idiotic book perhaps I'd better look for it," said Bunter.

"If you weren't a fat, lazy, slacking rotter, you'd be helping us look for it already," snorted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! If that's the thanks I get for finding the rotten thing for you—"

"You haven't found it yet, you blitherer!"

"Oh, I fancy I can find it!" said Bunter airily. "It only needs gump-tion, you know. That's my long suit. I don't suppose it's very far away."

"Fathead!"

Bunter heaved himself up from the grass. With a walk of two hours between him and lunch, it was clear, even to Bunter, that it was time to get a move on. And certainly nobody but Bunter was likely to find that missing Holiday Annual.

"Leave it to me," said Bunter. "You fellows go and sit down. You look tired. He, he, he! Ill-tempered, too."

"You fat frump—"

"Oh, leave it to me!" snapped Bunter. "Isn't everything left to me? Don't I do practically all the work on this hike? If you lose anything, I've got to find it, of course. Well, I've got to do it. Leave it to me, and don't jaw."

The hikers looked at Billy Bunter as if they could have eaten him.

With a contemptuous sniff the Owl of the Remove rolled away under the branches of the clump of trees.

"You fat chump!" bawled Bob Cherry. "It can't be there."

"Yah!" retorted Bunter, over his shoulder.

He disappeared into the trees.

"Bother the silly ass!" growled Bob. "I suppose he's gone for a snooze, really. The book can't be as far off as that, unless it's grown legs and walked."

"Oh, my esteemed hat!" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "There is an excellent and absurd proverb, my idiotic friends, that those who perform the hidefulness, can also perpetrate the findfulness."

Bob Cherry jumped.

"Oh! My only hat! I never thought of that! That fat scoundrel has—"

"The pernicious villain!" gasped Wharton. "He's hidden that Holiday Annual, to keep us hanging about while he sat under a tree!"

"Those who hide can find!" grinned Nugent. "That benighted ass has gone to find what he hid."

"I—I—I'll—!" gasped Bob.

He rushed after Bunter.

He was in time to see that fat and fatuous youth stoop, and plunge a fat paw into a hollow under the roots of a tree, and draw out a Holiday Annual!

Bunter rose to his feet, Annual in

hand, with a fat grin on his face. Bob heard his fat chuckle.

"He, he, he!"

"You fat rotter!" roared Bob.

"Oh!" Billy Bunter jumped, and blinked through his spectacles. "I—I say, old chap! I've found it for you!"

"Where you hid it!" yelled Bob.

"Certainly not! It was lying under this tree, you know. I—I dare say the wind blew it there."

"Some wind, to blow a volume that weight!" grinned Nugent, as the rest of the hikers came up.

"I saw him root it out from under that tree!" shrieked Bob. "It was hidden there, and Bunter hid it."

"D-d-d-did you?" gasped Bunter.

"What I mean is, I—I found it under the tree. I—I happened to look there, and—and there it was."

"You happened to look in a hole under a tree, without knowing that the book was there?" gasped Wharton.

"Yes, old chap! Gumption, you know," said Bunter. "You fellows would never have thought of looking there."

"Not as we didn't park the book there," agreed Wharton. "You did, you podgy bloater!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I'll burst him!" gasped Bob.

"Hanging about all the morning, because that podgy puffer was too lazy to walk! I'll squash him! I'll—"

"Here, keep off!" yelled Bunter, dodging round the other hikers. "I—I put it there to save it from that tramp, you beast!"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Bob, quite taken aback by that statement.

"He'd have had it, if I hadn't hidden it," declared Bunter. "You jolly well know that! You might thank a chap for saving it for you. That tramp would have had it, but for my presence of mind, hiding it before he came along."

"Pip-pip-presence of mind," stuttered Bob. "Did you know that tramp was coming along, any more than we did?"

"Oh! I—I—I mean—"

"You mean you hid it to make us hang about while you squatted under a tree!" roared Bob. "And you wouldn't have coughed it up now, only you want to get somewhere to lunch."

"The—the fact is—"

Billy Bunter got no farther. Bob Cherry grasped him by a fat neck, and landed him in the grass. With the other hand he grasped the Holiday Annual. That volume rose and fell with a bang.

Whack!

"Whoop!" roared Bunter.

Whack!

"Yarooop!"

Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow!" Draggimoff!" shrieked Bunter. "Pullimoff! Yarooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack!

"Yooop! Help! Fire!"

"There!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"That's a tip!"

"Yow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter.

"Beast! Ungateful beast! Catch me finding your Holiday Annual for you next time it's missing!"

"You fat puffer, if it's missing again, you'll be missing, too," said Bob.

"Come on, you men! We're keeping Mr. Bunce waiting."

Mr. Bunce had watched that entertaining scene with a broad grin on his tanned face. Now he started with the hikers, and they walked down the track to the gateway. Bunter sat and roared.

"Coming, fatty!" Harry Wharton called back.

"No!" roared Bunter. "I'm fed-up with you! I'm done with you! Go and eat coke! After this you can get on the boat you can without me!"

"Hurrah!"

"Beasts!"

The hikers hiked on. Bunter was left behind.

But a few minutes later there was a patter of feet in pursuit, and a fat and panting Bunter rejoined the hikers in the lane. On second thoughts—proverbially the best—Billy Bunter had decided not to turn down the Greyfriars hikers.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Trip on the Thames!

"THE jolly old Thames!"

"Hurrah!"

Coming through the trees, and beholding the glistening water reflecting back the rays of the sun, was really delightful.

The rippling Thames flowed peacefully between green banks, a mere stream, but very pleasant to look upon. The hikers had intended to "hit" the Thames in Wiltshire, but they were, as a matter of fact, hitting it in Berkshire; but it was all one to a hiker. How they hadn't got to Cricklade the previous day they did not quite know. But, anyhow, there was Lechlade across the river, and Bob Cherry remarked that one "lade" was as good as another, whether it was Cricklade, Lechlade, or marmalade.

"This reminds me of something classical," Bob remarked, as the river burst on their sight. "I forget what it was, but something or other—" He rubbed his nose thoughtfully. "Oh, I remember—the retreat of the jolly old ten thousand. They fought the sea all of a sudden, after hiking around in Asia Minor a long time, and exclaimed: 'The sea—the sea!'"

"They jolly well didn't!" said Billy Bunter.

"They jolly well did!" said Bob. "I remember we've had it with Quelch in the Form-room at Greyfriars, fathead."

"Well, they didn't," retorted Bunter. "It stands to reason that ancient Greeks must have talked Greek, so they couldn't have exclaimed, 'the sea—the sea!' That's English."

"Oh, my hat! You howling ass, of course they put it in Greek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thalassa! Thalassa!" said Nugent, laughing.

"Was that it?" asked Bob. "Sounds jolly poetical. Anybody know any Greek to greet the Thames with?" There was no reply. "Well, this sort of thing makes a fellow feel poetical," went on Bob. "Lots of sportsmen have written poetry about here. Shelley, for one, and a chap named Arnold."

"I've heard of Arnold," said Billy Bunter. "But he was a schoolmaster."

"This was another Arnold, ass—a poet! He wrote something or other called—what do you call it, or something?" Bob seemed a little vague. "The fact is, you men, I believe I could spout poetry in scenery like this—"

"Go it!" said Harry Wharton, with a chuckle.

"Well, what about this?" asked Bob, after a little reflection as the hikers walked down a shady lane towards the river that glistened across the green meadows in front of them. And Bob "went" it.

"The sea! The sea!" exclaimed the Greeks.

After wandering round for weeks, "The Thames! The Thames!" the hikers cried,

After getting lost, and wandering about, far and wide."

"I think the last line is a bit too long," said Bob thoughtfully.

"The thoughtfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How sweet to see the river glide, Too far up from London to be stopped by the tide;

With flowers bright, in many a bunch—"

"I say, you fellows, what about lunch?" put in Billy Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the hikers, as Bunter unintentionally added a line to Bob's poetry.

"Lunch!" snorted Bob. "You'd be thinking about lunch when other fellows are thinking about poetry! Lots of poets have written bags of stuff on this jolly old river. There was Pope, at Twickenham—"

"Rot!" said Bunter. "He wasn't!" "He was!" roared Bob.

PUT YOUR THINKING CAP ON.

Like Miss Eleanor Ouseley, of 31, Upper Derby Road, Portsmouth, Hants, has done and make up a Greyfriars limerick. If it's worth A POCKET WALLET you'll get one. Here's her winning effort:

Dr. Locke is the Greyfriars "beak,"
He's tall and majestic and sleek.
He worries the prefects
By pointing out defects,
And stuffing their noddies with Greek!

"Lot you know!" jeered Bunter. "Any kid in the Second Form could tell you that Pope lives at Rome!"

"You howling ass, I mean Pope, the poet, not Pope, the Pope!" roared Bob.

"Was there a poet named Pope?" asked Bunter. "Well, look here, don't you get telling us any of his beastly poetry. I'm hungry!"

"Ere's the inn, gentlemen," said Mr. Bunce, "and if you want a boat any time you come along to the boathouse, which you'll see next to my cottage yonder."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "Now we've hit the jolly old Thames at last, you men, my idea is to hike by water for a bit—what?"

"Good egg!" said Harry Wharton. "But how about getting shut of the boat when we're finished?"

"That's all right," said Mr. Bunce. "You can leave the boat where you like along the river, anywhere this side of Oxford, and I'll get it picked up after."

"You're a friend in need, and no mistake, Mr. Bunce," said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "That's ripping!"

"The ripfulness is terrific!"

Mr. Bunce touched his hat to the hikers and stumped along cheerily on his wooden leg, leaving them to go to the inn, which was called the Golden Trout. They were all rather glad to get safely landed there, and to discover that an excellent lunch was to be obtained.

"I say, you fellows, this trout is simply ripping!" said Billy Bunter,

beaming. "They catch 'em here, you know! If you fellows like, I'll do some fishing. I'm a dab at angling. We get some pretty big fish in the trout stream at Bunter Court. Suppose we stay on here for a few days. The grub seems to be good—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! These trout are nearly as good as we catch at Bunter Court."

"This is a different species of trout, though," said Bob Cherry.

"Eh! What's the difference?" asked Bunter.

"This is a real trout," explained Bob. "There's a lot of difference between a real trout and an imaginary trout."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "I can tell you I once caught a trout weighing thirty pounds—"

"Shillings, more likely!" grinned Bob.

"Yah!"

Bunter devoted himself to the trout. Whether he could catch trout or not, Bunter knew how to dispose of them when caught. In that line he could beat any angler that ever angled.

After lunch the hikers walked down to Mr. Bunce's boathouse to look over the boats. Bunter was left taking a nap under a shady tree. Bob Cherry's idea of hiking by water for a while was quite popular, especially with Lord Mauleverer and Billy Bunter. Sitting in a boat to hike was an idea that suited them both admirably. Mauly even suggested turning it into a river-hike, and keeping on right down the Thames to London; a suggestion which did not catch on. And the prospect of sitting down for the rest of the trip faded from Mauly's eyes like a beautiful dream.

"We'll boat it as far as Bablockhythe, and then hoof it north through Oxfordshire," said Bob. "We can take a couple of days over twenty-five miles, taking it jolly easy. We'll leave the boat at Bablockhythe for Mr. Bunce to pick up."

"Right you are, sir!" said Mr. Bunce.

And the hikers selected a boat, and arranged terms with Bobby Bunce, and prepared for the voyage. Untiring hikers as they were, the Famous Five liked the idea of using their arms instead of their legs for a day or two. Billy Bunter was roused out of his nap, and he rolled down to the boat. It was rather a roomy boat, with plenty of space for the crew of seven and their "dunnage," as Mr. Bunce called it.

"What about fishing tackle?" asked Bunter.

"Nothing about fishing tackle!" answered Harry.

"Look here, we may as well have fresh trout for supper," argued Bunter. "You fellows can pick up some tips about angling, too, by watching me. Bunce has got fishing tackle here."

"Heaps!" said Mr. Bunce.

"You can leave the fishing to me," said Bunter. "You fellows make out that I never do any work! Well, so long as you do the camping and the washing-up and the other few trifling things, I'll do all the fishing. I'll guarantee to keep you supplied with plenty of fish so long as we stick to the river. I want a rod and line."

"Oh, all right! But you won't catch anything unless you row."

"Eh! What should I catch if I rowed, you ass?"

"Crabs!"

"Yah!"

Fishing tackle having been added to the equipment, in order that Billy

Bunter might keep the whole party well supplied with fresh fish during the trip on the Thames, the hikers pushed off. Mr. Bunce gave the boat a shove, and they floated out on the Thames and drifted down with the current. A mile or two below Lechlade, as they floated at a leisurely rate by green meadows, a red-spotted muffer on the bank caught their eyes.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Know that sportsman?"

"The knowfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Mr. Herbert Higgs, on the bank, stared at the hikers in the boat. Evidently he remembered the party, and not with affection. He came to a halt, staring at them and shaking a brawny fist.

"I say, you fellows, keep clear of that bank!" exclaimed Billy Bunter anxiously. "What are you steering in for, Cherry, you ass? That beast might go for us!"

Bob pulled the line, and the boat nosed towards the bank, where Mr. Higgs stood shaking his fist.

"What's the game?" asked Harry Wharton.

"This!" answered Bob cheerily, dipping his hand into a bag of provender and extracting therefrom a large apple.

The hikers chuckled. Bob, apple in hand, watched the burly man on the bank. As they drew within range of his voice, Mr. Higgs began to make remarks to them of a personal and objectionable nature. It was only too clear that his experience with the hikers had caused him to take quite a dislike to the cheery party.

But the flow of his eloquence was suddenly interrupted. Bob's hand shot up, with the apple in it.

Whiz!

Crash!

The apple landed fairly on Mr. Higgs' nose. He sat down on the bank, with a sudden shock.

"Well bowled!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar from Herbert Higgs. He scrambled up, with both hands clasped to his nose. The hikers' boat pulled out into the stream again and slid on down the Thames, the hikers looking back at Mr. Higgs with smiling faces. Mr. Higgs was brandishing his fist again and roaring, but the boat very soon passed out of hearing; which was just as well, for Mr. Higgs' observations were entirely unsuitable for youthful ears.

Mr. Higgs disappeared astern, and the hikers floated on cheerily in the glow of the September sunshine down the winding Thames.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter, the Fisherman I

"**H**OLD on here!"

"What for?"

"Fishing!"

"Oh, scat!"

"Look here, this is a jolly good place," said Bunter firmly. "Hold on, I tell you! I shan't keep you long; only until I've caught a dozen or so trout—"

"That means stopping here," said Bob Cherry, "till the year 2033. I suppose you will catch one about every ten years!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Too long a rest for us!" said Bob, shaking his head.

"Oh, really, Cherry! Tie on to this branch," said Bunter. "I don't think

you fellows ought to keep on showing jealousy because I can do a lot of things you can't do! It's rather mean."

"Fathead!"

"Rather unmanly, if you ask me," said Bunter. "Now, tie on, and keep quiet! Don't keep on jawing, you know—it may frighten away the fish."

"You don't think your face has done that already?" asked Bob.

"Yah!"

"Well, this is a lovely spot—let's give him a quarter of an hour," said Harry Wharton.

"That will mean only two or three trout," said Bunter. "Still, when you see me landing them one after another, I fancy you'll be keen for me to keep on. You might stick that rod together for me, Bob! Don't slack."

A long, drooping branch over the stream afforded a good mooring. The boat tied on, rocked gently on the sleepy current. The rod and line having been adjusted, Bunter took it in hand.

"I say, you fellows, did you bring any bait?" inquired the Owl of the Remove, remembering that rather important item a little late. Even the most expert angler could hardly expect to catch his fish without bait.

"I think not!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Well, you're a lot of duds, and no mistake!" exclaimed Bunter, in disgust. "I have to think of everything, of course! If I forget a thing, it's forgotten all round! I want a jar of bait. Look here! We've only done a couple of miles. One of you fellows cut back on the bank, and get some bait from Bunce."

"Who's going to walk two miles, and back, to get Bunter some bait to play the giddy or?" asked Bob. "Don't all speak at once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I think that's pretty selfish, as I'm going to supply trout for the whole party," said Bunter. "I must have some bait."

"Stick on a bit of corned beef, old fat man."

"You want live bait for trout," said Bunter. "Trout won't rise to a bit of old beef! Dace or bleak—you stick the hook in them, you know, and—"

"Groooooogh! Shut up!"

"And they wriggle—"

"Shut up!" roared Bob.

"Well, if you're going to be squeamish, you can't expect to catch any trout," said Bunter peevishly. "Of course, you have to have live bait."

"What about sticking the hook into Bunter?" said Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "If it can be stuck into a live bleak, why not into a live freak?"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "Well, if you're not going back for bait, I'll try a bit of beef on the hook. Mind, I don't undertake to catch trout without live bait."

"That's all right—you'll catch just as many," said Nugent. "And if you wag the rod about like that, you'll catch that tree."

"Rats! I'll show you how to handle a rod," sniffed Bunter.

And he did! Standing up in the moored boat, Bunter brandished the rod, and the hook immediately caught on a branch overhead. Bunter tugged.

"Go it!" said Bob encouragingly. "Bunter's made a catch already, you men. He's caught an oak-tree! I hardly think it will do for supper—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly, cackling asses, help me to get this line loose!" roared Bunter. "How's a fellow to fish, with a lot of cackling idiots grinning at him, I'd like to know! Beasts!"

Bunter tugged and tugged! The rod

came away at last, leaving the hook and a few yards of line in the tree. However, a new hook was forthcoming, and then Bunter made another cast, fortunately missing the tree. Unfortunately, however, it caught Lord Mauleverer's straw hat, which whisked off his head with a suddenness that surprised his lordship.

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Mauly. "Where's my hat? I say, that's my hat. Bunter! You're jolly well not goin' to use my hat for bait!"

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

"Another catch!" roared Bob Cherry. "Are we to have Mauly's hat for supper?"

"The catchfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"It's going to be some supper, if it depends on Bunter's fishing," said Bob.

"First course an oak-tree—second course, Mauly's hat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Take your silly hat off my hook. Mauly, you fathead!" howled Bunter. "Can't you keep your silly head out of the way when a fellow's fishing?"

"I'll take jolly good care to!" gasped Mauly. "You're not goin' to hook my head next time."

The hat swung over the boat, and was recaptured. Then Bunter at last got his bait on, and cast afresh. This time, wonderful to relate, hook and bait sank into the Thames, with no casualties.

"Now it's all right," said the fat Owl. "Keep quiet! You have to keep quite quiet, or the trout won't rise."

The juniors, sitting about the boat at ease, kept quiet, grinning. Billy Bunter paid out his line, blinking anxiously over the gunwale through his big spectacles. Very likely trout were there. But it was probable that they did not want to have anything to do with Bunter. Anyhow, they did not rise.

Bunter shifted his line several times. Then he gave a chirrup of glee.

"Got him!"

"Oh, my hat! Has he really caught something?" exclaimed Bob, in amazement.

"Watch and see!" grinned Bunter. "You watch me play him! By gum, he's heavy! Ten pounder—at least! Fifteen pounds, I should say! Just you watch me land that trout, you fellows."

There was something on the hook. Whether it was a trout remained to be seen. Anyhow, it did not wind and dodge and struggle in the manner of a trout. It was heavy, but unresisting. It came up peacefully as Bunter whisked his rod, and shot up from the river.

Then there was a bowl from the hikers.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

On the end of Bunter's line swung an ancient, decayed boat, which, to judge by its looks, had been a long time at the bottom of the river. Bunter blinked at it, with his eyes almost popping through his spectacles. The other fellows yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're getting on with supper," said Bob. "Third course, an old boat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, will you?" yelled Bunter. And he unhooked the ancient boat and hurled it back into the river, rebaited, and tried again.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Some Catch I

BILLY BUNTER snorted. He was getting annoyed. The silvery Thames flowed on past the moored boat, the wind rustled the branches of the trees,



"Ere, you 'ook it!" said Herbert Higgs, clenching a brawny fist as Mr. Bunce approached. "See, 'ook it! Don't you come barging in 'ere!" Up came Mr. Bunce's wooden leg like a flash of lightning, and it was jammed fairly into Herbert Higgs' waistcoat. "Oooooogh!" gurgled Herbert, staggering backwards.

the sun shone brightly on green woods and meadows and glistening stream. The other fellows all seemed to be enjoying life. Lord Mauleveror was dozing. Harry Wharton was scanning a map of Oxfordshire, picking out a route for the next hike. Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh sat and basked in the sun. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent sat round the Holiday Annual, reading it together. Only Bunter, for once, was really busy—and as he was taking all this trouble to provide the party with an appetising supper, he considered that they might at least have taken some interest in the proceedings.

But they didn't. They gave Bunter his head, and let it go at that. Probably they did not expect him to make a catch, unless there was another old boot at the bottom of the river.

Bunter shifted his line continually. He did not seem to possess any of that peaceful patience necessary to an angler. When he made a cast, he seemed to be bent on thrashing the river, as if it had done him some injury. That was not really the way to attract the wily trout.

"I fancy we've struck a bad patch," said Bunter at last. "I don't think there's any fish here, you fellows."

"There's no fisherman, at any rate," said Bob.

"I wish people wouldn't come barging along when a fellow's fishing," said Bunter irritably, as a skiff came down from Lechlade.

"Bought the Thames?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"
Bunter was standing up again, brandishing his rod, looking for a good spot. It was irritating for the skiff to come barging along. Though, in point of fact, Billy Bunter had not bought the

Thames, and it did not belong to him. He gave the two people in the skiff an annoyed blink. Both of them were looking at him, as if wondering what he was up to. Possibly they did not recognise his performance as angling.

One of them was an old gentleman, with a red face and a white moustache, and a pair of eyes rather like gooseberries, in one of which an eyeglass was stuck. The other was quite a pretty girl, who held a flimsy sunshade over her head. She was steering, while the old gentleman gave an occasional flick with the sculls. They were obviously interested in Bunter. The girl was smiling; the old gentleman took off his eyeglass, wiped it, and jammed it into his eye again, as if to make sure that he saw aright. The girl's smile was, of course, easily accounted for by the fact that Bunter was an uncommonly handsome and attractive fellow! But he saw no reason for the old gentleman's steady stare of astonishment.

"Hi!" ejaculated the old gentleman, as the skiff floated into the offing.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Eh! Did you call to me?" he squeaked.

"Yes! I did! Mind what you're doing with that rod."

"What?"

"I don't know what you're at!" barked the old gentleman. "But pray let us get by in safety. You shouldn't wave a twelve-foot rod about like that, with a hook on the line, and other boats passing."

Bunter glared at him.

That old ass—that old duffer—that cheeky old chump—seemed to suppose that Bunter was just waving the rod about for fun! He seemed totally unaware of the fact that Bunter was making a masterly cast!

"Hold on till they've passeed, old fat bean!" chuckled Harry Wharton.

"Don't be a silly ass!" grunted Bunter.

"If you hook that old gent—"

"Rats!"

"Well, he looks rather fierce," grinned the captain of the Remove. "I'd let him pass safe, if I were you."

"You silly ass! Do you think I don't know how to handle a rod?" hooted Bunter. "I don't want any of his cheek, I can jolly well tell him."

And Bunter, unheeding the advice he had received, as well as the testy glare of the old gentleman in the skiff, proceeded to cast his line.

There was a sudden scream from the skiff.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

His line whisked into the air, with a sunshade adhering to the hook. The girl in the skiff gave a startled scream; the old gentleman a roar of wrath.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Another catch! Fourth course for supper—a jolly old sunshade."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My sunshade!" shrieked the young lady in the skiff. "What ever—"

"You young rascal!" roared the old gentleman. "You young villain! Good gad, I'll teach you to play tricks with my daughter's sunshade!"

He brought the skiff with a rush towards the moored boat.

Splash! The hooked sunshade descended into the Thames! It was a flimsy article, quite pretty when it was dry; but as soon as it was wet, it was just a limp rag! It splashed between the boats, and the old gentleman grabbed at it and captured it. Then he gave utterance to a roar like a

wounded elephant. Evidently he had caught the hook, too!

"Yoo-hooo—hoooop!" roared the man in the skiff.

"I—I—I say, let go my line!" howled Bunter. "I say, wharrer you grabbing my line for?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Nugent. "This looks like trouble."

"Terrific trouble!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur.

The man in the skiff got the sunshade loose, and tossed it down—wet and limp! Then he closed in on the boat, and grasped the gunwale, bringing the two craft alongside. Then he grasped Bunter.

"I say, you fellows—yaroooooh!" roared Bunter. "Oh crickey! Wow! I say, you fellows—whoooooop!"

Smack! smack! smack!

"Yaroooooop!"

A hand on Bunter's collar jerked him over—the other hand rose and fell, in a series of terrific smacks. Billy Bunter roared and wriggled and yelled. The rod slipped from his fat hands, and slid away down the river. Bunter did not heed it. All he heeded was that heavy, smacking hand.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! Whooooop!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows, draggimoff! Oh lor! Oh crickey! Yarooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Father," gasped the girl in the skiff, "I—I think it was an accident—please, please—"

"Nonsense!" roared the old gentleman. "These hooligan trippers spoil the river! It was a prank—the young scoundrel deliberately hooked away your sunshade I will—"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Don't burst him, sir!" suggested Bob Cherry, respectfully.

"What? What? Young rascal—"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Yarooooh! Help! Whooooop!"

Harry Wharton gave the skiff a shove, and it floated off. The testy old gentleman had to let go Bunter then, or drop out of his boat. He let go, and rocked away in the skiff, still glaring, evidently under the impression that Bunter had not had enough.

Bunter, on the other hand, was convinced that he had had too much! He rolled in the boat and roared.

"Yow-ow-ow! Wow-wow-wow! Whoooo-hooop! I say, you fellows—yarooooh!"

"All serene, old bean—he's gone!" said Harry.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter sat up, and blinked after the skiff, which was disappearing down the Thames. He was glad to see it go. He wriggled and gasped, while the other fellows yelled with laughter. What there was to laugh at, in this painful and disagreeable incident, Bunter did not know. He did not feel like laughing himself!

"The cheeky beast!" gasped Bunter. "Barging into an angler's way, and fouling his line, and then cutting up rusty, as if a fellow was to blame! I say, you fellows, where's my rod and line?"

"O where and O where can they be?" sang Nugent.

"Have you silly asses let my rod drop overboard?" yelled Bunter. "Look here, if I don't get that rod back, I can't catch any trout for supper."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've caught enough," chuckled Bob. "You've caught an oak-tree, and Mauly's hat, and an old boot, and a flapper's sunshade. That's more than we shall eat for supper—a lot more."

"The lotfulness is terrific."

"Time we got moving," said Harry Wharton, untying the painter. "We may pick up the rod lower down."

"Well, I'll try the next reach, if we get the rod back," said Bunter.

"You jolly well won't!" grinned Bob. "You've done enough damage for one day! You've finished fishing, old fat bean."

"I haven't!" roared Bunter.

"You have!" answered the hikers, with one voice.

And Bunter had! The rod was recovered from the rushes lower down; and packed carefully away. Bunter had made all the catches he was going to make! He might have caught somebody's ear or nose next time, and that would have been too serious! There was no more fishing for Bunter—but the trout in the Thames, probably, had not had an awfully narrow escape!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Plunge for Ponsonby!

"JOLLY place to camp!" said Bob.

"Topping!"

A little green field, surrounded by shady trees, sloped down to the water. It looked an inviting and very pleasant spot in the summer sunset. On one side a narrow shady lane ran up from the Thames, leading to a house in the distance. The hikers eyed that agreeable spot, and the boat was tied up.

"Wake up, Mauly!" roared Bob.

"Eh? I'm not asleep! I heard all you fellows were ayyin'," came a yawn from under Mauleverer's straw hat.

"Up with you, slacker! You're wanted."

"Look here, I'm not goin' to row!" protested Lord Mauleverer. "The advantage of travellin' down-stream is that you can go with the current. It would be a sheer waste to throw away that advantage. We're gettin' on fast enough—in fact, a little too fast!"

"And you've not been asleep!" chuckled Harry Wharton. Mauly was evidently in happy ignorance of the fact that the boat had stopped.

"Well, perhaps I closed my eyes," admitted Mauleverer. "I say, don't let's hurry! This pleasant drifting down-stream is soothin' and—"

"You howling ass, we've tied up," said Johnny Bull.

"Oh!" Lord Mauleverer sat up, and took notice. "Have you? Why?"

"You heard all we were saying, but you don't know we're camping here!" grinned Bob. "Now you're wanted, old bean! Somebody's got to go up to the house yonder and ask leave. You're the most respectable member of the party—got on with it."

"Oh gad! Is it far?" yawned Mauly.

"About three hundred yards."

"Well, look here, let Bunter go! Bunter would like to stretch his legs a bit, wouldn't you, Bunter?"

"No!" said Bunter.

"Wharton, old man, you'd make a better impression on the people at the house than I should."

Lord Mauleverer sighed and rose to his feet. He sighed again, and landed. With another sigh he started up the lane towards the distant building. The hikers remained in the boat waiting for him to return.

Apparently, Lord Mauleverer's nice looks and nice manners made the necessary good impression on the people of the house, for he returned with permission for the party to camp for the night in the little field.

Cheerfully the party landed their gear, and camped.

The tent was set up, the supper cooked on the portable stove, and the hikers sat round to dispose of it, with excellent appetites. It was quite a nice supper, though Billy Bunter had not, as he had intended, contributed fresh trout.

It was very pleasant sitting under the trees in the grass, watching the river ripple by and various craft pass in the glowing sunset.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly.

He pointed to a punt that was coming down-stream.

Two fellows sat in it, or, rather, sprawled, on cushions, smoking cigarettes. Another fellow, very elegant in white flannels, was poling. The latter was Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School. The other two were Gadsby and Monson.

"Highcliffe cads!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Looking for us!" grinned Bob.

Gadsby and Monson did not appear to be looking for anybody or anything. But Ponsonby, as he poled the punt slowly along with the sluggish current, cast quick and searching glances to and fro at both banks of the river.

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"Those rotters are after us again!" he said. "We jolly well know that Ponsonby set those tramps on us. That red-spotted brute couldn't have wanted Bob's Annual for any other reason. And that ruffian saw us on the river today. Now Pon is looking for us! I've a jolly good mind—" The captain of the Remove half rose, but he sat down again.

"We're leading a jolly old hunted life!" grinned Bob. "That rotter has spotted us."

The juniors saw Ponsonby fix his eyes on the moored boat under the trees. Then his glance travelled on, to the camp on shore. He spoke to Gadsby and Monson, and those youths sat up lazily and stared towards the bank. Ponsonby poled in close to the boat.

"You fellows here!" he said, in quite an amiable tone. "Taken to the river—what?"

"You didn't know?" asked Bob sarcastically.

"How should I know?" asked Ponsonby innocently.

"I thought your friend with the red spots might have told you."

Ponsonby started.

"Who? What? I don't quite catch on," he said.

"You didn't set a gang of tramps on us?" asked Bob.

"Certainly not."

"Then there's another party after my jolly old Holiday Annual, as well as you fellows. That's what they wanted," said Bob, with a chuckle.

"You're talkin' in riddles," said Ponsonby calmly. "Have you been havin' any trouble with other tramps?"

Gadsby and Monson chuckled.

"Oh, chuck it, Ponsonby!" exclaimed Wharton, in disgust. "We jolly well know that you set that gang on us, and we know what you're after now. Now you've spotted our camp, I've no doubt you've got your gang of roughs all ready to spring on us again."

"My dear man, you're dreamin'," said Ponsonby pleasantly. "We've parked our car up at Lechlade, and we're havin' an afternoon on the river. Quite a surprise to see you fellows. I thought you were miles away, hoofin' it."

"Ananias was a fool to you, Pon!" said Bob Cherry. "If you've done telling lies, suppose you clear off! Your face doesn't improve the landscape!"

"Look here, let's mop 'em up, now

"we've got the chance!" said Johnny Bull, getting on his feet. "We all got some hard knocks scrapping with those tramps, and I'm going to hand a few on."

"I say, let's get on, Pon!" said Gadaby hastily.

"What rot!" said Ponsonby coolly. "I suppose we're not afraid of a mob of Greyfriars outsiders! That fellow Bull—is your name Bull, or Bullock?—is only gassin'. I'd like to see him jump on this punt!"

Johnny Bull crimsoned with wrath. "It won't take you long to see that!" he roared.

And he rushed down to the margin of the water.

"Look out!" yelled Nugent.

Ponsonby swung up the punt-pole. He made a vicious lunge with it, and caught the unwary Johnny on the chest.

"Oooogh!" gasped Johnny Bull, as he sat down suddenly. "Oh, you cad! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Ponsonby.

The hikers were all on their feet now, with the exception of Billy Bunter. Bunter sat and blinked. He did not like punt-poles at close quarters.

But the other fellows rushed down to the bank, with the intention of leaping into the punt and giving Pon & Co. what they were asking for.

Ponsonby, grinning, drove with the pole in the shallows, and the punt shot away far out of reach.

Unfortunately for Ponsonby, he drove so hard that the pole declined to come out of the mud.

The punt shot away, carrying Gadaby and Monson to safety, and before Pon knew what was happening it had shot away from under his feet, leaving him clinging to the embedded pole.

"Oh gad!" gasped Monson, staring back as the punt rooked away. "I say! Oh gad! Oh scissors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the bank.

Splash!

Ponsonby, with no visible means of support, splashed headlong into the river. The punt-pole flew from his hands, and he disappeared under the surface of the Thames.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the hikers.

"He, he, he!" cackinnated Billy Bunter.

"Oh crums!" gasped Gadaby.

Ponsonby came up, spluttering. The water was not deep; the Thames flowed round his neck as he stood. He blinked about him wildly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oooooogh!" gasped Ponsonby.

"Urrrrrgh! Oh great gad! Urrrrrgh!"

He scrambled frantically towards the bank. Johnny Bull stood waiting for him there, with an expression on his face that was so grim that Pon changed his mind and scrambled back again. He splashed and floundered to the punt, and Gadaby and Monson dragged him in.

The hikers yelled with laughter. Pon had been an exceedingly elegant youth when he splashed in. He looked anything but elegant when he splashed out. He was soaked and drenched, dripping with water and dripping with mud. There seemed to be a lot of soft, clinging mud at the bottom of the Thames, and Pon had collected quite a lot of it. He was of the mud, muddy, as he squelched into the punt.

"Do that again, Pon!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby shook a muddy and furious fist at the hikers. The punt floated on, leaving the pole sticking in the mud

by the bank. It disappeared down the winding river, followed by a roar of laughter from the Greyfriars hikers.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Foes of the Night!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had rather serious faces as the summer dusk deepened into dark.

Pon & Co. had long vanished in their drifting punt, and of the red-spotted man they had seen nothing since Bob had landed the apple on his nose that afternoon.

But all the hikers were convinced that they had not seen the last of either. It was fairly certain that Ponsonby had punted down the Thames to spy out their camp, and now he knew where to lay his finger on them.

Pon certainly was not likely to attempt to lay his own finger on the hikers; but they did not doubt that he intended to set the tramps on them again. That, indeed, could be his only object in spying them out. And the hikers did not want to repeat their hectic and painful experiences with Herbert Higgs & Co.

Breaking camp, after settling down in such good quarters for the night, did not appeal to them, neither did the idea of running away. Yet to turn in, when any minute a rough gang might come along to attack them, was not an attractive idea.

Sitting in the deepening shadows under the trees by the river, the Famous Five discussed the matter, hardly noticing that Lord Mauleverer had sauntered away, leaving them to it.

Billy Bunter did not take part in the discussion. Bunter was still eating. He was travelling, slowly, but surely, through a large cake; and until that cake was finished Bunter had no attention to bestow on lesser matters.

"The fact is, we ought to have gone to the police about those rotten tramps and had them run in!" said Johnny Bull. "Only it would have meant hanging about, instead of getting on with the hike. Pon ought to be run in, too, if you come to that. Ten to one they'll come along to-night, now that they know where to get us. And we're not going to run away."

"Well, we can't handle those four ruffians if Pon sets them on again," said Harry. "Bobby Bunce isn't here to lend a hand now."

"And they're pretty certain to come after dark," said Nugent. "We should have seen them last night, if they'd been able to spot the camp. Now they can spot it—if Pon's in touch with them."

"No 'if' about it; he is!" said Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, dry up, Bunter!"

"Is there another cake?"

"No, you cormorant!"

"I think you might have got another cake. You know I like cake. I say, you fellows— Oh crikey! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter suddenly. "Help! Keep him off! Rescue! Whoop!"

Bunter made a sudden bound. Through the hedge

field from the lane, a large animal had suddenly whisked. Billy Bunter had a glimpse of the bright eyes and extensive jaws of a large bulldog—and one glimpse was enough for Bunter.

With a single bound he reached

the group of hikers, and tumbled into their midst.

"Yaroooh! Keep him off!" he roared.

"What the thump—"

"It's a jolly old bulldog—"

"I say, look out! He's got a jolly old set of teeth on him—"

"G-r-r-r-r!" growled the bulldog.

"Pop—Pop!" came a familiar voice—the voice of Lord Mauleverer. Mauly came through the hedge. "Good dog! Good doggie! Pop!"

Pop apparently was the bulldog's name. He turned to his lordship, and rubbed a square nose on him. Apparently he liked Mauly.

"You fellows here!" asked Mauly, peering round in the shadows. "I thought I heard Bunter yowling—"

"Keep that dog off!" shrieked Bunter.

"My dear chap, he's all right," said Mauly cheerfully. "I've brought him along to keep us company."

"You silly idiot!" yelled Bunter. "Take him away! Drive him away!"

Lord Mauleverer chuckled.

"Pop! Good dog!" he said. "Better make friends with him, you men. He's got frightful teeth! I've made friends with him already."

The hikers gathered round the bulldog rather uncertainly. Billy Bunter remained at a respectful distance.

"Where on earth did you dig up that beast?" asked Bob.

"He belongs to the gardener up at the house," explained Lord Mauleverer. "I met him when I went up to ask leave to camp. He seemed to take to me, rather. He's a jolly decent dog! He's got judgment. You can see that he doesn't like Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Look at his teeth!" said Mauleverer.

"Jawver see such a set, except on a saw! Splendid teeth!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm going to stop on the boat!"

"But what the thump have you brought that fearful rhinoceros along here for, Mauly?" asked Nugent.

"Keep us company to-night," said Mauleverer.

"Nice company—in a tent," said Bob. "I'd rather he went to the dentist before I settled down to sleep near him."

"My dear man, it's because of his jolly old teeth that I've been up to the gardener's cottage and borrowed him," said Lord Mauleverer. "He's a really nice dog, ain't you, Pop, old bean? The gardener says he hates tramps."

"Oh!" said Harry. "You mean—"

"Well, I can't help thinkin' that we may have visitors to-night," said Lord Mauleverer. "I don't know whether it's occurred to you fellows, but I've got an idea that Pon's unwashed friends may be droppin' in—what? We don't want another battle. I got quite tired this mornin'. If they barge into Pop, I feel sure they'll clear off again quite rapidly. What do you fellows think?"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"While we've been jawing about it, old Mauly's solved the jolly old problem,

(Continued on next page.)

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and worked the giddy oracle. Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen, it's all serene! Let's make friends with Pop. We don't want him to bite the wrong party if there's a rumpus to-night."

"We've got the loan of him till morning," said Lord Maulaverer. "I tipped the gardener—a awfully decent chap. I really think that, with Pop in the tent, those sportsmen will be sorry they called, if they butt in and spoil our beauty sleep—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton & Co. proceeded to do their best to get pally with Pop, who seemed quite a good-tempered beast. Certainly he had taken a liking to Maul; and he was pleased to extend at least a friendly toleration to the rest of the party. Billy Bunter, however, did not put his friendly disposition to the test. Bunter retired to the boat to sleep. There he rolled himself in blankets, and woke the echoes of the Thames with his snore.

The hikers remained up for some time yet, chatting in the starlight on the bank, and talking to the dog. When they went to the tent at last they turned in fully dressed, ready to turn out again if there was an alarm, and they took the precaution of cutting sticks from the thicket, to use as cudgels, if necessary.

Pop, the bulldog, settled down cheerfully and peacefully just within the opening of the tent. He went off calmly to sleep.

There was no doubt, however, that he would awaken fast enough if there was a hostile tread in the vicinity; and the hikers, thus guarded, had no hesitation in closing their eyes, and leaving the watch to Pop.

They slept soundly enough.

On the boat Billy Bunter slept still more soundly. The flowing Thames sang him a lullaby as it washed by the moored boat—not that Bunter needed a lullaby. In fact, his steady snore drowned the wash of the river, and other sounds of the summer night. Sleeping was one of the things that Billy Bunter could do, and do well. He did not awaken when the boat was jarred by a bump on the riverward side. He slumbered on peacefully under the midnight stars, when another craft hooked on, and there was a foot-step on board. If Bunter dreamed, certainly he did not dream that Ponsonby & Co. had arrived. But they had.

"Careful, Pon," came a whisper from the punt hooked beside the boat. "One of the rotters may be on board."

"I can hear something," muttered Monson.

"Only one of the brutes," whispered Pon. "The others are in the tent. If that cad Cherry's left his things on board, it's all clear, and we shan't want those hooligans to chip in."

But for Bunter's snore the Highcliffians would have supposed that the boat was unoccupied. But the deep snore from the blankets in the darkness left no doubt on that subject.

Gadsby and Monson held the punt alongside, and Ponsonby stepped into the boat cautiously. Staring shoreward he could dimly make out the shape of the tent under the trees. All was still and silent there. He flashed the light of an electric torch about the interior of the boat, and Billy Bunter's fat face was revealed, the eyes fast closed in slumber.

Taking care not to wake him, Pon proceeded to search through the boat. A good many things that the hikers did

not need ashore had been left on board, among them a couple of rucksacks, which Pon pounced upon. But they were empty. There was no sign of the Holiday Annual in the boat. Bunter had a bag under his head to serve as a pillow. It was possible that what Ponsonby sought was there. He knelt beside Bunter, and placed a hand over his mouth, and shook him. Bunter's eyes opened.

"Groogh!" he gurgled.

The hand over his mouth shut off his gurgle. He blinked up at Ponsonby in terrified alarm.

"Quiet, you fat fool!" whispered Ponsonby. "If you make a row, I'll tip you over the side into the water."

"Oooogh!" gurgled Bunter.

"You know what I'm after—"

"Urrgh!"

"Is it on the boat? Speak in a whisper. If you wake those cads ashore, you go into the water!"

Pon removed his hand from Bunter's mouth. Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"If you mean that Holiday Annual, it's—"

"You know I do! Where is it?"

"Bob's got it in the tent. He always sleeps with it under his head, since you got after it."

"Hang him!"

Ponsonby searched the bag from which Bunter had lifted his bullet head. It contained only clothes. In the glimmer from the electric torch there was a grin on Billy Bunter's face. There was, in point of fact, no need for Bunter to give the alarm. Obviously Pon knew nothing about the bulldog in the tent.

"Found it?" came Gadsby's whisper.

"No; it's not in the boat." Pon shut off the light. "I'll get ashore. It's in the tent; and Higgs and his friends will get it for us fast enough. You fellows stay here till I come back. Keep an eye on this fat fool, and if he makes a sound, tip him into the water."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up!"

"Leave him to us," said Gadsby. "We'll half-drown him if he gives a single squeak. Get goin'!"

Ponsonby swung himself ashore and disappeared into the darkness. Gadsby and Monson waited and listened. Billy Bunter suppressed a chuckle. The bulldog was featured in the next scene, though Pon and his confederates were blissfully unaware of it. But Billy Bunter was aware of it, and he listened with happy anticipation.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not a Success!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. slept soundly in the tent. Pop, the bulldog, slept, too—but with an ear on the alert in the manner of bulldogs.

None of the hikers stirred, but the bulldog stirred when there was a rustle in the hedge between the field and the lane. In the faint glimmer of starlight under the trees four burly figures were dimly visible as Ponsonby came from the direction of the river. A red-spotted muffer caught his eyes in the dimness as Herbert Higgs turned towards him.

"That you, sir?" muttered Herbert.

"Yes. You're all here?" whispered Ponsonby.

"All 'ere and ready," murmured the red-spotted man hoarsely, "and more'n willin' to give them coveys jip—blow me pink if we ain't!"

Ponsonby peered at the four tramps. The unscrupulous young rascal had no

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Ponsonby drove so hard that the pole declined to come out of the mud. Before he knew what was happening, the punt had shot away from under his feet, leaving him clinging to the embedded pole. "Oh gad!" gasped Monson, staring at Pon as the punt rocked away. "I say—oh gad! Oh scissors!" "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Harry Wharton & Co., from the bank.

hesitation in using their services, but he was rather uneasy in such company. Not quite trusting Mr. Higgs, he had left all his valuables behind on this peculiar excursion. No doubt Mr. Higgs guessed as much, or he might have given Pon his particular attention just then. Not that Pon deserved much in the way of good faith from his ruffianly confederates. Had he found what he sought on board the boat, it was Pon's intention to clear off with it in the punt, leaving Mr. Higgs & Co. to their own devices—in which case, the gang of tramps might have waited as long as they liked, but certainly would never have seen Cecil Ponsonby again. But the Holiday Annual had not been on the boat, and Pon required the services of the tramps. So here he was!

"Right!" whispered Ponsonby. "Get goin'! I'll wait for you here."

Mr. Higgs eyed him keenly.

"It's a fiver for that there book, sir, when we get it."

"Yes, yes!"

"Right you are, sir! 'Course, sir, I trust you, but I ain't 'anding over what you want till you got the fiver ready for a covey."

"Let me see it and make sure it's the right article," said Ponsonby; "then you can bring it up to me at the inn in the morning, and I'll hand over the fiver for it."

"That's all right, sir."

Leaving Ponsonby standing in the shadow of the trees waiting eagerly, the four roughs pushed, one after another, through a gap in the hedge.

Inside the field Herbert Higgs pointed to the shadowy outline of the tent.

"That's it!" he breathed. "Foller me, and go for 'em sudden! Knock 'em right and left; never mind if you 'urt 'em!"

"We're arter you, 'Erbert."

"The more you 'urt 'em the better," said Herbert. "I ain't got over the jab that wooden-legged bloke give me in the breadbasket yet! Got me fair in the weskit, he did! Blow me pink! Likewise, that young villain nearly busted my nose with a blinking apple! 'Urt 'em—mind you 'urt 'em!"

And with that kindly intention in his mind Herbert led the way towards the tent on tiptoe over the grass.

Ponsonby waited by the gap in the hedge watching the shadowy figures till they were lost in the dimness. Herbert Higgs & Co. reached the tent. There was a faint sound of stirring within; they did not know what it was that stirred, taking it for granted that it was one of the sleepers.

The tent flap had been left open for air in the fine summer night. Herbert Higgs peered into the darkness within.

"Now!" he breathed.

And he rushed in.

The red-spotted man expected to trample over startled sleepers, among whom he was going to hit out right and left with his brawny fists as they started up from their blankets.

But what he actually trampled over was a big bulldog.

There was a fierce growl in the darkness and a snap of teeth.

The next moment there was a terrific yell from Herbert.

"Whooop! 'Elp! It's a dorg! Oh, blow me pink!"

"Grrrrrrg!" came from Pop.

The snap of the jaws barely missed Herbert's leg, and tore his trousers. With a desperate leap Herbert got out of the tent again, leaving a large section of trousering in Pop's formidable jaws.

He bumped into the other three as he bounded out, sending them spinning.

"Ere, what the thump—"

"Grrrrrrg!" came from the bulldog. He bounded out after Herbert.

He had that section of Herbert's trousers in his jaws, but he was evidently not satisfied with it. He wanted Herbert personally! He dropped the mouthful of trousering and bounded at Herbert.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a startled shout inside the tent. "Here they come! Wake up, you men!"

"The wakefulness is terrific."

"Seize 'em, Pop!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Go for 'em! Fetch 'em!"

"It's a dorg—" yelled one of the tramps.

"It's a bulldog—" shrieked another.

"Ook it!" spluttered the third.

The sight of the big bulldog in the dim starlight was enough for the tramps. The hikers poured out of the tent, cudgels in hand. But their cudgels were not wanted; the enemy were already in full flight.

After them went Pop.

Three of the tramps burst through the gap in the hedge in such a hurry that they knocked Ponsonby over, trampled over him, and fled, leaving him sprawling and gasping for breath. But Herbert Higgs was not so lucky as the

others. Pop had marked him—and Pop meant business! Pop was hanging on to Herbert as Herbert bounded for the gap—and this time he had hold of something more substantial than trousering! The fearful roar that pealed from Herbert told that it was Herbert himself this time.

"Ooooooh! 'Elp! Pull 'im orf!" raved Herbert. "Blow me pink! 'Elp! Pull that bulldog orf! Yarooooop!" "Grrrrrgh!" growled Pop, as he hung on.

"Oh, my hat! The bulldog's got one of them!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Good dog!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Elp!" shrieked Herbert. "'Elp! I'm being tore to pieces! Oh, my leg! 'Elp! I won't do it no more! I'll never come 'ere agin—only pull that there bulldog orf! 'Elp!"

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer. "Pop! Pop! Good dog! Good doggie! Mustn't let him quite kill him, what? Let him go, Pop! Good dog!" "They're gone!" said Nugent, glancing round. "All but one. Pop's got one! They seem to have left in a hurry."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Elp!" shrieked Herbert. "Will you let a covey be tore to pieces hunder your heyes? Call him orf!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the hikers. "He, he, he!" came from the boat, where Bunter was sitting up and blinking at the starlit scene through his big spectacles. "He, he, he!"

Gadsby and Monson were not giving Bunter any attention now. They were staring shoreward in alarm. Evidently the night attack had been a failure, and the deep growling of the bulldog showed the case. Gaddy and Monson were thankful that they were not on shore.

"Pop! Pop!" gasped Lord Maule-

verer, dragging at the bulldog's collar. "Let go! Good dog! Good old doggie! Let go! Oh gad, he seems to want to eat the man! Well, dash it all, he's asked for it!"

"Elp!" roared Herbert, squirming frantically.

Pop, like all bulldogs, disliked letting go once he had taken hold. Instead of letting go, he wanted to settle his teeth deeper into a firmer grip. It was really awful for Herbert! His companions were already far away, running as if for their lives; and it was fortunate for Herbert that the hikers came to his aid. With a great deal of persuasion Pop was induced, at last, to let Herbert go. He released him very reluctantly, but he did release him at last. Pop was led back into the tent, and his chain hooked on to a peg. The moment he was released Herbert flew.

He burst through the gap in the hedge, still yelling. There he stumbled over a fellow who was sitting up, dazed and dizzy, trying to get his breath and to find his feet. Ponsonby sprawled again as Herbert sprawled over him.

"Blow me pink!" gasped the red-spotted man, scrambling up, with his knee on Pon's neck. "Ow! Blow me pink and blue!"

"You clumsy fool!" gasped Ponsonby. "Get off! What—?"

"Ook it! They got a blooming bulldog!" gasped Herbert, and he dashed up the lane and disappeared into the darkness.

Ponsonby scrambled breathlessly up. His peculiar allies were gone, and he realized that it was time for him to be gone, too.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's another of them!" roared Bob Cherry, glimpsing Pon through the hedge. "Why, it's jolly old Pon! After him!"

Ponsonby flew towards the river. Bob

Cherry charged through the gap and flew after him.

"Gaddy!" yelled Pon. "Monson! Quick!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Gadsby. "What a night! Oh scissors!"

Ponsonby came into view in the starlight, running desperately. Gaddy poled the punt to meet him. But Bob Cherry was close behind the fleeing Higheliffian.

As Ponsonby reached the water's edge Bob reached Ponsonby. He let out a foot as if he were kicking for goal. Ponsonby flew.

"Splash!" "Got him!" roared Bob.

Ponsonby, dripping with water, was dragged into the punt by his friends, and Gaddy poled away in hot haste.

"Come back and have some more, Pon!" roared Bob Cherry.

Pon did not accept that invitation. He vanished into the night. Once more the cad of Higheliff had failed, and perhaps by this time he was getting a little tired of hunting the Greyfriars hikers!

It was a merry party that gathered to breakfast in the morning.

Pop was taken back to his owner, his services being no longer required. Whether Pon was fed-up or not, there could be little doubt that the red-spotted man had had enough of the hikers. They did not expect ever to see Herbert again; and they were right—they didn't!

Breakfast was a very cheery meal, and after it was over, and the hikers had carefully cleared up all litter, they embarked on the boat once more and resumed their way down the Thames.

Nothing was seen of Pon & Co. on the river, and the hikers hoped that they had done with them. Still, they did not mind very much if Pon kept up the game. There was no doubt that they had had the best of it so far.

At Bablockhythe they left the boat, to be collected later by Mr. Bobby Bunce. Lord Mauleverer sighed as he put on his pack. Billy Bunter blinked at him, and blinked at the other hikers.

"Now, look here, you fellows," said Bunter firmly. "Hiking is all very well; I'm a dab at it, and can walk any of you fellows off your legs! But Mauly would prefer to stick to the boat. Wouldn't you, Mauly?"

"Yaas!" "Well, then, let's stick to the boat," said Bunter. "If you fellows want to hoof it—"

"Come on, Fatty!" "Shan't!" said Bunter. "I'm sticking to Mauly! You stick to me, Mauly. We'll both stick to the boat, and those silly asses can tramp as long as they like and be blowed to them! The fact is, we don't want them, old chap, do we?"

"Yaas!" "Oh, really, Mauly! Think what a ripping trip we could have together—just us two pals!" said Bunter.

"Oh gad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "You fellows ready? Let's get goin' for goodness' sake! What are you waitin' for? Buck up! Come on! Hurry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Lord Mauleverer started, and the hikers followed. And Billy Bunter, with a snort, followed the hikers.

THE END.

(Billy Bunter and the chums of Greyfriars meet with heaps more exciting adventures next week in: "THE SPECTRE OF HOAD CASTLE!" Be sure and read this yarn, boys, you'll enjoy every line of it.)

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ALLISON OF AVONSHIRE!

By JOHN BREARLEY



WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY.

LEN ALLISON, the young boss of a motor works, is set on stealing the plans of a supercharger, which is the invention of his crippled uncle,

SIMON ALLISON. But Simon's son, **Bill**,

and **MIKE DOYLE**, a mechanic, are more than equal to the attempts of a thug named

VALETTI, who is in Len's pay, to steal the plans.

BILL plays for Avonshire as a cricket professional to keep the family finances together. Meantime, Mike Doyle does a bit of detective work and trails Valetti to a secret garage. Here he helps himself to Valetti's car, what time **JACK WILLIS**, a trusty pal, guards the plans.

"What a pleasant surprise for Bill, eh?" muses Mike.

(Now Read On.)

Surprises—Pleasant and Otherwise!

IN due course, Mike Doyle's words came true. But before Bill received the pleasant surprise in store for him, he received another—very much the reverse.

Both partners left the cottage together immediately after breakfast next morning, but parted at the gate. With a jaunty wave of the hand, Mike limped hurriedly down the road towards the Red Lion, leaving the young Avonshire star frowning after him in mingled perplexity and wrath.

All through breakfast, Bill had tried hard to pump his friend, but, on the subject of the previous night's deeds, Mike had maintained a masterly and infuriating silence. Wherefore Bill had called him many unkind names, and now, as he stood glowering after the Irishman's tall spare figure, and inwardly wondering why Mike seemed to be keeping a sharp lookout as though expecting to see someone or something, the lad wrinkled his nose in a humorous grimace of disgust.

"Yah! Oyster!" he grunted, and strode off in the opposite direction.

Bill was under orders to catch the 9.15 to Daleham, thirty miles away, where, for the next three days, Avonshire would be engaged in a local Derby against their neighbours, Severnshire. In good time, then, he arrived at the station, and—

Almost the first person he saw there was Corsica Phil Valetti!

Bill froze in his tracks.

The burly rogue was lounging in a quiet corner against an automatic machine, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his leather coat, eyes glued to the pointed toes of his shoes. But presently, as Bill watched him, the man lifted his head to look at the clock, and the extraordinary change in his appearance gave the lad a sudden shock.

Gone now was Valetti's hatefully conceited smirk and cocky manner. His eyes were dull from lack of sleep, the swarthy face was pasty and drawn, and a dark, ugly lump adorned his heavy jaw. He looked desperate, yet scared to death. Somehow he reminded Bill at that moment of a squealing rat he had once seen cornered by a pugnacious terrier.

The young cricketer grunted and braced his shoulders back.

The Severnshire match was forgotten—swept from his mind by a red tide of anger. There stood Corsica Phil Valetti, the mainspring of all his troubles, and this was a chance that could not be missed. With characteristic recklessness, Bill slung his bag aside and started across the station to wade into the powerful crook bald-headed.

Simultaneously Valetti happened to glance up again and saw him.

"Ah, gee!"

If the man's expression had been savage before, it was nothing to the poisonous, triple-distilled hatred that flamed in his haggard eyes now.

One venomous glance of alarm and rage he darted at Bill, and quick as thought, his hand made an ominous, instinctive move towards his hip. Remembering where he was just in time, however, the Corsican spat out another acid oath, and before Bill could get to him, turned and ran like a hare.

So speedily was the retreat carried out that for a second Bill was taken aback.

Valetti fairly flew—straight for the nearest exit, while the handful of passengers in the station looked on in amazement as Bill recovered and gave chase. But though the vengeful youngster crowded on all sail, and cut down

Valetti's lead by several yards, fate was against him.

As he raced pell-mell through the exit:

"Hey, what the dickens?"

"Look out, here's another looney!"

"Say, Bill, where's the fire?"

Cheery familiar voices hailed the boy in chorus; friendly hands pulled him up short, and the brown faces of half a dozen Avonshire team-mates grinned all around him. Vigorously Bill tore himself free, cleaving a way through with strong arms and brawny shoulders. But those few moments' delay proved fatal.

When the breathless lad ran out into the station approach at last, Valetti had disappeared into the throng of passers-by on the other side of the railings.

"Confound it!"

Furiously Bill snorted, half-moved as though to carry on the pursuit, useless though he knew it to be now. Then a tight grasp landed on his elbow.

"What on earth's the matter, Bill? Anything wrong?"

The anxious questions of the Avonshire men, who had sprinted after their youthful and agitated comrade, brought Bill back to earth. For a moment longer he continued to gaze wistfully at the crowded pavements, only to shrug and turn disconsolately in the end.

"What's up, laddie?" repeated Ted Forbes.

"Oh, nothing—nothing much!" replied Bill lamely. "Just a—fellow I wanted to see."

"A feller you wanted to slaughter, it looked like," commented Dick Hayes shrewdly. "Were you chasing that hefty, foreign-looking duck who nearly barged into us just now? Because if you were," added the little stumper, hooking a firm arm through Bill's, "you'd better forget it, young Allison of Avonshire. We want you to bowl out those Severnshire birds, not go scrapping with roughnecks who could eat you!"

Bill sighed, and nodded gloomily.

Hang it, he thought, as he followed the others back to the platform, something was always cropping up between him and Valetti!

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"That beggar's got jam on it, and no bloomin' error!" he grumbled sulkily. "Roughneck or not, I'd have followed him if the lads hadn't grabbed me!" Bill grinned reluctantly as he recalled Valetti's face. "By gosh, I wonder who planted their kind regards on the blighter's jaw, though? Some hitter, whoever he was! And why the heck was Valetti hanging around here?"

Throughout the train journey to Daleham, and at frequently recurring intervals during the day, Bill pondered over the queer, brief encounter.

As things worked out, too, the youngster had precious little else to do that day but think, for Avonshire, winning the toss, promptly camped out on a perfect batting wicket until stumps were drawn.

First, Forbes and Conway started off with one of their methodical, heart-breaking stands that netted 70 before lunch, and by the time the partnership was broken up at 112 the best of the Severnshire bowlers were suffering from the well-known tired feeling. Then the Avonshire hitting brigade started in to consolidate the deadly work, with the result that the perspiring home team enjoyed a happy afternoon's leather-bunting.

Thus, it was not until practically close of play that Bill had to leave his seat on the pro's balcony and go out to bat. Last man in, the young left-hander scored twelve runs in precisely three balls, and, incidentally, set the crowd rocking with mirth.

Bill's first shot was a truly gorgeous off-drive—a whole-hearted slash past extra cover that would have done credit to Wally Hammond himself. His second was an eyes-shut-and-here-we-go swipe, the third was a "Chinese cut" that missed the leg-stump by a hair and made the unlucky bowler raise his arms in agonised protest to the heavens.

After this display of fireworks, however, Bill suddenly remembered that he was a county cricketer, so he tried to play the next ball correctly. Unfortunately, that ended his own innings and Avonshire's, too!

"You silly young ass!" remarked Mr. Jerry Tempest, more in sorrow than in anger when, two minutes later, the grinning batsman tramped into the pavilion, followed by the laughter of the crowd. "Why didn't you keep on hitting in your own horrible style, instead of trying to kid yourself that you're a real bat? Still, never mind—398's a nice, handy score! Should be enough to give us a win if—"

"If Bill isn't too tired to bowl tomorrow after his brilliant batting!" chimed in Dick Hayes, amid chuckles.

Bill strolled across to the bath-room door, only to pause there and put one over the perky wicket-keeper.

"Twelve runs—rabbit!" he said significantly, whereupon Dick, who had only scraped up a couple, snorted and made a grab for his boot.

Bill wriggled through the door just in time and took a sousing plunge into a cold bath.

A pavilion attendant beckoned to the youngster when he barged back into the dressing-room again, fresh and glowing after a brisk rub-down.

"There's a chap waiting to see you outside the East Gate, Mr. Allison. He wouldn't give his name, but he said it was important, and you were to hurry up and come on out at once!"

"Oh, yes!" Bill cocked a suspicious

eyebrow. "Sounds a cool customer, whoever he is! What's he like, anyway?"

"He's an Irishman," came the surprising reply. "Tall and lean. Looks as though he'd bite your head off for tuppence, and—"

"Golly! Mike!" exclaimed Bill, and began dressing with all speed, frowning while he did so.

Mike—here in Daleham! What did that mean? Had anything gone wrong?

A prey to anxious thoughts, the Avonshire star ran out of the pav, as soon as he had changed, and hurried towards the East Gate. It was then that Bill Allison of Avonshire received his hundred-per-cent pleasant surprise at last. For, to his utter stupefaction, outside the gate, with his hat pulled low and jaws moving rhythmically, sat Cannonball Mike Doyle, in a big, battered, but useful-looking touring-car!

Testing the Allison Invention!

BILL nearly fell down.

He looked at the car, he gaped at Mike, and pinched himself to make sure this was no dream.

His eyes popped wider and wider till they bulged out of his head like marbles.

"What the—where—how—where the dickens did you get that?" he stammered eventually; and then gasped afresh at the laconic reply.

"Pinched it! Come on, now—hop in!" jerked the Cannonball. "Don't stand there yammering like a—"

Bill obeyed.

As one in a dream he tumbled in beside his grinning friend, babbling breathless questions as Mike swung out from the kerb. But the Irishman, who seemed to take a delight in teasing the excited youth, refused to talk in traffic!

Sphinx-like and bland, he whirled the car deftly through Daleham, heading for the great expanse of downland that rolled away from the town to join the Avonshire hills. Once they were gliding along quiet, open roads, however, Bill could bottle-up his seething impatience—no longer.

"Listen, you—you silent Mick!" he hissed, suddenly thrusting a truculent face close to Mike's. "We're not in traffic now, so if you don't stop and explain some of the bloom-in' mysteries you've piled-up this last week, I'll sock you one right under the chin! Or if you won't talk, lemme get at that wheel! Gosh! I haven't driven a car for a dog's age!"

Somewhat surprisingly, Mike pulled up at once. He got out, walked round to the other side of the car without a word, got in again, and shunted Bill along into the driver's seat.

"All right—drive!" he drawled; and then put the finishing-touch to Bill's joyful amazement by adding quietly: "Go easy at first, though, 'cos she's got the Allison supercharger fitted to her engine. I fixed her to-day."

"Wha-a-at?"

All Bill's remaining breath went into that harsh, strangled cry. For a moment the peaceful countryside, the car, everything, seemed to spin. He saw Mike's saturnine, smiling face through a sort of pearly mist.

"You—you mean," he articulated slowly, as soon as he could get his wind, "that this really is our car? The—the car you said you were going to get

free, gratis, and for nothing! Our own demonstration-car—at last?"

Mike was unwrapping a stick of chewing-gum.

"Why, sure," he replied placidly. "An' I thought I'd come and meet you so you could give her the first trial out here, where there'll be few folks to get in your way, or watch! We're quite a distance from Avonport, y'see," he added, with a sidelong glance, "so you drive and I'll watch points. What d'ye say?"

Say? Bill couldn't say much. But what he did manage was very much to the point.

A car! Their own demonstration-car—a chance to prove the Allison supercharger at long last! Where or how Mike had obtained it failed to interest Bill any more just at present.

"Wow!" exploded young Mr. Allison of Avonshire then, at the top of his voice, and with one boisterous wallop, he crushed Mike's hat down over his eyes.

Next moment the touring car was on the move again.

And so began the first real test of the Allison supercharger—an invention that was destined to revolutionise the motor industry!

Bill, with his innate love of motors, his craze for speed, and instinctive judgment of pace and distance, was a really good driver. In his present mood of reckless exuberance, he handled that long, rakish tourer in a style that satisfied even the once-famous Cannonball Mike Doyle, which was saying something.

Away sped the car, going all out across the breeze-swept downs that were bathed in the mellow evening sunshine. Her passengers spoke seldom, and then only in crisp, short sentences. For Bill, it was the drive of his life.

With a blissful grin wreathing his lips, his fair hair whipping back from his forehead, the youngster drove as he had never driven before. Under his skilful hands the tourer ate up the narrow white roads that criss-crossed the downs, taking stiff gradients, sharp corners, in her stride, whirling past blurred, sunny meadows, dense woods, secluded farmsteads.

At times, however, Bill dropped her down to a steady road-gait, and then, at a brief word from Mike, the quiet of the countryside would be suddenly shattered by the sonorous roar of an engine worked under forced draught, so to speak. And when that happened, the tourer picked up and fled across the landscape like a racer, responding magnificently to the tremendous extra drive of the Allison supercharger.

"Whee-ee-ee!"

During each of these bursts of exhilarating speed, Bill's delirious glee bubbled over, venting itself in long, weird yells of delight. But Mike sat like a graven image, his face inscrutable, his head slightly to one side, while he listened to every beat of the engine. Only his keen eyes moved restlessly, glancing at the milestones that flickered past, at the watch in his cupped hand, at the instruments on the dashboard—everything. And occasionally he nodded to himself, a sharp, jerky nod that, for him, spoke volumes.

Deep blue dusk shrouded the downs when that long, stirring spin—seventy-odd miles over a natural, cross-country race-track—came to an end at last, and

Bill slid to a halt half-way on the road between Daleham and Avonport. Lying back in his seat, he linked his hands behind his neck, and sat gazing up for long, tranquil minutes at the early stars twinkling through the twilight.

It was one of those all-too-infrequent moments in life when the heart is too full of happiness for mere words.

Valetti Strikes Hard!

UP hill and down, and at all speeds, the Allison supercharger had been tested, and from this severe trial the invention had emerged with flying colours. Bill sighed contentedly. Mike delivered his verdict in a quiet, but emphatic voice.

"By th' fightin' cats of Kilkenny, she's the goods!"

A rare enthusiasm flashed in his deep-set eyes as he stowed his watch away and jotted down some notes on a pad.

"Yes, sir, Bill, she's it!" he repeated. "This car's a good 'un, but the old supercharger's turned her into a flyer. Just a few adjustments here and there, maybe, is all that's wanted now. Bedad, I always thought your dad was a world-beater in his own line, and now I know it! Maybe we'll have him out of that hospital soon, and ridin' in his own car! I'll bet all the money we're goin' to make that the throb of an engine in his ears again'll do him more good than all the sawbones in the world!"

Bill grinned at Mike affectionately, wondering inwardly how he would have got on all this while without such a loyal, determined comrade.

"You old beggar! You still haven't told me just how you—er—acquired this car—and saved us money!" he hinted. At which Mike chuckled deeply—and told him.

"Oh, my hat! You wild Irishman! Talk about poetic justice! And you hogged all that fun to yourself, too, you selfish blighter!" spluttered Bill excitedly. "So it was you who raised that lovely bump on Phil Valetti's jaw!"

"Eh?" Mike sat up hastily, "You mean you've seen—"

"Yes. I saw him this morning, skulk-

ing on Avonport Station!" cried Bill. "Looked as though he was waiting for someone. I went across to tackle him; but the brute saw me too soon, and bunked. Even then I might have caught him, only I bumped into some of the team, and the silly chumps held me back."

"Lucky for you!"

Mike laid a compelling hand on the boy's arm.

"Bill, listen!" he went on, very seriously. "You're a good, tough lad, but you mustn't tackle Corsica Phil Valetti singlehanded, see? Especially now. He's got no actual proof that it was me who knocked him cockeyed and lifted his car; but Phil's no fool. Proof or not, he'll make a good guess. That's why I worked like fury to-day to get the supercharger fixed."

"Bill, we're on the last lap of the race now—and Valetti's due to make his final spurt any time. It'll be a nasty one, too. I know him. He's a cur, but a fighting cur when the pinch comes. He'll still make one more attempt, at least, to pinch your dad's invention, because he doesn't know for sure that the supercharger's already fixed, and that we're ready to demonstrate it to the motor trade right away!"

"Therefore, Valetti will stake all on a blind chance! Well, he can't get at this car, 'cos I'm keeping it in a shed behind the Red Lion. Even if he found it, that black devil of a mastiff belongin' to old Jem Willis 'ud tear th' spalpeen to bits if he came sneaking around there. But, though Phil can't get his bus back, he can still try to get you or me! An', Bill, he will try!"

In sober silence Bill digested the long, grave speech. Then a sudden, sharp stab of fear jerked him bolt upright.

"But what about our cottage?" he gasped. "You may have parked the car at Jem Willis', but I suppose you've left the plans in their hiding-place back home?"

Mike laughed—grimly.

"Yep—and I've left that socking great giant, young Jack Willis, to guard them and the cottage!" he retorted, to Bill's intense relief. "If Phil Valetti pokes his nose in there, and young Jack catches him, it's a stretcher,

not a supercharger, he'll be after needin'! Don't worry, son, I've got Corsica Phil well set!" the Irishman chuckled confidently. "So now let's get home."

And home it was!

Twenty-five minutes later Bill drove the demonstration-car cautiously into the dark yard of the Red Lion Inn, at Kelsey; and there, after locking up under the watchful eye of Jem Willis' enormous mastiff, the partners strolled up to their cottage to relieve big Jack Willis of his trust.

Rather to their surprise, however, no cheerful glow of lamplight shone from the kitchen-parlour window to greet them. The little dwelling, indeed, was in total darkness, and as quiet as a vault.

Mike frowned. He opened the gate slowly, paused irresolute, then raised his voice:

"Hey, Jack!"

There was no reply.

"Jack! Where are you?"

Bill joined in the lusty hail this time, but the result was the same. Not a sound anywhere, save the faint whisper of trees beyond the cottage.

And somehow—all at once—that stillness seemed eerie, sinister!

Mike stiffened. Bill heard his teeth meet with a sharp, vicious click. Uttering a wordless growl, the Irishman hurried along the garden-path, Bill behind him. Together, gripped by an unreasoning fear, they burst through the cottage door into the little room beyond.

Mike struck a match; held it aloft. And the first sight that met the partners' narrowed eyes as the flame brightened, was the prostrate figure of Jack Willis, their stalwart guard.

Flat on the floor lay the young giant, gagged, cruelly bound, and barely conscious. Beside him, as though placed there in deliberate mockery, was the charred butt of one of Corsica Phil Valetti's favourite Turkish cigarettes!

(Valetti has certainly struck hard this time, hasn't he, chums? Be sure and read the thrilling follow-up of this fine sporting story, which will appear in next Saturday's MAGNET.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

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

TWO POPULAR ANNUALS!

READERS will be glad to know that the new "Greyfriars Holiday Annual" and the new "Popular Book of Boy's Stories" are now on sale at all newsagents. Both these books have a world-wide reputation for quality and quantity, and they constitute the best value-for-money propositions on the market. The "Greyfriars Holiday Annual" which, by the way, is

REDUCED TO 5/-,

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THERE'S quite a fishy flavour about the first letter I have picked up to answer this week. It comes from a Grimsby reader, who wants to know

WHAT IS THE LARGEST FISH

caught in British waters? Well, occasionally whales have been caught in

British waters, but they aren't fishes. I suppose my reader chum means the waters around these islands, and in that case I should say the tunny is the largest fish caught round our coasts. The tunny fishing season started a few weeks ago; and the "bag" of one yacht alone for a couple of days' fishing weighed over 1,500 pounds. It consisted of three tunny fish, each of which weighed over 500 pounds apiece.

Tunny fishing is, however, a rather expensive sport, for a yacht is generally used by tunny fishers, and most of the members of the British Tunny Club are yachtsmen. This country holds the record for the largest tunny ever caught. It was caught off Scarborough last year, and weighed 798 pounds. At the time of writing a great number of fishermen are trying to break the record. The record was previously held by the American author, Zane Grey, but it is gratifying to know that an Englishman now holds it.

Talking about fishing, do you realise how many

DAINGEROUS FISH

are to be found round our coasts? Sharks occur frequently, but an even more annoying visitor to our shores is the weever, which is furnished with poisonous spines, like the fangs of snakes. Although

(Continued on next page.)

these fishes are only about six inches in length, they can inflict wounds which are capable of putting a man out of action for many weeks.

Sometimes in the summer electric rays come to our waters from more southerly seas, and are very nasty customers to meet. An electric ray is capable of giving a shock equivalent to 100 volts. In addition you will sometimes find sting rays, certain jellyfish, and the curious little fish known as a "Portuguese man-o-war"—because of its likeness to a small sailing ship. All these fish can give you extremely nasty stings.

HERE is an interesting piece of news regarding another sort of record. A young fellow has just established

THE LONG-DISTANCE STOWAWAY RECORD!

Generally, stowaways on board ship are discovered before the ship has travelled very far, and in these cases they are sent back to land by means of the first inward-bound vessel or fishing boat. But a British steamer recently arrived at Osaka, in Japan, and, upon arrival, a stowaway was discovered. During the whole of the journey—eleven thousand miles—he had escaped discovery. He had joined the ship in Antwerp, and remained in hiding all that time, which is by no means an easy thing to do.

Don't try to beat his record! Stowing-away is very severely punished in some countries, and a long term of imprisonment is generally the "reward" which competitors for the long-distance stowaway record earn for themselves!

Here is a selection of

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to various queries which have been sent to me by readers:

How long are the railways of Canada? (J. D., of Newcastle). There are now over 40,000 miles of railways in Canada. No less than 22,500 miles are operated by the Canadian National Railway, which is one of the largest state-owned railways in the world.

What is the largest "tip" that has ever been given? ("Magnetite," of Worcester). The largest "tip" ever given to a servant was presented by a former Tsar of Russia to Queen Victoria's housekeeper. It was a banknote for a thousand pounds! "Some" tip, eh?

How long can a man fast? ("Faster," of Nuneaton). The world's record for a fast is seventy-five days. I should not advise you to try to break this record. Fasting should only be carried out under medical supervision.

What is the "Missing Link"? (Jim T., of Wanstead). There is no such thing. The expression is used to denote a "missing link" in the chain which connects man with monkeys—a sort of half-man-half-monkey. Various types of prehistoric men have been referred to as "the missing link," but scientists do not accept this.

I frequently get requests from my readers to help them in

THE CHOICE OF CAREERS,

and, though I am always willing to do all I can, it is not possible to reprint the same answers again and again. Will N.M., of Frome, Portsmouth—and any other interested readers—please note that all information regarding joining the Navy, Army, or Air Force can be obtained at their local post office!

With regard to "Constant Reader," of Belfast, who wishes to become a light-house keeper, these appointments are made by Trinity House, and are generally given to ex-naval or merchant service sailors, so I am afraid there is not much chance for him.

A third letter comes from Miss Kitty K., of Harringay, who aspires to become a greyhound trainer. She would have to commence as a kennel maid. Occasionally advertisements of such situations vacant appear in the better-known journals which deal exclusively with dog news. Her newsgroup will be able to tell her which is the most likely journal to contain such advertisements.

Those of you who are musicians may be interested in the following reply to "Jazz Hound," of Birmingham, who wants to know which is

THE MOST VALUABLE MUSICAL INSTRUMENT IN THE WORLD.

Well, cinema organs, of course, are pretty valuable, but there is one class of instrument for which musicians will pay almost anything, and that is a violin! Not an ordinary one, of course, but one which was made over two hundred years ago by a certain gentleman named Antonio Stradivari. A "Strad," as they are generally called, originally cost only £1—but if you possess one to-day it might quite easily bring you in a thousand times that amount!

Just a few weeks ago a man happened to be going through his lumber room and he came across a violin which he had bought for 5s. a few years ago. He had it cleaned—and you can imagine his feelings when he discovered that it was a genuine "Strad." Just fancy picking up about £4,000 in a lumber room! It proves that it is not always necessary to go to the Spanish Main to discover hidden treasure.

Incidentally, while we are talking about

violins, do you know that the smallest in the world is no bigger than 2½ inches in length? 'S'fact!

THE next query will need a longer answer. "Film Fan," of Margate, wants to know if I can tell him

HOW NATURAL COLOUR FILMS ARE MADE.

There are several different methods used, but the most successful consists of a special kind of film, which is treated in such a manner that the film itself works like a tremendous number of tiny lenses. "Colour filters" are used over the lens of the cine camera, and these split up white light into its component parts. But the actual cine film still appears to be black and white, until it is projected with corresponding colour lenses. These then bring out the natural colours, and throw them on the screen.

This method, although successful, has not yet been adapted to ordinary cinemas, because the actual film taken has to be developed as a positive, and that means that there is only one copy of it. Many amateur cinematographers are using this method, and the result is that, so far as colour films are concerned, amateurs are, at present, ahead of professionals. Needless to say, of course, the professionals are working hard to adapt this method for their own purposes, and will probably do so before very long. The present professional colour films are not quite so successful as the films made by the method which I have briefly described above.

Sorry I shall have to hold over a large number of other replies, but I have just time to tell you what is in store for you in next week's bumper number. To begin with

"THE SPECTRE OF HOAD CASTLE!"

By Frank Richards,

is the title of the long, complete yarn dealing with the further exciting holiday adventures of the chums of Greyfriars, and you may be sure that this popular author has packed it as full of good things as possible. You'll get a thorough feast of fun and thrills in this story, chums.

There'll be more gripping chapters of our popular serial "Allison of Avonshire!" and a rib-tickling issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," which is almost capable of making a brass idol laugh. In conclusion, there will be another interesting Soccer talk by "Linesman," while I will be "in the office" as usual to answer more queries from my readers.

Cheerio, until next week, chums!

YOUR EDITOR

BE TALLER! Ross System is Genuine.

INCREASED my own height to 6ft. 3ins.!! T. H., age 16½, to 6ft. T. P., age 21, from 5ft. 5 to 5ft. 10" B. P., age 20, 3ins. in 16 days! A. G., age 19, 5ins. in 6 weeks! See £2 2s. STAMP brings FREE Particulars



F. M. ROSS, Height Specialist, Scarborough, Eng.

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BE TALL

Your Height Increased in 14 days or Money Back. Complete Course, 5/-. Booklet free privately—STEEBING SYSTEM, 28, Dean Road, LONDON, N.W.2.

VOLUNTEERS WANTED
To roll Bunter down the stairs and jump on him every time he mentions postal-orders or tiled relations next term! Join to-day.—The League for the Preservation of Junior Sanity (Hon. Sec., R. Cherry), Study No. 13, Remove.

No. 49 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

September 9th, 1933.

THE NEW Greystriars Herald

EXTRA GOOD EDITION

LESSONS IN TAILORING
Wanted by junior who has promised his pater he'll alter his "habits," this term! —Apply S. J. Skoor, Study No. 11, Remove.

TIP TO NATURALISTS
If you're studying flying mammals, you'll find that Alonzo Todd has developed a first-rate crop of bats in the belfry during the vac!

AS OTHERS SEE THEM

What I Think of Tomlinson Minor

By William Walter Dabney

If ever a man had the right to feel sore about a fellow, I have that right about Tomlinson. When I read his satirical remarks about me in last week's "Greystriars Herald," I couldn't refrain from saying to myself disgustedly "What a fellow!"

Fortunately, as you may have gathered from what Tomlinson said, I'm a pretty easy-going sort of chap, and although I don't feel very cheery about that article, I bear him no ill will. After all, young Tomlinson has his limits, and it's hardly to be expected that he should understand a rather intellectual sort of chap like myself!

Tomlinson minor, who has an elder brother in the Fifth, is like most fellows with brothers in senior Forms—rather cheeky. Although he nominally belongs to our "Co." and acknowledges Temple as leader, he's too fond of his own ideas to follow anybody's lead very far. I believe he'd very much like to be captain of the Fourth—but, needless to say, he'll never occupy that coveted position while Temple and I are in the way!

For the benefit of fellows who don't know Tomlinson, I ought to mention that his figure somewhat resembles that of the celebrated Remove Baby Elephant—Billy Bunter. Tomlinson's not particularly tall—but what he lacks in height he makes up for in width!

I can't say, however, that he resembles Bunter in any other way. He certainly doesn't possess the Prize Porter's garish appetite, he's not such an idiot at games—in fact, he's one of the best average all-rounders in the Form—and he has ideas of honesty and honour which Bunter never had and never will have!

But you can't get away from it all the time that he's cheeky and totally lacking in respect for fellow like Temple and myself. It's unfortunate for in other respects he's a perfectly good scout—but it is so!

On that melancholy note I must end my brief analysis of Tomlinson minor, though, of course, if you ask me "Is he still a pal of yours?" I shall unhesitatingly answer "Oh, rather!"

Next week George Tubb has a mouthful to spill about Arthur Came of the Sixth.

DICKY NUGENT'S WEEKLY WISDOM

Gatty's manners are so awful that he had the nerve to protest to my mother about my serving up fried fish for breakfast. I must confess that I thought it quite out of place.

BUNTER MINOR'S TERRIBLE MALADY

Sammy's Somnambulist Sufferings

We feel really sorry for young Sammy Bunter. It's invariably starts tucking in at bed enough to be afflicted with dire diseases when you're in the sack and yellow leaf. But to get it when you're in the pristine glory of Second Form feehood is simply too bad.



Sammy suffers from sleep-walking, you see. You'd have thought the holiday might have done him a bit of good. But far from it; if anything, he seems to be worse than ever.

Strangely enough it seems to attack him most frequently when he stays in other people's houses. Sammy Bunter, who is tremendously popular, (he says so himself, so it must be so) has stayed for varying periods with half a dozen of his Second and Third Form colleagues this vac—and walked in his sleep at the house of every one of them! A peculiarity of his complaint is that he invariably walks downstairs to the pantry. Having reached the pantry, he invariably opens the door.



Oliver Krips is an inveterate fish fan, and spends much of his spare time and cash at the Courtyard Cinema. He says he gets both amusement and instruction.

MOUNTAINEER'S LEaping Mount!



"C'est Terrible!"

Says M. Charpentier

bottom no longer. I feel ze fear—ze bar he stand up on ze head of me—I say to myself 'Charpentier! Your last hour 'e come!' And ze mule! Vat you sink does zat leaping animal? Does 'e try himself to make me feel ze comfort and forget ze fear? Mais non!

Come with us, dear readers, and see the rugged grandeur of the Pyrenees! Or, at least, if you can't afford the fare this week, see from. As Sammy tearfully remarked to one of his hosts, the dreadful thing about it is the thought that it's often fatal to wake up a sleep-walker, so this means that he has to be allowed to finish his feed, whether he's discovered or not.

Poor Sammy Bunter! Our hearts go out to him in his distress! Fancy having to eat stacks of grub in the middle of the night without the slightest hope of being stopped at it!

"WATER" SHOCK FOR HIM

Hobson of the Shell tells us that he's greeted like a popular favourite all the way along the promenade at Brighton.

But we hear he was bowled off his feet and sustained severe damage to his natty flannel bags when a rough sea broke over the front one day. So, apparently, his outings on the prom aren't attended exclusively by "friendly waves"!



Fisher T. Fish photographs any fellow—for a fee. He is still trying to get Bunter to square up for the "snaps" he had last term!

More Greystriars Queries

"HERALDITE" (Bournemouth).—"Why did Linley wear clogs when he worked in a cotton mill?" To save him the trouble of doing up his shoelaces, of course!

"SKINNER FAN" (Norwich).—"Is Skinner as black as he is painted?" No; the last time we saw him, which was on a boat in mid-Channel, his face had turned an art shade of green!

"GREYFRIARS FOR EVER" (Northampton).—"Does Mr. Quelch type his 'History of Greystriars' sitting down or standing up?" Neither; he prefers to do it balancing on his knees, with his back to the typewriter and his arms over his shoulders. He says that this enables him to see things in their true perspective.

'Lonzy's Little Letters

Dear Editor,—To the individual of perspicacious temperament, the intellectual sequelae to the exhibition of cinematic projections concerning 'subjects of pathological or criminological interest is calamitously manifest. Oh, my dear Editor, when one effectuates cogitation upon the inherent potentialities for beneficent intervention in the realm of human activity on the part of this marvellously dynamic form of photography is not one tempted to vociferate with stentorian fervour a resolution never to utilise the visual organs for the purpose of regarding these ephemeral optical productions until such time as every phlegmatic optical production is inclusive of a pictorial representation of the distribution of neither habits nor among the retarded African natives—or equally enlightening cinematic phantasmagoria?

Yours for the amelioration of cinematography, ALONZO TODD.

(Lonzy wants us all to vow never to go to the "talkies" until they include in every programme at least one picture of trousseurs being given away to the blacks! 'Lonzy', 'Lonzy', are there no limits to the ideas that are hatched in that massive brain of yours!—Ed.)

LET THIS SOAK IN!

Russell claims to have broken all Greystriars records during the vac, by running without stopping for 10 hours. Broken records, boss! Why, when Nimble the gardener went for his holiday, he accidentally left the tap turned on in one of the greenhouses—and the water was running without stopping for a fortnight!

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!



When Bunter offered a plum cake for sale in Study No. 1, Wharton recognised it as Manly's. Bunter made a "quite sell"—through the study doorway!

WHY FISHER T. FISH WAS FURIOUS

From his home in the Highlands, Ogilvy writes to tell us that he was surprised, during a recent trip down to Loch Lomond, to find Fisher T. Fish there. Fish was gazing across the waters at the misty hills in the distance. Ogilvy would have imagined that he was admiring the scenery, but for the expression of concentrated ferocity he wore.

"What's biring you, Fish?" he asked. "I guess I got my mad up," snorted Fish, after perfunctorily shaking hands. "What I want to know is, where are they?"

"If you mean the far-flamed heather-clad hills of Scotland," replied Fish, "I was Fishy's disrespectful reply to that suggestion. 'Listen, bo,' I came a long way to see 'em, an' I guess—"

"If you mean that haunting chain of mist-shrouded lochs, redolent of ancient Scottish history, over which poets have shed tears and artists—"

"I guess you got me all wrong!" howled Fish furiously. "When I'm looking for anything like that, you can reckon that something's snapped in F. T. F.'s cabeza! What I'm looking for, if you want to know, is the bonny, bonny banks of Loch Lomond!"

Ogilvy blinked. "The bonny, bonny banks of Loch Lomond?" "Why, you're standing on one of them at present!"

Fish's jaw dropped as he looked down at his feet. He seemed to be affected by a sudden faintness. "B-b-but look hwer, Ogilvy, you're not gonna tell me a poet wrote about the banks of a gosh-darned pond?"

"What other kind of a bank do you think he'd write about?" "Big banks, of course, you jay, with bullion an' strong rooms!" Fishy roared. "That's what I came hwer to see. Don't tell me the only kind of banks they got are the banks of a peaky pond!"

Ogilvy had to admit that it was so.

HOLD THIS ONE, LODER

At a sixth hotel on the East Coast, Loder of the Sixth was recently heard boasting that he was not among the common herd at Greystriars.

It's a matter of taste, old bean. Personally, we'd rather belong to the rank and file than the "rank" and "file"!

"LEAF" THEM ALONE, PLEASE

We hear that the authorities are thinking of clearing the banks of the Skak by cutting down all the weeping willows. If they perform this vandal act, it will be a crying shame!