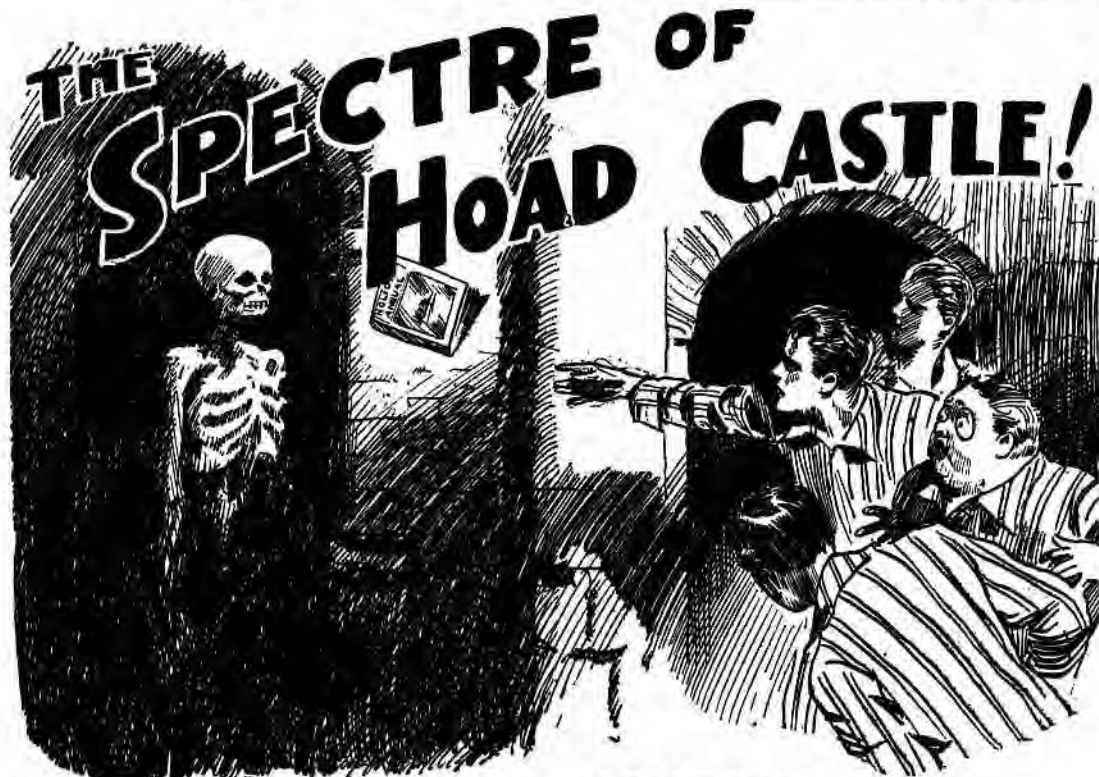


"THE SPECTRE OF HOAD CASTLE!" This week's thrill-packed yarn
of Harry Wharton & Co.

The **MAGNET** 2^D





BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Happy Hikers!

DRIP, drip, drip!
It was raining!
"I told you so!" said Billy Bunter, for the tenth, or perhaps the twentieth time. "I knew it was going to rain!"
Nobody answered Bunter.

The Greyfriars hikers plugged onward through the rain.

They were getting wet.

That, of course, was only to be expected when it was raining hard.

Hikers have to take the rough with the smooth. Harry Wharton & Co. bore it cheerfully. Lord Mauleverer was as placid as usual. Only Billy Bunter grouched. But Billy Bunter did enough grouching for the whole party.

Certainly it was not nice! Oxfordshire was not displaying its most attractive aspect to the schoolboy hikers.

The Greyfriars fellows had heard of Oxford clay. Now they found a good deal of it slippery round their feet. Tall elm-trees swept over them as they marched. Darkness was falling. A last glimmer of a wet and watery sun came dimly through rainy mists, across drenched fields. It was wet and it was windy.

"It's coming down!" groaned Bunter.

"Did you expect it to go up?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Beast!"

"It's a bit damp, and no mistake!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"The dampfulness is truly terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"What's the odds, so long as you're 'appy?" asked Bob. "I dare say this rain is doing the crops a lot of good."

"Blow the crops!" said Frank

Nugent. "It's trickling down my neck!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Look here, how far is it to that beastly village we're making for?" demanded Bunter.

"It was five miles when we started after lunch," answered Bob. "We should have got in before the rain if you hadn't crawled like a bandy-legged slug!"

"We've done more than five miles. I feel as if I'd done about fifty!" groaned Bunter. "Look here, I'm getting wet!"

"The rain's wet," said Bob. "One thing you can rely on about the rain—it's always wet. Never heard of dry rain."

"I'm soaked!" howled Bunter.

"We're not exactly dry, old fat bean!" remarked Harry Wharton.

"Eh, what?" Bunter grunted. He was not apparently thinking about whether the other fellows were wet. "I tell you I'm drenched."

"The drenchfulness of my esteemed self is also preposterous," remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "But the grousefulness is not the proper caper, my idiotic Bunter."

"I'm tired," added Bunter.

"And nobody else is tired!" observed Johnny Bull, with a deep sarcasm that was wasted on Bunter.

"I'm hungry."

"You needn't have mentioned that," said Bob Cherry. "We could have guessed that one, old fat man."

"I say, you fellows, there's a shed in that field. I say, halt! Let's have a rest for goodness' sake! Let's camp!"

"Nothing for supper," said Harry Wharton. "We were relying on getting to Hoad for supper. Not more than half a dozen sandwiches left."

"Well, look here, I could manage on

half a dozen sandwiches," said Bunter. "It's not much I eat, as you know."

The Famous Five blinked at Bunter through the dripping rain. Lord Mauleverer gave a gentle chuckle. Billy Bunter wiped his big spectacles, jammed them back on his fat little nose, and blinked at the hikers.

"That's all right," he said. "I can rough it. After all, I've never had enough to eat since I started hiking with you fellows. I've wished more than once that I hadn't come."

"Same here!" remarked Johnny Bull. "The samefulness is terrific."

"Slogging through the rain, hungry as a hunter!" said the fat Owl of the Remove indignantly.

"You mean hungry as a Bunter?" asked Bob.

"Well, let's camp in that shed. I want to get out of this rain!" roared Bunter. "We can get over that fence. Look here, there's two or three palings loose; we can squeeze through. Come on!"

Billy Bunter headed for the fence that bordered that Oxfordshire lane. The other fellows grinned and resumed their march.

Bunter blinked round through his wet spectacles.

"I say, you fellows!" he howled.

"Where are you going?"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

He rolled on after the party. Slosh, slosh, slosh, went the footsteps of the hikers through a clay soil made slippery by ample rain. Bob Cherry slipped and stumbled, and sat down in a puddle.

"Oh!" he ejaculated.

"He, he, he!" came from Bunter.

Bob scrambled up, rather muddy. He gave the fat Owl of the Remove a glare and marched on.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up!" roared Johnny Bull.
 "Yaas, ring off, old bean," said Lord Mauleverer gently. "You talk too much, Bunter, old fat tulip! I've mentioned that before."

"Look here—"
 "Oh, kick him!" said Nugent.
 "Beast!"

Bunter sloshed on.
 Suddenly his foot slipped, and he sat down as Bob had done.

"Yooooop!" roared Bunter.
 "Funny, isn't it?" said Bob, looking round.

"Yow-ow-ow!"
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Why aren't you he-he-heing?" asked Bob. "You went off like a Chinese cracker when I took a tumble. Doesn't it seem so funny now?"
 "Owl! Beast! Wow! Help!"

"Oh dear! Take hold of his ears and yank him up!" said Harry Wharton.
 "We shall get into Hoad about midnight at this rate."

"I say, you fellows, I can't get up! I say, I'm injured! Help!" roared Bunter.

The Greyfriars hikers turned back and surrounded the Owl of the Remove. Bob cherry took one fat arm, Johnny Bull took the other, and Bunter was heaved to his feet. He stood on one leg, clinging to his helpers.

"Owl! I've sprained my ankle!" he gasped. "Wow! Oh dear! The pain's awful! I c-can't put my foot to the ground! Owl!"

"Well, my hat! That's the jolly old limit!" exclaimed Nugent, in great exasperation. "Look here, you've got to come on, you fat owl!"

"Owl! I think my ankle's broken!" wailed Bunter.

"Pity it wasn't your neck!" remarked Johnny Bull heartlessly.

"Beast! Owl! Don't let go!" yelled Bunter. "I shall fall down again if you let go! Oh! I'm suffering awful pain! Wow!"

He clung desperately to Bob and Johnny. They staggered under his weight. It was not a light task to support William George Bunter.

"Well, that does it," said Harry Wharton. "If the fat idiot really can't walk—"

"Gammon!" growled Johnny Bull. "Bit of a twist, perhaps. Nobody but Bunter would make a fuss about it."

Groan!

"Well, what the thump's going to be done?" asked Bob, in dismay.

"Get me into the shelter," said Bunter, in a faint voice. "Leave me! Leave me to suffer alone! It would be like you! Owl!"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled Bob. "You jolly well know we shan't leave you, you fat fraud. But what the dickens—"

"There's that shed," said Harry. "Better get out of the rain if we're going to halt. Look here, Bunter, if you're really hurt—"

Groan!

"Oh, get him along!" said Harry.

There would have been plenty of sympathy had any other member of the Greyfriars hiking party been crooked. But really it was a little difficult to sympathise deeply with Bunter. The chances were about a hundred to one that he was making the most of a trifling damage. Indeed, it was quite possible that he was not damaged at all, but was "spoofing" all the time. But in the circumstances he had to be given the benefit of the doubt. Certainly he could not march if his ankle was twisted. So the juniors helped him through the fence, and headed across the drenched and dripping field towards the shed, the only shelter that was in sight.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

No Rest for Bunter!

"HOP it!" said Bob Cherry, encouragingly.

Groan, from Bunter!

With one fat arm round Bob's neck, the other round Johnny Bull's, Bunter threw his whole weight on them. He hopped on one leg, the other being kept carefully suspended in the air.

The two juniors staggered along, bearing up manfully. Harry Wharton cut ahead, to open the door of the shed.

To whom the building belonged, the Greyfriars fellows had no idea; but they supposed that it was an out-building belonging to some farm. It was not likely that the farmer would object to the party taking shelter from the rain in it, especially as one of them was crooked. Anyhow, the hikers had to chance that. Standing out in the downpour, when there was a roof at hand, was not to be thought of.

Wharton opened the shed door. Nugent and Hurree Singh and Lord Mauleverer went in, and Bob and Johnny followed with Bunter. Inside, the shed was deeply dusky, and smelled strongly of cattle. There was a great pile of straw at one side. The juniors peered round them in the shadows, Wharton leaving the door a little way open, to admit such light as there was, also to freshen the stuffy air a little.

It takes more than a ghost to frighten Harry Wharton & Co.—the happy-go-lucky holiday hikers. And thrill follows thrill when they set out to solve the mystery of Hoad Castle!

"Well, here we are!" said Bob. "Sit down, Bunter, and let's have a look at your fearful injury."

"What is there to sit on?" groaned Bunter.

"The farmer seems to have forgotten to put armchairs or a sofa in his shed! Bit thoughtless," said Bob. "But there's quite a large floor."

"If you think I can sit on the floor, Bob Cherry—"

"There's a pile of straw," said Harry. "Sit in the straw, for goodness' sake, Bunter, and dry up."

"Beast!"

"Now let's look at the damage," said Johnny Bull, with a suspicious glare at Bunter. "I fancy we shall find it's not awfully bad."

"I can't bear to have it touched," said Bunter. "The pain is awful—fearful, in fact! I say, you fellows, we shall have to camp here for the night. There must be a farmhouse somewhere, and if you can find it, you can get some grub for supper. I'm jolly hungry."

Harry Wharton looked from the open door. No doubt there was a farmhouse "somewhere"; but all he could see was weeping rain, weeping trees, weeping hedges, and thickening gloom.

"Not much good going and looking for a house," remarked the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I suppose we shall have to camp here, if Bunter can't get on," said Bob. "We shall have topping appetites by breakfast-time to-morrow."

"The topfulness will be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, ruefully.

"You'd better try to find a farmhouse or something—for goodness' sake, don't be lazy!" said Bunter.

"You fat owl!"

"I'm really thinking of you fellows!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I can manage on the sandwiches! What are you fellows going to have?"

"We're going to have a sandwich each!" said Johnny Bull, in a deep, growling voice.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"There's some cocoa in my rucksack," said Bob Cherry, cheerily. "I remember sticking it in with my Holiday Annual! If we could get some water—"

"Lots of water!" said Nugent, with a grimace. "Only it's no use for making cocoa."

"Water, water, all around, and not a drop to drink! as the Johnny says in the poem! Anyhow, we're out of the rain! We shall have to tighten our belts, and smile!"

"The smilefulness is the proper eaper! Pack up your absurd troubles in your ridiculous kitbag, and smile!" suggested Hurree Singh.

"I say, you fellows! Is that straw dry? If it's dry I'll sit down on it," said Bunter. "Get those sandwiches unpacked! I've told you I'm hungry. If you're afraid of a little rain, you can wait till it stops, and then go and look for a farmhouse."

"I believe that fat villain is gammoning, all the time," growled Johnny Bull. "We ought to be getting on to Hoad. I don't suppose it's a mile farther on."

"If you think I can walk a mile, with a fearful pain in my ankle, Bull—"

"Oh, rats!"

"If you think it's only a mile, suppose you go on, and get some grub at the shops, and come back with it!" suggested Bunter. "I can wait, if I have the sandwiches."

"Oh, sit down and be quiet!"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter—with an expression of agony on his fat face, designed to show what awful suffering he was enduring, hobbled across to the stack of straw. He plumped down on it with a gasp of relief. Whether Bunter was injured or not, there was no doubt that he was tired, and still less doubt that he was lazy.

He plumped heavily into the thick straw. The next moment he gave a yell.

"Owl! I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, my hat! What's the matter now?"

"Owl! There's something here—something alive—it's moving!" yelled Bunter, and he bounded up from the straw.

"What the thump—"

"Oh crickey! Is that a bull?" gasped Bob Cherry, as a huge horned head loomed dimly from the shadows of the shed. Evidently the shed was not unoccupied, as the hikers had supposed.

"A—a—a—bull!" stuttered Bunter.

"Oh crickey! I say, you fellows, keep him off! Yarooooooh!"

Bunter bounded to the door.

The fact that he had a sprained ankle, and could not walk, let alone run, slipped his memory at that thrilling moment! He fairly flew!

Harry Wharton and Co. stared at him blankly.

"Keep him off!" howled Bunter.

He went through the doorway at about 60 m.p.h.

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"Moooooooooh!" came from the big animal stirring in the straw. Big sleepy eyes blinked at the hikers.

It was not, fortunately, a bull! It was a cow! The animal had been sleeping placidly in the straw, when Bunter plumped down and startled it out of balmy slumber.

But the cow was not so startled as Bunter! The cow simply blinked sleepily at the hikers, moored, and laid down its head again peacefully in the straw; while William George Bunter raced for the fence on the lane, as if a mad bull had been just behind him!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "The spoofer!" ejaculated Wharton. "Didn't I tell you he was gammoning?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"The gammonfulness is terrific!" "After him!"

The hikers left the shed. Billy Bunter's fearful injury having suddenly evaporated, as it were, there was no reason for staying there! Harry Wharton carefully closed and fastened the door behind him, and the party followed Bunter back to the lane. They overtook him at the fence. The fat junior was squeezing through.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Buck up, Bunter! There's a Bull just behind you!"

"Yaroooooh!" Bunter went through, spluttering. He rolled in the lane on the other side. Bunter sat up and roared.

"Keep him off! I say, you fellows, I—"

"Keep off, Johnny!" said Bob. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly owl!" roared Wharton. "There wasn't a bull in the shed—it was only a cow—"

"Oh!" Bunter gasped, and blinked round through his big spectacles. "That beast Cherry said there was a bull just behind me—"

"So there was," answered Bob. "But it was only Johnny Bull!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Beast!" roared Bunter.

He scrambled to his feet.

"Now Bunter's done his funny turn, let's get on to Hoad!" said Bob Cherry.

"Quick march!" "I say, you fellows—"

"Get a move on, you spoofer rhinoceros!"

"I—I can't walk—"

"What?" roared the hikers. "I told you my ankle was sprained and—"

"You—you told us your ankle was sprained!" gasped Bob.

"Yes, you beast! I can't walk, as you jolly well know! If it's only a cow in the shed, we can camp there! You fellows needn't be afraid of a cow—cows are all right! Let's get back! Help me!"

"Help you!" repeated Wharton, blankly.

"Yes! I can't walk—"

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After the foot-race Billy Bunter had put up, only a few minutes ago, it really was not of much use to tell the tale of the sprained ankle again. It was quite clear that that tale had been spoof from beginning to end! But Bunter apparently hoped to get away with it! Hope springs eternal in the human breast!

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" exclaimed the Owl of Greyfriars indignantly. "It's frightfully unfeeling to cackle and snigger when a fellow's suffering fearful pain! I say, you fellows—"

"Sure you can't walk?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

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"Quite sure!"

"Well, if you can't walk, you can run, because we've just seen you do it! Do you fellows mind running, just to oblige Bunter? He can't walk, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha! Let's!"

"The runfulness is the proper caper!"

"Run, you fat boulder!"

"I can't!" yelled Bunter. "I can't take a step! I—yarooooh! Leave off kicking me, Cherry, you beast!"

"I'm waiting for you to run! You can't walk—but you can run—and I'm going to kick you till you do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Whether Bunter could walk or not, there was no doubt that he could run—and he did! He ran quite fast. With Bob Cherry running behind him, dribbling him like a very fat football, Bunter found that he could put on quite a creditable turn of speed. He ran and ran and ran.

After him ran the hikers, through the dropping rain. Bunter, for once, led the way. With a boot behind him, to help him on when he slacked, he kept in the lead; and he was still going strong when the lights of the village of Hoad glimmered ahead through the rain and the gloom—welcome to all the hikers, but especially to Bunter!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Asking for It!

"PUTRID weather!" growled Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliff.

"Horrible!" said Gadsby.

"Beastly!" agreed Monson.

Jervis, the chauffeur, who was driving the car, made no remarks about the weather, though no doubt he felt it rather more than the fellows in the car did. Jervis had to give all his attention to driving, in the thickening dusk and the pouring rain. Rain beat on the roof of the green Austin, and splashed on the windows, blurring them till nothing could be seen from within, save a vague looming of weeping trees and dusky wet hedges.

Pon and Co. were thoroughly bad tempered. Certainly that September afternoon was enough to try the temper of a saint. A sunny August was followed by a rather rainy September; and Pon and Co. did not like it. In fine weather the three Highcliff fellows had enjoyed touring the green country in a car, hunting the Greyfriars hikers. They agreed that it was a jolly way of spending the "hols." With no masters or prefects about, they were able to drop in at the races sometimes, and play billiards at the hotels when they put up, and generally make young asses of themselves. But in this weather it was no catch.

"Where the dooce are we now?" asked Monson, trying to peer from the dripping glass.

"Somewhere in Oxfordshire, I suppose," grunted Pon.

"If we'd only stopped in Banbury this mornin'—" sighed Gadsby.

"We're after those Greyfriars cads. They weren't in Banbury," growled Pon.

Gadsby and Monson gave a simultaneous grunt. Hunting the hikers did not appeal to them very much at any time; they had had the worst of most of the encounters that had taken place. In this weeping weather it appealed to them less than ever. Pon was as determined as at the start; but Gadsby and Monson would undoubtedly have "chucked" it, but for the fact that they were getting the tour in Pon's car.

"We're not far off their track," said Ponsonby. "We got news of them

yesterday. They struck north after leaving the Thames."

"Oh, bother 'em!" growled Monson. "We've caught them more than once, and jolly well caught Tartars. You'll never get hold of Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual—even if it was worth gettin' hold of, which I don't believe."

"Same here," said Gadsby. "You fancy that smash-and-grab man at Courtfield put a message in that book for his pal, Pon. You fancy you're going to spot it, and find out where he parked the plunder. You fancy you're going to bag the reward of £50 the insurance people are offering for finding the loot. And I tell you it's all rot."

"Utter rot!" agreed Monson.

"Piffle!" said Gadsby.

"Bosh!" said Monson.

Ponsonby turned an unpleasant eye on his pals.

"You grumblin', grousin' nincom-poops—" he began.

A roll of thunder drowned his voice. Lightning flashed across the darkening sky. Following it came a rush of rain, beating on the car like a cascade. Rain and mud splashed round the revolving wheels.

"Oh gad! This is ripplin'!" groaned Gadsby. "Shall we ever get to anywhere, I wonder? Has the dashed chauffeur lost his way, or what?"

"We ought to have kept to the high-road," snarled Monson. "One of these dashed lanes is just like another. Looks like a night out for us."

"And suppose it is?" snapped Ponsonby. "Those Greyfriars men are hiking it, on foot, and I'll bet the lot of them aren't puttin' up so much grousin' as you two, with a roof over your heads."

"Oh, rats!"

"Oh, go an' eat coke!"

Temper was getting very sharp in the green Austin. Ponsonby slid down the glass a few inches to look out. Immediately there was a dash of wind and rain inside the car, and yelps from Gadsby and Monson. Unheeding the yelping of his knutty pals, Ponsonby stared out into the gathering gloom. He saw a muddy lane, lined by tall, weeping elms; and, as far as he could see, there were only elms and beeches, all weeping. It was one of those Oxfordshire woods which are so delightful in the fine weather. It looked anything but delightful under torrents of rain. Jervis had slowed down. There was little doubt that he was doubtful of his way, in winding lanes where signposts were few and far between.

"What the dooce is the brute stoppin' for?" muttered Gadsby.

"To ask the way, fathead!" snapped Ponsonby. "There's some sort of a native here, thank goodness."

A man by the roadside was standing and looking at the car. He was enveloped in a raincoat, which was turned up about his neck, and a soft hat was pulled down over his face. Jervis brought the car to a halt only a few yards from him. Pon eyed him sourly from the window. Between the pulled-down hat and the turned-up collar he had a glimpse in the dusk of a plump red face and a ginger-coloured moustache. The man stepped into the road and came to the window where Pon was looking out.

"You've picked a rather rough day, sir," he said.

"Eh, what?"

"I suppose you've been up to the office?"

Pon stared at him.

"What the dooce do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean, you've got the order to

view," said the man in the raincoat. "You can't see the place without it."

"What the thump—" murmured Gadsby.

"I mean, you can see the place; it's open to the public, as far as that goes," said the man in the raincoat; "but only the ruins. The other part of the house is locked up, of course, and you have to get the keys at the office."

The man was talking in riddles, apparently.

"I'd advise you to leave it till tomorrow, sir," said the man in the raincoat. "It's getting dark, and, of course, there's no lights there. Couldn't you find the place, or what? Some people don't find it easy. Not that there's a lot come to see it. If you like to call at the office in the morning I'll take

"I want to know the way!" hissed Ponsonby. He had no desire to a long talk with a garrulous gentleman who was, apparently, the local estate agent in that part of the country, and who seemed to be full of his own business. "Doesn't this road lead anywhere else?"

"It does not, sir!" answered Mr. Timothy Watkins. "If you go back a quarter of a mile you'll see a turning that leads to Hoad, and a quarter of a mile farther on is the turning to High Hoad—my office is there, if you had a fancy for viewing any properties in these parts—"

"Get back, Jervis!" snapped Pon.

"Yes, sir!"

Mr. Watkins stepped out of the way, and the chauffeur started backing the car to turn it. The man in the raincoat

at a time. Every time it backed the rear wheels came perilously near the edge of the ditch and the edge of the ditch was soggy and crumbling with heavy rain. Jervis was a good driver, and no doubt he could have turned the car successfully, even in that confined space, but for that circumstance.

Suddenly there was a slip. A mass of drenched earth under the rear wheels gave, and tumbled down into the ditch. Immediately the car slid backwards after it. There was a yell from the three Highcliffians within. So suddenly that they hardly knew what was happening, the car slipped backwards into the ditch and jammed into three feet of water and clinging mud. Water swamped into it, drenching the Highcliffians as they rolled and tumbled on the rear seat.



The Greyfriars hikers were slogging through the rain when Bunter's foot suddenly slipped, and he sat down in the mud. "Yoooooop!" roared the fat junior. "Yow-ow-ow!" "Funny, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry, looking round. "Why aren't you he-he-heing? You went off like a Chinese cracker when I took a tumble. Doesn't seem so funny now, eh?"

you there and show you over it. You won't see the ghost in the daylight, I dare say." He chuckled. "I dare say you've heard that it's haunted."

"I don't know what you're talking about," snapped Ponsonby. "Where does this lane lead?"

"Straight to Hoad Castle," answered the man in the raincoat, "and nowhere else. Aren't you going there?"

"No!" grunted Ponsonby.

"My mistake, sir," said the man in the raincoat cheerfully. "Seeing you heading straight for the old castle gateway, I naturally supposed you were going there. You're not here to view the place, then?"

"Never heard of it!" said Ponsonby.

"If you want to, sir, you've only to call at my office—anybody in High Hoad will point out the office of Timothy Watkins, estate agent and auctioneer. The place is in my hands—and has been these seven years, ever since the old squire went abroad. And—"

backed under the weeping trees, watching the proceedings.

"Careful of that ditch!" he called out.

In a narrow lane, with a wide, flowing ditch on one side, it was not easy to back and turn the car. Jervis paused and looked round at Ponsonby.

"I think I'd better back as far as the turning, sir," he said. "There's not much room here to turn a car."

"Oh gad!" growled Monson. "How long is it going to take to back a car a quarter of a mile?"

"For goodness' sake get it round!" snarled Gadsby.

"There's hardly room, sir—"

Ponsonby interrupted him savagely.

"Can't you drive? Stop talking rot and get the car round, and go back."

"Very well, sir!" said Jervis.

And he started again. The wheels ground and slogged through clayey mud. Grunting and groaning, the car moved back and forward, gaining a few inches

The man in the raincoat jumped forward and dragged the door open. Three drenched and breathless fellows clambered and scrambled out. Jervis shut off the engine, suppressing a grin. Pon had asked for it, and he had got it! The car sank deeper into the bed of the oozy ditch.

"Well," said Mr. Timothy Watkins, "you've done it now!"

Mr. Watkins was right! There was no mistake about that! Undoubtedly, beyond the shadow of a doubt, Pon & Co. had "done" it!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Haunted Castle!

"YOU fool!"

"You idiot!"

"You dummy!"

Pon & Co. addressed those polite remarks to the chauffeur. They
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stood in drenching rain, swamped with it, gazing at the embedded car.

"Sorry, sir," said Jervis urbanely. "You remember, sir, I mentioned that there was no space to turn."

"Get it out!" howled Gadsby. "We shall be soaked to the skin in a minute!"

Jervis blinked at him. Getting that car out of the ditch was a task for six or seven Jervises, at least! Obviously the green Austin had found a resting-place from which it would not shift in a hurry.

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, Gaddy!" snarled Pon. "The car's stuck! Don't talk like a fool!"

"Then what are we going to do?" yelled Gadsby.

"Is that a conundrum?" snarled Pon.

"We can't shift the car, sir!" said Jervis calmly. "It will have to be got out somehow to-morrow. Is there a garage anywhere near, sir?" he added, addressing Mr. Watkins.

"Nearest four miles," said the estate agent cheerfully. "Next to my office in High Road."

The car was settling deeper in the soft mud at the bottom of the ditch. It was almost perpendicular now, on its back, and half full of water. Hercules himself, had he been available, would have found it difficult to shift that car. It was a hefty task for somebody in the morning!

"I'd better get along to the garage, sir, that this gentleman mentions," suggested Jervis.

"Get our bags off the car," growled Ponsonby. "We shall have to find an inn, or something, you fellows." He turned to the cheerful Mr. Watkins. "Is there an inn anywhere about?"

"There's an hotel at High Road, sir—"

"We can't walk four miles in this!" hissed Ponsonby.

"Well, Hoad is only two miles, sir, and there's an inn there—the Golden Pig! Not much of an inn, though—"

"Anythin's better than nothin'. But—two miles—in this!" The three Highcliffians had backed under the trees, but there was little shelter. The rain was coming down in torrents.

Jervis extracted three suitcases from the car. The knuts of Highcliffe looked at one another in utter dismay. Hardier fellows than Pon & Co. might have balked at a walk of two miles in a drenching, swamping downpour. Pon turned almost desperately to Mr. Watkins again.

"Look here, isn't there anythin' nearer?" he gasped.

"Nothing, sir! Hoad's the nearest—only two miles," said Mr. Watkins encouragingly. "I'm going that way myself, if you'd like me to show you."

"We can't walk two miles in this!" howled Gaddy.

"What about that place you were speakin' of—Hoad Castle?" asked Ponsonby. "Can we get shelter there?"

"Nobody there, sir—"

"We don't want anybody—we want to get out of the rain!" howled Monson.

"I suppose there's a roof?"

"Well, I wouldn't advise you to go there," said Mr. Watkins. "It's getting

dark, and all the countryside believes that the place is haunted—"

"Oh, rubbish!" snapped Ponsonby. "Look here, you fellows, we'd better get under shelter. This dashed rain may give over presently. Did you say it was straight on to the castle, Mr. Watkins?"

"Yes; but—"

"Well, we're going there. If the rain stops, you fellows, we can walk to Hoad afterwards. Pick up your bags, Jervis, you get along to High Hoad and tell them at the garage."

"Yes, sir!"

Jervis disappeared in the rain and the dusk.

Pon & Co. picked up their bags, Mr. Watkins eyeing them very curiously as they tramped on up the lane. He was still eyeing them curiously, with a peculiar glint in his eyes, when they disappeared from his sight.

The change from the shelter of the car to the open air was a change with a vengeance. Drenched and dripping, the three knuts of Highcliffe staggered on through the dusk. It seemed as if the skies had opened on them; the rain came down in sheets. Two miles away the Greyfriars hikers had been very glad to get into Hoad before that fearful downpour came on. But Pon & Co. were getting the full benefit of it. Water fairly swamped them as they staggered on. A ruined castle, reputed to be haunted, was not a particularly attractive place after dark; but the knuts of Highcliffe longed to reach it. They could hardly have walked the necessary two miles to Hoad in this blinding swamp of rain. Two or three hundred yards to the old castle gate was more than enough for them.

"Here's the place!" groaned Gadsby. Dimly through the dusk and the rain two ancient stone pillars loomed up where a great gate once had hung. There was no sign of the gate now, and the gateway was overgrown with drenched weeds and grass. Beyond, a drive that was like a sea of mud ran between rows of weeping elms. Pon & Co. tramped along it desperately.

Hoad Castle, as they could see even in the thickening gloom, was a very ancient place. One wing of the house was habitable, and that, as the estate agent had told them, was locked up. The rest was a mere ruin, and had evidently been so for unnumbered years. Crumbling walls of immense thickness, old flagstones green with moss, hardly a trace of a roof met the eyes of the dismayed Highcliffe fellows. The rain washed down on tumbling old walls, fragments of masonry, windowless apertures, broken and doorless doorways. Mr. Watkins had said that the ruins were "open to the public," and perhaps on fine days sightseers might have liked to visit the place and take snapshots with cameras. But on a drenching day like this the desolation of the place was almost appalling.

"Oh gad!" groaned Monson. "Is that the show? Oh dear!"

"Anythin's better than this rain," gasped Gaddy. "Let's get out of it somehow. Oh crikey! I'm wet!"

Through what had once been a great entrance doorway the three Highcliffians entered the rambling, ruined building. There was no roof over their heads; the rain poured as hard as ever. It ran in channels among the shattered flagstones and broken masonry. The darkness was almost com-

plete now; the place dusky, full of shadows. Ponsonby groped in his pocket and produced an electric torch. He carried one with him ever since he had started trailing the Greyfriars hikers; he had needed it once or twice in dark hours when he had been on the warpath. He flashed on the light, swaying it to and fro in search of anything like a shelter.

"Here—this way!" he exclaimed, as he spotted an arched opening, once a doorway, though no door remained. But the archway gave into a roofed place, and that was enough.

Ponsonby tramped in, Gadsby and Monson squelching after him. The rain was beating now on a roof over their heads, which was a relief. Wind and rain dashed in at the doorway, but that mattered little. They gasped with relief to be out of the downpour.

"Filthy-lookin' hole," remarked Gadsby, staring round dismally in the glimmer of the torch.

"Dry, anyhow," mumbled Monson.

"We're out of the rain," said Ponsonby. "Thunder! How it's coming down! It's too fast to last—we shall get out of this soon."

The apartment in which they stood was a long, low hall. There were thick walls, where the mason-work was broken away. Long, deep slits in the thick walls took the place of windows. In ancient days they had been manned by bowmen in times of danger. The floor was of solid old stone flags, here and there thick with moss. Most of the roof was intact, though here and there it had fallen away, and rain dropped in. Except where Ponsonby flashed the light there was deep darkness. The dandy of Highcliffe found a fallen mass of masonry, and sat on it, and shut off the light.

"Keep the light on, old bean," said Gadsby, with an uneasy blink round in the darkness.

"What for? The battery won't last for ever," grunted Pon. "We've got to pick our way out of this hole when the rain stops."

"It doesn't sound like stopping," said Monson, with a shiver.

"Well, we've got to wait till it does."

"Got any smokes?"

"Here you are!"

The three young rascals found—or fancied they found—a little comfort in lighting cigarettes. If there was any comfort in it, however, it was slight. They were utterly dismal and wretched, and their tempers were growing worse and worse. If this was a holiday tour, Gadsby and Monson were fed-up with it. It was not their way to keep a stiff upper lip, and take the rough with the smooth.

"If we'd stayed on in Banbury—" mumbled Monson.

"Well, we didn't!" snapped Pon.

"Might have, but for your silly fool idea of rootin' after those Greyfriars cads," growled Gadsby.

"Oh, shut up!"

"I say, what was that?" asked Monson, with a start.

"What was what, you silly ass?" grunted Pon, irritably.

"I heard somethin'—"

"The rain, ass."

"Somethin' else—a sort of sound—"

"Oh, the jolly old ghost, perhaps," sneered Pon. "That Johnny in the lane told us the place was haunted, you know. The ghost may be goin' to give us a look in."

"Oh, shut up!" muttered Gadsby, uneasily. "Don't start talkin' about ghosts here, for goodness' sake."

"Yes, shut up, Pon," snapped Monson.

"In this dashed darkness—"

"Rot!" said Ponsonby, coolly. Pon, at least, was not afraid of ghosts, and

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he found a malicious pleasure in making his companions uneasy. "If there's a jolly old ghost in Hoad Castle, I'd be rather glad to see him. Better company, I dare say, than you fellows, with your eternal grousin'. What about callin' out and askin' him if he's at home?"

"Dry up, I tell you," hissed Monson. "Oh, rats!" And Ponsonby raised his voice, and shouted, with a shout that echoed eerily through the dismal old ruins. "Hallo! Ghost at home! Show up, old ghostly bean; here's two fellows anxious to see you."

His voice died away in a thousand echoes. Following the echoes came a faint groaning sound.

Gadsby and Monson jumped to their feet.

"What—what was that?" stuttered Gadsby.

"I—I heard a—a—a groan—" gabbled Monson.

"Rot!" Ponsonby's heart was beating faster, and he wished that he had not shouted that challenge to the ghost of Hoad Castle. "Rubbish! If you believe in silly ghosts—"

Groan!
Ponsonby broke off short.
The sound was loud, clear, distinct; it seemed to come from the solid stone flags under their feet.

"What—" panted Monson.

Groan!
There was no mistaking the sound now. It was a deep and dismal groan, echoing weirdly, eerily, horribly through the shadows. It sent a chill to their hearts, and Pon's face was as white as those of his comrades as he stared round him in the black gloom.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Ghost Story!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Oh dear!"

"Look here, buck up; I'm tired of kicking you!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "You can't expect a fellow to keep on kicking you all the time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" moaned Bunter. "I'm tired! I'm wet! I'm hungry! I'm nearly dropping! I'm going to be ill! I'm catching a cold! I think I can feel it turning to pneumonia already! Ow!"

"Listen to my tale of woe!" chanted Bob Cherry.

"Here we are, old fat bean," said Lord Mauleverer, encouragingly. "This place must be a village, and there must be an inn—"

"Oh dear! Oh crikey! Oh lor'!"

The Greyfriars hikers tramped into Hoad. It was a small Oxfordshire hamlet, and seemed to depend on the stars for illumination at night. The village street, washed and drenched with rain, was dark, no stars being on view at the present time. But they caught a glimmer in the distance, and guessed that it probably came from an inn, and headed in that direction.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here we are!" exclaimed Bob. "A jolly old inn, Bunter—and that means grub. Rejoice! My hat! They've got the place up specially for this party, according to that sign."

Light glimmered from diamond panes. A sign swinging on the branch of a beech tree announced that the building was the Golden Pig, adding that there was accommodation for man and beast.

"Eh, wharrer you mean?" mumbled Bunter.

"Look!" Bob pointed to the sign. "Man and beast. That's for us and you, old chap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly chump!" roared Bunter.

It was a small village and a small inn. But the hikers were deeply thankful to get under its roof. They tailed in, leaving a trail of muddy rain. A plump innkeeper, with a red nose, which looked as if he was one of his own best customers in the ale department, came to greet them. He eyed them rather sharply; and they were aware that they presented a dismal, draggled, and rather disreputable aspect.

But Mr. Pooks was as hospitable as he was plump. There was accommodation for the party; indeed, the hikers gathered that they were the only guests at the Golden Pig; and even the ale and beer department was very thinly patronised that rainy, windy evening. Mr. Pooks called an equally plump and red-nosed waiter, and the hikers were helped off with their packs and shown to their rooms, and assured that supper

TIME FOR A JOKE?

Well, here's one for which S. Lawler, of 96, Grosvenor Road, Urmston, Manchester, has been awarded one of this week's useful pocket-knives:



Two miners were anxiously gazing at a glittering display in a jeweller's shop window.

"Wouldn't you like to have yer pick among the lot?" asked the taller of the two.

"I'd sooner have me shovel!" replied the other.

I've got more prizes in stock, chums, so pile in with your efforts.

would be prepared immediately. Mr. Pooks himself showed them to their rooms, and candles were lighted for them. Out of doors Hoad depended on the stars, indoors on candles. The march of modern progress had passed that little village by.

"You're too late to-day," Mr. Pooks remarked; "but if it's fine in the mornin' I can let you have the trap."

With that mysterious remark, into the mystery of which the hikers did not inquire, Mr. Pooks left them to clean off the mud, and change—which they did with great pleasure and relief. Even Billy Bunter was glad to make himself a little more presentable. Newly swept and garnished, as it were, the hikers came down to a low-ceiled comfortable room, in which there was a fire, and which was lighted—not brightly—by a swinging lamp. A table was already laid, and the plump waiter was busy; and a savoury scent of supper was more than welcome to the hungry hikers.

They sat down to eat—and Billy Bunter's fat face expanded into a grin of delight as he blinked over the festive board. Mr. Pooks carried his hospitality so far as to bestow his plump, ruddy company on the hikers as they ate their supper.

"It'll be wet!" he told them. "But it will droie up! You'll see it all right, marnin'."

The Greyfriars hikers were not aware that there was anything special to see in the vicinity of Hoad. Apparently, however, there was!

"I can get you all into the trap, at a pinch!" said Mr. Pooks, surveying them thoughtfully. "But maybe you'd walk! It's a matter of two moile."

"What is?" inquired Bob Cherry politely.

"Hay? The castle," answered Mr. Pooks.

"Is there a castle?" asked Bob, innocently.

Mr. Pooks looked at him. He seemed puzzled for a moment or two, and then he seemed to decide to take the question as a joke, and he burst into a roar of laughter.

"Well, that's a good one!" he said. "Ha, ha! Is there a castle, says you? Ha, ha, ha! A good one! Ha, ha!"

Evidently there was a castle two miles from the village of Hoad, and it was a show-piece of the neighbourhood, though the Greyfriars hikers were so unfortunate as never to have heard of it!

Mr. Pooks, however, really could not believe that anybody had come to Hoad, without having heard of the ruined castle—which was generally the only reason why anybody ever came to Hoad.

"You'll see it marnin'," said Mr. Pooks good-humouredly. "It'll droie up by marnin'. You wouldn't want to see it after dark! No! Seeing that it's haunted! No!"

"My hat! A jolly old haunted castle!" said Johnny Bull. "We're in luck."

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

"Any charge for seeing the ghost?" inquired Nugent.

"There's no charge at all," explained Mr. Pooks. "Open to the public, and they goes with their cameras and their sketch-books. Leastways the ruins is open to the public. The squire's house ain't, natural-like. Seven year the squire's been away, and the house ain't sold yet, though Mr. Watkins, along at High Hoad, has it on his books all the time. Nor it won't sell," added Mr. Pooks, with a shake of the head. "No!"

"Why not?" asked Bob.

"Haunted, sir—and a place that's haunted by a ghost ain't everybody's money!" said Mr. Pooks. "Likewise the estate was too expensive for the old squire to keep up in these times of 'igh taxes, so natural-like it's too expensive for others. 'Course, it's going cheap, for such a place—but in these times, ten thousand pounds is a pot of money. Though if it ain't worth twice as much, it ain't worth a penny!"

"I say, you fellows, we might look over it," remarked Billy Bunter, glancing up from the plate of beef that he was attacking. "Might mention it to my pater! Ten thousand pounds is nothing to him."

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I dare say it's cheap at ten thousand pounds, with the ghost thrown in," grinned Bob. "But is it a genuine ghost? Everybody seen it?"

"Nigh every man in Hoad," answered Mr. Pooks. "Mr. Watkins, too."

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along at High Head—and he's a hard-headed man, if you like. He don't say much about it, 'cause why, he's the estate agent that has the selling of the place, and he don't want to spoil his own market, natural-like. But I asked him fair and square, and he owned up that he see something very strange there. 'Don't tell everybody what I've said, Pooks,' says he. But natural-like, talk like that gets about."

The juniors smiled. Their impression of Mr. Pooks was, that anything said to him would "get about" in a very short space of time. Telling Mr. Pooks was as good as advertising the ghost!

"No!" said Mr. Pooks. "It won't sell, not unless the old squire takes a very low figure, half or less'n half what he wants. No! Why, my idea is that Mr. Watkins himself would put in for the estate, along of that new building scheme he's got in hand, if the squire would come down to his figure. And if it don't sell, the old squire'll have to, you mark my words!" said Mr. Pooks solemnly, taking it for granted that the hikers were as deeply interested in this important matter as he was himself. "Cause why, look at the income tax! He will have to sell cheap, the old squire will, and before long, too, you mark my words!"

"You haven't seen the jolly old ghost yourself?" asked Harry.

"I have that!" answered Mr. Pooks, unexpectedly.

"Oh, my hat! What was it like?"

"Six of us goes there, one night last year," said Mr. Pooks, impressively. "We sits there in the dark and watches. Mr. Watkins was coming, but he was kept away—and there was six of us. And we all see it! We hears a groan—a deep and 'orrible groan—and then we sees a skull a-walking towards us in the dark—a shining skull, as true as I stand here—and you can lay to it that we didn't stop for a second look! I don't mind admitting that I run all the way back to the Golden Pig without stopping, an' when I got in, I had 'ardly enough breath to call to George for some ale!"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry, "we're going to view that jolly old castle, before we get on our travels again!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"And we'll go after dark and see the ghost walk!" said Harry Wharton.

"What-ho!"

"You won't stop long, if you do!" said Mr. Pooks. "Lots of visitors have said the same, but one sight of that walking skull was enough for 'em. I've had 'em come in here as white as chalk, totterin', I have that. A wild night like this," added Mr. Pooks, "is jest the night for the ghost to walk! And if there was anybody at the haunted castle to-night, he would see something, I can tell you, and run for his life and—"

Mr. Pooks was interrupted. There was a sound of scampering feet outside in the rain, and a bang at the inn door.

Mr. Pooks ran to open it. Three fellows, drenched with rain, panting for breath and white as chalk, staggered into the inn.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Three in a Funk!

GROAN! Ponsonby, Gadsby and Monson drew closer together in the dark, as the strange, weird sound was repeated. Gadsby and Monson were trembling, and Ponsonby tried

in vain to still the—chattering of his teeth.

"What—what—what is it?" stammered Gadsby.

"It—it's an echo, or somethin'," stammered Ponsonby. "It—it can't be anythin' else! The wind in these old ruins—"

Groan!

Pon ceased to speak. He knew that it was not an echo. It was a deep and dismal groan, whether it came from a human or a ghostly throat.

"I—I say, let's get out of this!" mumbled Monson.

Pon tried to pull himself together.

"Rot! It's a rotten trick!" he muttered. "I'm not going out in the rain! It's some sort of trickery—"

"There's nobody here, but ourselves!"

"Who could be here?" stuttered Gadsby. "Oh! Look—look!" His voice rose to a frightened scream.

There was a glimmer of strange light in the darkness. The three Highcliffians fixed their startled eyes on it.

From the blackness, the shape of a human skull grinned at them.

It was about the height from the floor that a man's face would have been, had a man been standing there. But nothing was to be seen, but the skull, floating in the darkness.

It remained there, glimmering luminously, seeming to grin hideously at the Highcliff juniors from the gloom.

Ponsonby felt an icy chill run down his back.

He did not believe in ghosts. He had a hard and practical mind, and nonsense of that sort had no appeal to him.

But it was easier to, laugh at ghosts in the daylight, and in company, than in the darkness of an old ruin, silent and solitary.

"It—it—it's a—a skull!" gabbed Gadsby. "Oh gad," he shrieked, "it's comin' this way!"

The skull was moving towards the Highcliffians. It floated eerily through the darkness towards them.

There was a patter of feet as Gadsby rushed for the arched doorway.

He plunged under headlong into the rain. Monson followed him, panting with terror.

Ponsonby, gritting his teeth, felt for his electric torch. He flashed on the light.

The white beam shone on the glistening skull, and on the dim outlines of a grisly skeleton below.

Skeleton and skull advanced on Ponsonby.

One glimpse of the hideous thing was enough for him.

He turned and ran after his comrades. Clank! Clank!

He heard the sound of a rattling chain behind him! It was as if the spectre of Head was dragging behind him a chain as he moved!

Madly Ponsonby rushed out into the rainy darkness after his comrades.

Gadsby and Monson were racing down the windy, weeping avenue to the old stone gateway. Pon raced after them.

Stumbling blindly in the darkness, falling and picking themselves up again, Pon & Co. reached the gateway on the lane at last.

There they paused, to gasp for breath. Gadsby reeled against one of the old stone pillars. Monson staggered by his side. Ponsonby stared back with distended eyes, in terror of seeing the grisly thing behind him.

But there was nothing to be seen, but the falling rain in the gloom, and the groaning branches of the old trees.

"Come on!" muttered Gadsby. "Get out of this."

"It's a trick!" Pon hissed out the words. "Some sort of a trick—it can't be anything else."

"Let's get out, anyhow."

"Two miles to the nearest village," groaned Monson, "and in this rain! Oh crickey!"

"Better than that horrible place!" said Gadsby, with a shudder. "Are you comin', Pon, you fool? I'm goin', anyhow."

Monson tramped away, and Gadsby followed. Pon, after another savage stare back into the darkness, followed them.

Through the mud and the wind and the rain they tramped on, peering about for the turning that the High Head estate agent had mentioned to them.

"This looks like a turnin'," said Gadsby, after long groping and fumbling in the dark. "Is this it?"

"Take it and chance it!" mumbled Monson.

A figure loomed up in the gloom, and the three Highcliffians gave a startled gasp. But it was a human figure, clad in a long raincoat.

"Hallo!" said a voice they had heard before. "Who's that?"

"Oh! That's Watkins!" exclaimed Gadsby. "I know his voice again!"

"Oh, it's you!" Mr. Watkins peered at them in the gloom. "Have you been up to the castle?"

"Yes! I say—"

"You didn't stay long?"

"We—we—we saw—something—" stammered Gadsby. He was rather ashamed to admit that he had been frightened by a ghost. "We—we got out—"

Mr. Watkins chuckled.

"I fancied you would!" he answered. "And I thought I'd hang about a bit and see if you ran for it, and if you want the way to the village, why I'll show you the way, and welcome!"

"Thanks!" gasped Gadsby. "If you're going to Head—"

"I'm going home, which is at High Head, but it ain't much farther round if I go by the village," answered the estate agent cheerfully. "You'll never find the way in this darkness. I'm used to it. Keep with me, and you'll land all right at the Golden Pig, if that's what you want."

"Thanks ever so much," gasped Monson.

"Not at all!" answered Mr. Watkins. "Happy to oblige. But look here, what did you see in the ruins?"

"A—a sort of floating skull!" Gadsby shuddered at the recollection. "It—it was awful—horrible—"

"Some sort of trickery!" growled Ponsonby.

"Oh! You think it was trickery, do you, sir?" asked Mr. Watkins.

"What else could it be?" growled Pon. "There's no such thing as ghosts."

"Well, strange things have been seen and heard in that old place," said Mr. Watkins. "I've seen strange things there myself that I can't account for, and I'm a practical business man, I hope. It's a place I'd steer clear of after dark—though, of course, I wouldn't say so to everybody, as I've got the place on my books to sell! If you'd taken my advice, you wouldn't have got this fright."

"I wasn't frightened!" growled Ponsonby.

"Oh! You weren't?" Mr. Watkins was heard to chuckle. "Well, this is the way—keep with me—and walk a bit faster, will you—I don't like being too near Head Castle at night! I can tell you, my nerves were on the jump all the while I was waiting for you! Come on."

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"Ow! There's something here—something alive—it's moving!" yelled Bunter, and he bounded up from the straw. The fact that he had a sprained ankle and could not walk, slipped his memory at that thrilling moment. He fairly flew! "Moooooooooh!" came from the cow stirring in the straw, startled out of its balmy slumber.

Mr. Watkins walked very quickly, and the Highcliffians tramped after him. They had left their suitcases behind in the hurry of their flight, but they were not thinking of going back for them. Pon, in spite of his assertion that the ghost was trickery, would not have entered the haunted ruins again in the dark for love or money.

Mr. Watkins gave a sudden start. "What was that?" he ejaculated, looking round. "Did you hear it?"

"Only the wind!" muttered Ponsonby. "Well, put it on a bit, will you? I'm in rather a hurry, if you don't mind."

Ponsonby sneered in the darkness. The estate agent of High Hoad seemed to have his nerves still on the jump. But, as a matter of fact, Pon's own nerves were none too steady, and Gadsby and Monson were peering round in the darkness with scared eyes. They hurried on after Mr. Watkins, who set them a good pace. The muddy, rainy lanes seemed endless; but a glimmer of light caught their eyes at last.

"That's the place!" said Mr. Watkins. Pon & Co. tottered on to the inn and banged at the door. The darkness behind them seemed peopled with grinning skulls. They could almost have cried with relief when the door was opened and Mr. Pooks let them in. They staggered into the Golden Pig.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Gadsby. "I thought we'd never get here!"

moaned Monson. "Well, we're here now—pull yourselves together!" snapped Ponsonby.

Mr. Watkins followed the three Highcliff fellows in. He nodded in greeting to the innkeeper.

"What's appened, Mr. Watkins, sir?" asked Mr. Pooks.

"These young gentlemen took shelter from the rain in the haunted castle. They

seem to have seen something that's scared them."

"And no wonder!" said Mr. Pooks. "I was just telling some young gents here that this was just the night for the ghost of Hoad to walk—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry looked out of the inner door and stared at the drenched and weary Highcliffians.

"Pon & Co! My hat! You fellows look wet!"

"That gang here!" exclaimed Gadsby. "Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" chuckled Bob.

"And the jolly old Holiday Annual, too, Pon, if you're still after it." And Bob laughed, and went back to his friends.

"We've found them again!" muttered Pon to Gadsby and Monson. But Gaddy and Monson weren't interested.

"Blow them!" said Gadsby.

"Bother them!" said Monson.

And they followed Mr. Pooks up the creaking stairs, while Mr. Watkins, divested of his drenched hat and raincoat, proceeded to trouble George, the waiter, for a drink.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Thief in the Night!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. gathered about the fire in the inn parlour after supper.

It was hardly time for bed; and the hardest of the hikers did not feel disposed to walk out in the rain, which was still coming down hard. Three or four local inhabitants were there, and Mr. Pooks and Mr. Timothy Watkins—who had a glass at his elbow, and was apparently accustomed to having a glass at his elbow.

Seen in the light, Mr. Watkins' ruddy face was rather hard and rather sharp, and the juniors would have set him

down as a business man of rather a tough disposition—certainly not the kind of man to believe in ghosts, as Mr. Pooks had told them. Hard-featured as he was, however, the estate agent of High Hoad seemed very affable, and he entered into talk with the hikers and told them a good deal about Hoad Castle and the old squire; who had been a rich man in the dear dead days before the War, and, like so many others, was a rich man no longer.

Mr. Watkins was interested to hear that the hikers were going to exploit the ruins on the morrow; but he shook his head seriously when he heard that they intended to remain there after dark and "start" the ghost if they could.

"Don't do it, young gentlemen," said Mr. Watkins, shaking his head. "A shock to the nerves does nobody any good; and you'll get one."

"The ghost might get the shock!" suggested Bob Cherry. "I'm jolly well going to punch his nose if he turns up."

"The punchfulness will be terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh; a remark that made Mr. Watkins blink at him.

"The other young gentlemen to-day didn't stop to punch his nose," said Mr. Watkins dryly.

"Oh, Highcliff funks!" said Johnny Bull. "I bet they hopped it fast enough. We shan't hop it."

"No fear!" said Frank Nugent.

"I say, you fellows, you'll be all right, you know," remarked Billy Bunter. "I shall be with you."

"Right as rain!" agreed Bob. "If the ghost sees your features suddenly, old fat man, there's no doubt who will get the shock."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob,

as a voice was heard from the passage outside. "That's dear old Pon."

The hikers grinned. Ponsonby's voice, raised in angry tones, was heard. Pon, it seemed, wanted a man sent to collect the suitcases that had been left behind in Hoad Castle. Somebody was explaining to him that nobody would go in the rain, and that nobody in the village, anyhow, would go into the haunted castle after dark. Which seemed to irritate the lordly Pon.

The door opened, and Ponsonby came in, with an angry face. He looked round for the innkeeper, who was smoking a churchwarden pipe at the corner of the fire. Mr. Pooks looked at him.

"Here! I want my bags sent for," said Ponsonby sharply. "Your man here says it can't be done."

"Right!" agreed Mr. Pooks. "It can't."

"We can't do without our baggage," said Ponsonby.

"If you loike to fetch it," said Mr. Pooks, "I'll find a man to carry a lantern as far as the gate."

"I want it fetched," snapped Ponsonby. "I'll pay. Isn't there a man in this place with sense enough not to be afraid of ghosts?"

Mr. Pooks regarded him solemnly.

"Whoy did you leave them bags there, sir?" he asked.

Harry Wharton and Co. grinned. It was clear enough why Pon and Co. had bolted without their bags. Pon coloured with annoyance.

"Well, we did leave them," he said. "We—we got out in rather a—ahurry—"

"Not afraid of the ghost?" asked Mr. Pooks solemnly.

"Look here! I don't want any impudence," said the dandy of Highcliffe. "I want my bags fetched in."

"You won't get them fetched by nobody here," said Mr. Pooks; "and as for impudence, I don't want any, either. And if you ain't satisfied with this here inn, you can go elsewhere, and I shan't miss your custom."

Ponsonby glared at Mr. Pooks. But that plump and solemn gentleman had the best of the argument, and Pon flung out of the room in a temper. Mr. Pooks, quite unmoved, renewed his attention to his churchwarden pipe.

The Highcliffians had had their clothes dried, but they looked rather limp and muddy as they sat down to supper. There was no doubt that they were in need of the suitcases they had left behind in the haunted castle; but it was a case of needs must, and Pon and Co. had to do without them.

After supper they came into the inn parlour, and Harry Wharton & Co. decided to go to bed. They did not want to remain in the company of their old enemies of Highcliffe. Mr. Watkins drove away in the Golden Pig trap, after bidding the hikers a very affable good-night. They took their candles and went up the stairs.

A number of doors opened on the big landing above. Billy Bunter rolled into his room at once, and was very soon snoring. The other fellows chatted for a few minutes at the doorway. While they were so occupied Ponsonby came up the stairs with a candle and passed into one of the rooms. He did not speak to the Greyfriars fellows or look at them as he passed. He went into his room, but did not shut the door after him. Apparently he was not going to bed yet.

The hikers separated, going into their various rooms with cheery good-nights. After they had gone in, and the doors were shut, Ponsonby went downstairs with a sour grin on his face. He joined Gadsby and Monson, and the three young rascals smoked cigarettes for some time—Mr. Pooks and several old villagers eyeing them with cold and grim disapproval the while.

It was more than an hour later that Pon & Co. went to bed. They had a three-bedded room together; accommodation at the Golden Pig being limited, and most of it having been bagged by the Greyfriars party before the arrival of Pon & Co.

Gadsby gave a grunt as he set his candle down on a washstand.

"Precious sort of a hole to put up in!" he remarked.

"Candles!" said Monson. "Who'd believe that there are people still going to bed by candle-light? The Government ought to do somethin'."

"They've put in electric light at Bagdad," said Ponsonby. "They'll put it in at Timbuctoo next, and then perhaps they may think of Oxfordshire. Never mind that. As a matter of fact, it's rather lucky."

"What the thump—"

"I mean, a fellow disturbed in the night won't be able to get a light in a hurry," said Ponsonby.

Gadsby and Monson stared at him.

"Who's goin' to be disturbed in the night?" asked Gadsby.

"That rotter Cherry," answered Pon, in a low voice. "It's a stroke of luck being under the same roof with that gang. It gives us a chance."

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Monson. "You're thinkin'—"

"I came up when they were goin' to bed, and spoiled their rooms," said Pon, coolly. "Cherry's room is next to this."

"You're thinkin' of burglin' the fellow's room!" exclaimed Monson.

"Don't shout, you ass. The rotter will have his rucksack in his room, of course, and I know he carries that dashed Holiday Annual in it. We're goin' to snaffle it to-night. Easy as fallin' off a form."

"We!" repeated Gadsby unpleasantly. "Are we? You can, if you like, but if you're playin' burglar games you can jolly well leave me out. I'm not goin' to be run in for burglin', if I know it."

"Same here," said Monson, with emphasis. "Why, you might get three months for it, you silly ass."

Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders.

"If you funk lendin' a hand, I can do it on my own," he answered, with a sneer. "You're ready enough to share in the Courtfield reward when we get it."

"I'd sell my share for a bob down," answered Gadsby.

"A tanner for mine," said Monson.

"Oh, go an' eat coke!"

Not in the best of tempers, the Highcliffians turned in. Gadsby and Monson were soon fast asleep; but Ponsonby did not close his eyes. He had not undressed when he laid down, and he lay listening till the inn was silent, and it was certain that all occupants had gone to bed. He struck a match at last, and looked at his watch. It was past eleven.

Ponsonby slipped from his bed.

The old floor creaked as he tiptoed to the door. The door creaked as he opened it.

Outside, the landing was as black as a hat.

Leaving the door open, for a prompt retreat if necessary, Ponsonby crept out on the landing.

Groping his way along the wall in the darkness, he came to the door of the adjacent room, which he had so cunningly ascertained to be Bob Cherry's.

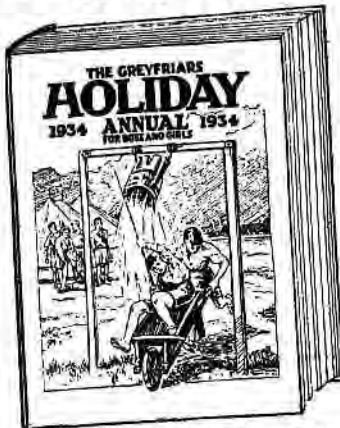
He grasped the door handle and turned it. For a moment he feared that Bob might have locked his door.

But it opened to his touch.

Pon's heart beat as the ancient door creaked sharply in opening. He stood in the doorway, listening intently.

The room was dark, but not so dark as the landing. Bob had pulled back the curtains and opened the top of the window for fresh air. The rain had ceased at that late hour, and stars were

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glimmering from the sky. A pale, faint glimmer fell into the room, and Pon was able to pick out the objects within dimly and vaguely.

He made out a large, old-fashioned bed, with the figure of a sleeper in it. His straining ears caught a sound of regular breathing. The occupant of the room was asleep.

Ponsonby stepped in. His heart was beating rather unpleasantly. He had no scruples whatever in getting possession of what he

wanted. But he was well aware that this sort of proceeding was rather risky. Still, it seemed safe enough.

The Greyfriars fellow was evidently fast asleep, and a glimmer of Pon's electric torch would reveal where the rucksack lay—and hardly a couple of minutes would be needed to extract the long-sought Holiday Annual therefrom. Certainly, when the hikers missed it in the morning they would guess who had snaffled it. That would make no difference to Ponsonby, as they could prove

nothing. He would take good care that they never saw it again.

He stepped into the room, and a glimmer of the torch showed him the face of the sleeper in the bed, a ruddy, healthy face with shut eyes. The same glimmer revealed a rucksack lying on the floor by the head of the bed.

Pon strode forward. The next moment he staggered wildly and crashed to the floor, and a startled yell woke the echoes of the inn.

(Continued on next page.)



If you are in any doubt over any Soccer problem 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.

TALKS ON TACTICS I

WE are out to make the very most of this football season, aren't we? It is already obvious that some of my readers are answering that question with a very decided affirmative. They are sitting down to think out ways and means of getting the best out of this football season. Take a bit of evidence to that effect. The first letter I opened from a reader this season, put this question: "Do you believe in a football team having talks on tactics before a match?" Let me say at once, that I do believe in talking on tactics before each match, no matter whether the game be between England and Scotland, or between two schoolboy teams. If the talks on tactics are of the right kind, then they ought to produce nothing but good results.

In first-class football these tactical talks are a comparatively new idea. But they have become very popular recently, and it is no exaggeration to say that, nowadays the players of practically every big football team have pre-match talks on tactics. At these talks the manager presides, but this does not mean that he does all the talking! The individual players are encouraged to express their views, and by an exchange of opinion good should result.

There is just one danger in these talks. Unless every member of the team engaging in them has the real team spirit, they are apt to become a source of irritation.

Let me explain. In order that something like the maximum benefit may be obtained from these talks, it is often necessary to "hold an inquest" on the previous match; to inquire why the match was lost. In the course of such an inquiry the blame might be put on an individual player, and he might feel aggrieved. Now, the object of these "inquests," as I call them, is not to fix the blame. It is to find out what was the matter with the play in the tactical sense. How did your opponents get that second goal? Was there something wrong in the positional play? It is only by going into such questions as these in the weekly talks on tactics that the way to improvement can be found.

PUTTING IT PLAIN I

AFTER the chat about the previous match, and the lessons to be learnt therefrom, discussion of the coming match should be helpful, especially if the make-up of the opposing team is known. What I want to stress is the importance of deciding on some sort of tactical plans both for attack and defence.

Please don't imagine that I am telling you that football matches are won in the dressing-room. They're not!

I remember a young professional, who had signed for a big club, attending his first tactical talk. The corks were duly brought out and placed on the board marked out to represent a football field. The manager took the corks, which represented his forwards, moved them hither and thither, until finally the cork which represented the centre-forward was able to score an easy goal. The young "pro," watched this moving of the corks very closely for a period, and then, plucking up his courage, put in a most pertinent observation. "That's all very well, Mr. Manager," he said. "But what were the opponents doing while those goal-scoring moves were being made by our corks?"

Obviously, when it comes to actual play, much must depend on what the opponents do. They may be good enough to dictate the tactics. But there can be no harm in having these pre-match talks, provided the tactics agreed upon are good—and provided that they are, as I might put it—made of elastic; that is, changeable. It is no use continuing the agreed tactics against particular opponents if those tactics are leading to heavy defeat.

A VALUABLE TIP I

TACTICS in general change from time to time. They have changed so far as first-class football is concerned, in recent years. And it is a fact, that what the first-class footballers do the clubs lower down the scale also try to do. That is natural, and generally speaking, is also wise. Many of the first-class clubs now use their centre-half almost exclusively as a third full-back. His particular job is to stop the opposing centre-forward from scoring goals. I shall not, this week, enter into a discussion as to whether this third-full-back idea is a good one. I have mentioned it in order to get the right

"atmosphere" from answering another question. "Suppose," writes one of my friends, "our centre-forward is being so well watched down the middle that he scarcely has a chance of scoring. What should be his moves?"

In the first place, it is obviously no use for the centre-forward who is being carefully shadowed by the opposing centre-half, just being content that he can't do anything good that day. He can still do good.

I had a talk not long ago on this particular phase of football to "Vic" Watson, the centre-forward of West Ham United, who has had much experience, including that of playing for England. "If I find an opposing centre-half is sticking to me closer than Mary's little lamb ever stuck to Mary," he said, "I don't complain. What I do is take him for a walk. Instead of keeping to my position down the centre of the field, I wander over to the left or to the right—sometimes even as far as the touch-line. Such a move is apt to get the policeman centre-half worried. He is not sure whether he ought to follow me, and I don't mind whether he does or not. If he does follow me, then he has been lured away from his position guarding the goal. If he doesn't follow me, then I have a chance to do something with the ball."

A BRILLIANT CAREER I

I THINK in that little chat, Watson gave a valuable tip to all centre-forwards who find themselves closely watched. There can be no greater mistake than to rely on one member of the side to get the goals. So don't regard the centre-forward as the official goal-scorer. Arsenal don't. When they find the centre-forward covered, they use the wing men to cut in and score goals. You may remember that, last season, Cliff Bastin, the outside-left of Arsenal, scored 32 goals. This was a greater number than any other first-class player has ever scored in one League season in this position. He got many of these goals by cutting in, and shooting from what was really the position of the inside-left, or the centre-forward.

What a wonderful career this outside-left of Arsenal has had to be sure. Before he was twenty he earned practically all the honours which can come to a professional footballer. He played for England, he had a Cup-winner's medal, and was in a side which won the League Championship!

I asked a man who knew Bastin very well, how it was that the boy had done so marvellously. "Well," was the reply, "mainly because he is a really fine footballer. But there is one thing which has told greatly in his favour. Though the honours have come to him thick and fast, he has always been able to wear the same size of hat." I like that last bit. Swelled head has "killed" more good footballers than any other "disease."

"LINESMAN."

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Not a Success!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry sat up in bed. He grabbed a matchbox, ready at hand, struck a match, and lighted the candle at his bedside.

The light glimmered on Ponsonby of Highcliffe.

Pon was sprawling on his face on the floor, howling and gasping. Never had a fellow been taken more completely by surprise than was Cecil Ponsonby of the Highcliffe Fourth.

He hardly knew what had happened to him. He was aware that his foot had caught in something, that was all. And he was aware—only too clearly—that he had pitched forward on his nose, and that his nose was severely damaged.

Bob Cherry stared at him in the candle-light and grinned.

"Ooooh!" gasped Ponsonby. "Oh gad! Yooocogh! Urrrrgh! What the thunder—Oooocogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Caught!"

He jumped out of bed.

Pon sat up on the floor blinking dizzily. He saw now that what he had caught his foot in was a cord stretched across the room a few feet within the doorway and a few inches from the floor. One end was tied to a leg of the bed, the other to a heavy article of furniture. The cord was stretched taut—all ready for a nocturnal intruder, as Pon realised now. The owner of the much-disputed Holiday Annual had been asleep, but he had not been caught napping!

"You—you—you—" panted Pon breathlessly. He rubbed his nose in anguish. "Ow! Oh! You—you rotter, you—you did this—"

Bob Cherry roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! You thieving rascal, did you think I didn't guess what you might get up to, being in the same inn? I fixed that cord up ready for you if you came!"

"Oh, you rotter!" groaned Ponsonby.

"Still after my jolly old Holiday Annual—what?" chuckled Bob. "Well, I guessed that much. It wasn't hard to guess, was it? I rather thought that the three of you might butt in—and I fancied that I should hear you when you tripped over the cord! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! You rotter! Wow!" Ponsonby caressed his nose, a thin stream of crimson running through his fingers. Pon's nose had hit the floor hard.

"My patent burglar-alarm!" chortled Bob. "And I've jolly well caught the jolly old burglar! Hurt your nose?"

"Ow! Wow!"

"What's the row?" Harry Wharton came out of his room. "What's up? I heard somebody yell— Oh, my hat!" The captain of the Greyfriars Remove stared into Bob's room and burst into a roar. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Pon staggered to his feet.

His game was up now—with a vengeance! He was not going to snaffle the Holiday Annual that night, that was certain! His face was white with rage—with the exception of his nose, which was crimson.

Bob Cherry grabbed the pillow from his bed.

"Pon's hurt," he said. "He's going to be hurt some more! Where will you have it, Pon?"

Pon evidently did not want it anywhere. He made a jump for the door. The whirling pillow caught him on the

back of his head as he jumped, and he pitched forward at Wharton.

Wharton promptly gave him a shove, sending him spinning back towards Bob Cherry.

Swipe! came the pillow again, catching Pon on the side of the head, and he staggered wildly and crashed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh! You rotter, let me go!" panted Ponsonby.

"Won't you have a few more before you go?" chuckled Bob.

"You ruffian! Keep off!" yelled Ponsonby, scrambling up wildly.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Oh gad! Oh crumbs! Yaroooooh!" Ponsonby—dodging frantically, but in vain—fled doorward again. This time the captain of the Remove let him pass, and Pon rushed out, Bob behind him with the pillow.

Wharton, laughing, picked up the candle and followed. Ponsonby dashed into his own room and strove to slam the door after him. But the pursuer was too close behind him for that. Bob's foot met the door and sent it spinning open again, and he rushed in after Pon.

Swipe!

Crash!

Ponsonby fairly spun along the floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton, standing in the doorway, candlestick in hand.

"Ow! Wow! Keep off! Yaroooooh!"

Gadsby and Monson started out of sleep; they jumped up in bed, staring at the startling scene in the candle-light.

"What the dooce—" gasped Gadsby.

"Pon, what—" stuttered Monson.

"It's a jolly old amateur burglar!" explained Bob Cherry. "Why didn't you fellows come, too? I expected the lot of you, and I was going to swipe you all round! But it's all right; as I'm here I'll swipe you all the same!"

"Here, keep off!" roared Gadsby in alarm, as the exuberant Bob rushed at his bed and smote with the pillow.

Swipe!

"Oh gad! Urrrrgh!"

"Like a few, Monson?" chirruped Bob.

"Keep off!" yelled Monson.

"Better serve 'em the same all round," said Bob. "This one is for your nut, Monson!"

Swipe!

"Whooooop!" roared Monson, as his "nut" captured the pillow. He rolled off his bed with a crash.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton.

Ponsonby scrambled up. With a desperate look on his face he leaped at a washstand and grasped a big jug by the handle.

That big jug undoubtedly would have done some damage had Pon got going with it—but he had no time to get going!

Bob Cherry was on him again too quickly for that. The pillow whirled and smote, and Pon went over backwards, the jug falling on his chest as he fell.

It was full of water! It was empty a moment later! The water was swamping over Ponsonby.

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled Pon, as he wriggled in a sea of water. "Oh gad! Grrrruuuggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think that will do," remarked Bob Cherry. "If you fellows want any more you know which is my room. Lots of it on tap if you want any! Ta-ta!"

And Bob Cherry tramped out of the room.

Gadsby scrambled to the door, slammed it, and turned the key in the lock. Monson lighted a candle. Pon,

sprawling in spilt water, was saying things that certainly would have earned him the "sack" if uttered at Highcliffe in the hearing of a beak.

"You silly idiot!" howled Monson. "So this is how it's turned out, is it? You bring that mad boocigan down on us in the middle of the night—"

"Ow! I'm wet!" yelled Ponsonby.

"I'm soaked!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" howled Gadsby.

"Yes, rather!" panted Monson. "I wish you'd had it worse!"

Ponsonby staggered up—drenched, white, furious, stuttering with rage.

"Back me up, you rotters!" he hissed. "I'm going after that brute! Come and help me! Get hold of the fireirons, or somethin'!"

He dashed across to the door. Gadsby and Monson exchanged a look, and with one accord they rushed at him, grasped him, and hurled him back. Once more Ponsonby sprawled.

"You're going after him, are you?" howled Gadsby. "You're goin' to bring the whole gang of them down on us, are you? You're jolly well not!"

"No jolly fear!" gasped Monson. "You're goin' to stay where you are, you silly fool! Take that key out of the door, Gaddy."

"Yes, rather!" Gadsby took out the key. "We've had enough for one night, I fancy; and if Pon wants any more we'll jolly well give it to him ourselves!"

"You—you—you rotten funks—"

"Shut up!" booted Gadsby. "Any more from you and we'll jolly well scrag you! Shut up and go to bed!"

"Give me that key!"

"I'll give you a thick ear!"

"You rotten funks—"

"Bang his silly head!" said Monson.

They grasped him again, and Pon's silly head was duly banged. Then his dear pals chuckled him on his bed in a heap.

"Stay there!" snarled Gadsby. "Any more rot from you, Pon, and you'll get more than you want! And shut up!"

Monson blew out the candle. He went back to bed, and Gadsby followed his example.

For some minutes Pon's voice was heard in the darkness, in tones of concentrated fury. But he was silent at last! On second thoughts, in fact, Pon found that he was not really keen to go after Bob Cherry. It was only too probable that, if he did, his last state would be worse than his first!

Gadsby and Monson got to sleep again at last. It was longer before Pon closed his eyes. He was thinking savage thoughts as he lay sleepless; but he was not thinking of going after the Holiday Annual again! Pon was a stickler; but, for the present at least, even Pon had had enough!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

At the Haunted Castle of Head!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Eight o'clock, fathend!"

"We can't go out in this fearful rain—"

"The rain stopped last night, ass!"

"Oh! Did it? Well, it might come on again!" said Billy Bunter. "Keep an eye on the weather, and call me again at half-past ten."

The Famous Five, looking in at the door of Billy Bunter's room, grinned. They had already breakfasted, and packed, and were ready for the road. After the heavy rain of the night, there was a glorious September morning, and



"Ooooh! Oh gad! Urrrh! What the thunder—oooogh!" Ponsonby gave a startled yell as he tripped over the cord stretched across the room a few inches from the floor. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry, getting out of bed. He struck a match and lighted a candle. The light glimmered on the nocturnal visitor.

all the hikers were feeling merry and bright.

Bunter sat up and blinked at them morosely. Bunter had no desire to turn out and get on the march. Glorious September mornings did not appeal to Billy Bunter. But, for once, Bunter was going to be allowed to slack.

"Now look here, you fellows," said the fat Owl of the Remove. "I'm not getting up yet! See? You can tell them to have my brekker ready at half-past ten! See?"

"Right-ho!" answered Harry Wharton, unexpectedly. "Make it half-past eleven if you like, old fat bean."

"Or half-past twelve!" grinned Nugent.

"Half-past any old thing you like," said Bob Cherry. "If you want to see us again, roll along to the jolly old ruined castle."

"You see, we're going to make a day of it, and camp there to-night, and see the ghost!" explained Harry Wharton. "We're not going on again till to-morrow morning! So you can spend a whole day slacking."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Come on!" said Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, you'd better come back here to-night," said Billy Bunter.

"Come back for meals, too. I'd rather have my meals here."

"Have 'em here, and welcome," said Bob. "As many as you like!"

"Yes, but what about paying—"

"We're paying the bill, including your brekker, old fat bean. After that you can telephone to Bunter Court for a sack of banknotes."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Ta-ta, old fat frog."

The hikers turned away, and the door closed.

"Beasts!" remarked Bunter,

And he laid his head on the pillow again, and resumed his interrupted snore. Harry Wharton & Co. walked cheerily out of the Golden Pig into the sunshine. There was no sign of the Highcliffe fellows about; probably they would not turn out much earlier than Bunter. Mr. Pooks pointed out the way to the old castle of Hoad, and solemnly adjured the hikers not to stay there after dark; advice which they did not intend to follow. As Bob Cherry remarked, a haunted castle was not discovered every day on a hike, and naturally they were not going to miss this one.

Lanes and hedges were still wet with the rain, but rapidly drying in the bright sunshine. In a cheery mood, the hikers walked out of Hoad, and followed the lanes to Hoad Castle.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That's Pon's car!" remarked Bob Cherry, as they turned into the lane leading up to the old castle gate.

Jervis, the chauffeur, was there with half-a-dozen other men, and a big Daimler, struggling to get the green Austin out of the ditch. They were getting it out when the hikers passed them; but it looked as if it would want a lot of cleaning before the knuts of Highcliffe could use it again. Leaving them to it, the hikers walked on to the castle gate and went into the weedy, shady old drive that led up to the ruins.

"Jolly old place, in the day-time, at least!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"The jollifunness is terrific," agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Sort of show that a fellow likes to explore. Bit gloomy at night, though, I imagine."

"Topping place to camp!" said Bob.

"Well, we're not afraid of ghosts,

anyhow, like those Highcliffe funks," grunted Johnny.

"It's queer, though," said Harry, thoughtfully. "Pon & Co. must have seen something! And all the villagers fancy they've seen something! Even that man Watkins—and he's a hard-headed, practical man—"

"Bit of a spoofer, I think," remarked Lord Mauleverer, shaking his head. "I don't like that man Watkins."

"He seemed a civil sort of Johnny," said Nugent.

"Oh, yaas."

"Of course, he's never seen a ghost here, and there aren't such things; but he must fancy he has, as he said so."

"Um!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Well, why should he spook about it?" asked Bob, staring at his lordship. "He only believes the same as all the other local people."

"He doesn't!" said Mauly.

"Well, my hat! How the thump do you know he doesn't, if you come to that?" demanded Bob.

"Hard-headed chap!" said Lord Mauleverer. "Nothin' soft about jolly old Watkins! Man must be a bit soft to believe in ghosts. Watkins doesn't! Too jolly hard-headed."

"Well, ghost or not, there's something going on here," said Harry.

"People have seen something or other."

"Yaas! Some sort of spoo."

"That's it, most likely," agreed Johnny Bull. "Some silly practical joker playing tricks to frighten people. If there's a ghost story about a place, there'll always be some silly ass ready to play ghost and cause a scare."

"But nobody lives within two miles of the place," said Nugent. "And a practical joker couldn't be camping in

(Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 13.)

the ruins. Jolly queer that he happened to be on the spot when Pon and Co. butted in last night."

"Yaas! But he did happen."

"It wasn't exactly a night for practical jokers to be out," remarked Bob. "But I suppose there's no other explanation—unless it's a real ghost. Watkins was telling a story of a prisoner in the ancient dungeons, who perished three hundred years ago, and whose skeleton walks about dragging his chains. Nice sort of sportsman to meet in the dark."

"We'll give him a chance to show up to-night, anyhow!" said Harry Wharton. "And while it's daylight we'll explore the place from end to end, and see if we can pick up any sign of him."

"Yes, rather!"

The hikers arrived in the dismantled old building. Between the ruins and the locked-up habitable wing was an almost endless confusion of shattered masonry, overgrown with moss, grasses, bushes, and here and there a tree. It was evident that the place had long been allowed to go to decay, even when the old squire lived in the modern wing. The hikers had the place to themselves. Although open to the public, it was too far from everywhere to attract casual visitors very often.

"Here's the things the Highcliff fellows left!" remarked Nugent, as they entered the arched doorway, into the long, low hall where Pon & Co. had taken refuge the previous night.

Three suitcases lay on the old mossy stone flags, where Pon & Co. had left them. The "ghost" that had frightened away the Highcliffians had not interfered with their property.

"It was here that those chaps saw, or fancied they saw, something," said Bob. "Nobody about now! I suppose the ghost only walks at night." He dumped down his pack. "Let's look round."

The juniors landed their packs on the stone flags, and scattered up and down the old place, rooting curiously through the ruins. They were rather interested to see the ancient dungeons, where, according to Mr. Watkins' story, a prisoner had perished in ancient days in chains. But the entrance to the dungeons was probably choked by the fall of rubble, for they did not succeed in finding it.

They had been about an hour in the ruins, when there was a clatter of hoofs and wheels on the drive. The ostler from the Golden Pig had arrived in the trap to fetch Pon and Co.'s suitcases. He drove away with them, leaving the ruins to the Greyfriars hikers again.

Quite a cheery morning was spent exploring the place; but the explorers came on no sign either of a ghost or a practical joker.

They camped for lunch under the shady trees on the old drive. Long before that, Jervis and his helpers had got away with the green Austin. Plenty

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of provisions had been brought from the village. The cooking-stove was soon going strong; and a savoury scent of frying sausages greeted a fat and perspiring fellow who came plugging up the drive. Billy Bunter had arrived in time for lunch!

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"My hat! Bunter's scented the sosses!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, I'm hungry," said Bunter. "I never had much brekker—only a few eggs and rashers and some kidneys—absolutely nothing else, except some porridge and a cake! I'm glad you've got lunch ready. How many sosses have you got there?"

"About a dozen!"

"That's all right! But what are you fellows going to have?" inquired Bunter.

The fat junior sat down, reached for the tin dish, and helped himself to sausages—all of them; a proceeding that the hikers eyed as if it fascinated them.

"Any spuds?" asked Bunter.

"Only a dishful!" gasped Bob. "Help yourself!"

"Well, it was rather decent of you to fry the spuds," said Bunter. "I like 'em fried! Quite nice, and no mistake! You fellows going to have bread and cheese?"

Bunter tipped the dish of fried potatoes into a large plate.

"Leave me some of the cheese!" he added.

"Oh gad!" murmured Lord Mauloverer.

"How they must love Bunter at home," remarked Bob—"and how I wish they had him there now! Kill him, somebody!"

And Bob jerked back the supplies and proceeded to whack them out among seven. Bunter blinked at him in dismay.

"If there's anything I despise," said Bunter, "it's greediness! I must say I think you chaps are the limit! I suppose I shall have to fill up on bread and cheese! Well, I suppose it's what a fellow might expect of you!"

Bunter frowned over the sosses and fried potatoes. But he felt a little better when he had parked them; and began to fill up with bread and cheese.

"I say, you fellows, Pon & Co. are raging like anything!" said Bunter. "I left 'em at it—calling one another names! I fancy something happened last night to upset them."

"Ha, ha! I fancy something did!" chuckled Bob Cherry—"and I fancy it was a pillow!"

"Gaddy and Monson told Pon they'd see him blowed before they'd come after you with him," said Bunter. "They're fed-up! And Pon was calling them all the things he could think of. They've got the car back, and Gaddy and Monson wanted to go in it, and Pon said it was his car and they could go to Jericho if they liked—but not in his car! He, he, he!"

The Greyfriars hikers chuckled. Evidently there was a rift in the Highcliffian lute, which was not surprising after the happenings of the night.

Having finished lunch, the hikers resumed exploring the ruined castle; while Billy Bunter packed himself away in a shady corner, shut his eyes and opened his mouth and went to sleep. Before scattering among the ruins the hikers carefully concealed the packs in a thicket, lest wandering tramps—or Highcliffians—should come rooting after them while their attention was otherwise

engaged. Which proved to be a useful precaution, for Pon, though he had lost the assistance of his two exasperated pals, was still on the warpath.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Pon on the Warpath!

"N O!" Gadsby and Monson made that answer together.

Pon scowled.

"Look here—" he began.

"Rats!" said Gadsby and Monson simultaneously again.

And to add point to the remark, they turned and walked into the Golden Pig, leaving Pon on his own.

Scowling more blackly, Ponsonby walked out of the village of Hoad.

For the present, at least, there was a deep rift in the Highcliffian lute. If Pon was carrying on the warfare with the Greyfriars party, he had only himself to depend upon.

He walked slowly along the lanes towards the ruined castle in the bright September sunshine. The green Austin and Jervis were at the inn now; but Pon had no intention of going on his way yet. He was thinking not only of the £50 reward, which he believed he could gain by getting hold of the Holiday Annual that belonged to Bob Cherry. Defeat after defeat only made Pon more determined and obstinate. Beating the Greyfriars fellows in this peculiar contest seemed to him even more important than "snaffling" that reward!

He glanced about him furtively as he came up the woody, shady old drive in the castle grounds. He could hear sounds of the hikers and calling voices, but they were not in sight. Another sound fell on his ears—that of a deep and unmelodious snore. He grinned at the sight of Billy Bunter, extended under a shady tree, fast asleep.

"That fat freak!" murmured Pon.

He stopped, looking about him very cautiously. He knew that the hikers were exploring and they were not at hand. As Bunter was not joining in the ramble over the ruins he rather expected to see the packs left with him. But nothing was to be seen of them.

He stepped closer to the sleeping fat junior at last.

Billy Bunter awakened suddenly with a grasp on his fat neck.

"Gurrgh!" gurgled Bunter.

He blinked in alarm at Ponsonby over his big spectacles, which had slid down his fat little nose.

"Don't call out!" said Pon pleasantly. "If you do I shall bang your head against that tree—hard!"

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter.

"Where have those cads put the packs?" asked Ponsonby in a low voice.

"They won't be lugging their baggage about all day for nothing! They've left them somewhere. Where?"

"I—I don't know!" gasped Bunter.

That was, as a matter of fact, the truth, as Billy Bunter had gone to sleep before the hikers parked their packs in the thicket. Pon, however, was not likely to believe Bunter's statement.

"Think again!" he suggested.

"I—I suppose the things are about somewhere!" stammered Bunter. "I—I—I'll help you look for them if you like, old chap! Lemme gorrup!"

"You wouldn't cut if I did?" grinned Pon banteringly.

"Oh, no! I—I wasn't thinking of bolting—nothing of the sort! I—I think the packs are just behind that tree!" Bunter pointed to a big beech a dozen

yards away. "In fact, I'm sure they are! I—I saw Wharton put them there!"

"Try again!" said Pon.

"I—I mean, they—they're in the castle; in that room, you know, where you left your suitcases when you were frightened last night—Ow! Stop twisting my arm, you beast! Wow!"

"If those fellows hear you and come this way I'll crack your silly head on that tree!" said Pon between his teeth. "Now, I want to know where to lay my hands on that Holiday Annual. Where is it?"

Bunter blinked at him in great dismay. It was rather fortunate that he did not know where the packs had been put. The savage gleam in Ponsonby's eyes terrified the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Cough it up!" snarled Pon, who was uneasy lest any moment one of the hikers might come in sight. "Get it out!"

"I—I don't know—Ow!" gasped Bunter, as the Highcliffe fellow twisted his fat arm again.

Pon clapped a hasty hand over his mouth to suppress a yell.

"You'd better tell me," said Ponsonby. "I'm going on twisting your arm till you do!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came through the trees and stared at the two in astonishment. "You here, Pon! What the thump—"

Ponsonby jumped up in alarm.

"I say!" yelled Bunter. He was free to yell now, and he lost no time. "I say! Bob! Wow! He was twisting my arm to make me tell him where the packs are—Wow!"

"Was he?" said Bob grimly. And he came at Ponsonby with a gleam in his blue eyes and his hands clenched. "You Highcliffe cur—"

For a moment, Ponsonby faced him, scowling savagely; but only for a moment. Then he turned and ran.

"After him!" yelled Bunter. "I say, give him a jolly good licking! I say, Bob, old chap, knock the stuffing out of the beast! I say—"

Bob Cherry did not stop to listen. He was pursuing the Highcliffe fellow at top speed. Ponsonby ran desperately up the drive with the Greyfriars fellow hot on his track.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob, as he ran. "Look out, you men! Highcliffe cad! Stop him! Bag him!"

Two or three calling voices answered from the scattered hikers. Frank Nugent ran out of the trees in front of Ponsonby. The dandy of Highcliffe charged him desperately, and Nugent went reeling. Leaving him sprawling, Ponsonby dashed on into the ruins.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Nugent, staggering to his feet.

"After him!" panted Bob.

"Highcliffe cad!" yelled Johnny Bull, glimpsing Pon from a distance. And he rushed to intercept him.

Ponsonby twisted aside and darted away among trees and thickets. He was rather sorry by that time that he had dropped in on the Greyfriars hikers that afternoon. But there was no escape for him now, with the whole party hunting him if he emerged from cover.

He glared round him savagely from a hiding-place. After the way he had handled the helpless fat Owl, he did not expect to be handled gently if the hikers got hold of him. Twisting a fellow's arm was a game that two could play at, and Pon did not want to go through the experience himself.

As he ran through the trees, with the hikers whooping after him, he suddenly found his way blocked by a huge mass of ancient, crumbling wall. There was no time to get round it; but it was thick with clustering, ancient ivy, and Pon squeezed himself through the ivy, to hide. A startled gasp left his lips the next moment, as he felt himself falling.

Bump, bump, bump!

Evidently there was an opening in that ancient wall, screened by the thick, hanging tendrils of the ivy, and Pon had inadvertently stepped through it. Within were steps, which he tumbled headlong down.

Bruised and breathless, the Highcliffe junior bumped down three stone steps, and then managed to stop. He sprawled there, dazed and dizzy.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Seen him?" came a shout.

"He came this way!"

"Yaas, begad! I spotted him a minute ago."

"Look among the trees!"

"This way!"

Footsteps and voices passed on, round the ancient wall. Ponsonby, huddled on the hidden stone stair, gasped with relief. Unconsciously, he had found the hiding-place he needed. He had never dreamed that there was an opening in that solid-looking, old, ivy-mantled

carefully, he descended; and arrived in a narrow, flagged, stone passage.

Only the gleam of his torch broke the utter blackness of that subterranean tunnel. Holding up the light, he stepped along.

The thought was in his mind that probably there was another outlet at the end of the stone passage. If that was the case, his escape would be easy enough.

The passage ran for a considerable distance. It ended in a cell, with walls of stone blocks, and no sign of a doorway.

He examined each wall in turn, but there was no outlet. Then he flashed the light over his head.

It was scarcely possible to suppose that the ancient builders, centuries ago, had built such a place for nothing. Obviously, it was one of the old secret passages, for escape in time of danger, which were built as a matter of course in those stormy, old days. There was some opening to the stone cell, but it was a secret one—he was assured of that.

The roof over his head was so low as to be within reach. He felt over it with his fingers. In the middle of the floor was a square stone block. It did not take Ponsonby long to guess why it was there—it was intended as a stepping stone into the castle above, it could have no other meaning.

He stepped on it, stooping his head to do so, and groped over the roof. A bar of rusty iron jutting from the stone roof met his groping fingers.

Whirrrrrrr!

His grasp on the iron set some hidden mechanism in motion. The square stone over his head rolled away.

He gave a startled gasp.

Light streamed down into the cell—dusky light, but daylight. He raised his head through an opening about two feet square.

The stone flag that had covered it was tilted up! He stared around, with his feet on the stepping-stone in the underground cell, his head in the room above.

"Great gad!" ejaculated Ponsonby.

He recognised the apartment at once. It was the long low hall in which he had taken refuge the night before, with Gadsby and Monson, and where the "ghost" of Hoad had appeared. He could see the marks on the mossy flags where the suitcases had lain.

"Great gad!" he repeated.

And he grinned.

He knew now how the "ghost" had appeared so strangely and suddenly. The "ghost" of Hoad had risen through the trapdoor in which Ponsonby was now standing. The secret he had just discovered, by sheer chance, was known to the mysterious individual who played ghost at Hoad.

He could have no doubt about that. Scared as he had been at the time by the grinning, phosphorescent skull, he knew that the apparition must be some sort of trickery, because it could not be anything else. Now he had discovered one of the secrets of the trickster!

From a distance he heard the echo of a calling voice. The hikers were still seeking him in the ruins. But there was nobody in the hall.

It was probable, however, that they might come that way, and the outlet he had discovered did not mean a way of escape.

In fear of seeing some of the hikers glance in through the arched doorway at the end of the hall, Ponsonby crouched back into the cell and fumbled with the iron bar again, to close the stone.

There was another whirr, and it closed

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WHO WANTS A POCKET WALLET

like that of A. N. Parry, of 10, Wyndham Road, Wallasey, Cheshire? He got his for sending in the following Greyfriars limerick:

Said Coker to Potter and Greene:
"My bike is the fastest that's been.
And when I get going
There will be no knowing
Whenever again I'll be seen!"

wall, and the hikers did not think of it.

He lay gasping, while the Greyfriars fellows streamed away in another direction, looking for him, but not likely to find him now!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Secret Passage!

PONSONBY picked himself up at last.

He was safe—and that was the chief consideration. So long as he remained in that hidden nook of the old castle of Hoad, the hikers were not likely to discover him. He did not mean to emerge in a hurry!

He stared about him.

Only the faintest glimmer of daylight came through the masses of ivy that covered the opening at the head of the stone stair. No doubt there had been a door there once; now there was only a narrow doorway. The steps down which he had tumbled were not more than three feet wide, with slimy walls of heavy stone blocks on either side.

He groped for his electric torch and turned it on, and flashed the light down the stairs.

It was in spiral form, and wound away downwards, apparently into the depths of the earth.

He wondered whether it was an entrance to the dungeons known to exist under the castle of Hoad. Stepping

over his head, and he stepped down to the floor of the cell.

The sound it made was faint; evidently the hidden mechanism on which it worked was in good order, and kept well oiled. The trickster of Hoad looked after that!

Ponsonby gave a mocking chuckle as he recalled the talk at the Golden Pig of the evening before, wondering what Mr. Pooks and his friends would think if they knew what he now knew!

It was clear that some person unknown knew this secret of the old castle, and used it to play ghost, for what reason Pon could not imagine, unless from some crack-brained sense of humour!

Whoever it was must be some man well acquainted with the place, or he would not have discovered the secret that Pon had now discovered.

Ponsonby cared nothing about that, however. What he was thinking of was that there was no escape for him by way of the secret trap. He left the cell, and retraced his steps along the passage, to the stone stair in the old wall.

He ascended the spiral stair, shut off the light, and peered through the thick, clustering ivy into the open air.

He had to wait till the coast was clear before he attempted to make his escape. And he was glad of his caution the next moment as he sighted a hiker in the trees, not six or seven feet distant.

It was Lord Mauleverer.

His lordship was standing still, gazing at the ivied wall with a thoughtful expression on his face.

Pon's eyes glittered at him through the ivy.

The other hikers were far afield; but the look on Mauly's face told what he was thinking of. He was puzzled at Pon's disappearance at that spot, and had returned there for further investigation. Now he was scanning the ivy, and, as Ponsonby watched him, he made a forward movement to pull aside some of the heavy clusters of tendrils and leaves.

Ponsonby started back in alarm, forgetting for the instant that he was standing on the top step of the stair.

"Oh!" he gasped up, for the second time, he tumbled down.

"Oh gad!" he heard Lord Mauleverer exclaim, and he knew that Mauly had heard him.

The thick ivy parted, letting in a stream of sunlight. Lord Mauleverer's face appeared, staring into the opening.

Pon stared up at him, sprawling at the turn of the stair. He was seen, and in another moment Mauly's call might have brought the whole party to the spot! Pon's brain worked swiftly.

"Help!" he gasped. "Mauleverer, come quickly! I've fallen! My leg's twisted! Quick—help!"

"Rotten luck, old bean," said Mauleverer, enmity changing into friendly concern at once.

He pushed through the ivy, and came down the steps in the dark as the clusters fell in place behind him.

He reached Ponsonby and stooped over him. As he did so, the Highcliffe fellow struck out, taking him utterly by surprise.

"Oh!" gasped Mauleverer.

He stumbled over Ponsonby and went tumbling down the stair. He rolled down five or six steps before he was able to stop; and then, as he sprawled breathlessly, there was a flash of light from Pon's torch, and Pon was upon him. A knee was planted on Mauly's chest, pinning him down.

"Now," said Ponsonby, between his

teeth, "quiet, you rotter! Quiet, you cad! Give just a yelp to call the other rotters here, and I'll bang your head on the stone and stun you!"

Lord Mauleverer blinked up at him. "You're not hurt, then?" he asked quietly.

Ponsonby laughed. "You were trickin' me?"

"Yes, you fool!"

"By gad!" said Mauleverer. "I always knew you were a dirty, sneakin', poisonous sort of reptile, Pon, but this is the jolly old limit! What the dooce is a fellow like you doin' out of chokey?"

"Quiet!"

"Not at all, old bean! I'm goin' to shout!" said Mauleverer calmly. "I don't like your company, Pon! I'd prefer reptiles and beetles and spiders! I'm goin' to give you the hidin' of your life, you cur! Get off my chest, or I'll call the other fellows here, and they'll look you out fast enough."

"Call out, and take the consequences! I mean what I say!" said Ponsonby savagely. "I'm not goin' through a raggin', if I know it! Give one yelp, hang you, and you won't give another!"

The schoolboy earl, pinned down on his back, was at the mercy of the young rascal of Highcliffe. But he looked up at Pon in the glimmer of the electric torch with calm contempt.

"Are you lettin' me get up?" he asked.

"No!"

"Help!" shouted Mauleverer.

Crash!

Ponsonby kept his word. The cry had hardly left Mauly's lips when the desperate young rascal crashed his head on the stone. Dazed, half-stunned, Mauleverer lay crumpled on the stone stair, while Ponsonby listened with terrified anxiety for an answering shout from the hikers. But no call came; evidently they had not heard Mauleverer. No doubt they would have heard if the cry had been repeated, but it was not repeated.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Rough on Mauly!

LORD MAULEVERER hardly knew what happened after that.

He was half-unconscious for a good many minutes. Dimly he knew that he was dragged down a stone stair and along a murky passage. He was pitched down on a stone floor, in a corner of the stone cell under the old hall of Hoad.

His dizzy brain cleared at last. He struggled into a sitting position, blinking in the beam of the electric torch which was stuck in one of the many crevices of the wall.

Ponsonby stood regarding him with a sneering grin.

Mauleverer realised that his hands were tied. His belt had been taken off and buckled fast round his arms, behind him. He could hardly move his hands. He made the further discovery that his feet were tied together at the ankles with a twisted handkerchief.

The schoolboy earl of Greyfriars was a helpless prisoner.

His head ached horribly. He was not badly hurt, but it was painful and extremely uncomfortable. He gazed at Ponsonby in a kind of wonder. Pon, the dandy of Highcliffe, the glass of fashion and the mould of form among the Highcliffe knuts, was coming out. Under his polished exterior, Pon was very little better than a hooligan, as he had proved more than once. Now

he was acting like an utterly unscrupulous and ruthless young scoundrel. That, however, was not a new experience for Ponsonby.

"Good gad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer. "My head aches, by gad! I'll give you something to remember this by presently, Pon!"

Pon laughed mockingly.

"You've got to get loose first!" he remarked.

Lord Mauleverer gave a wrench at his bonds. Ponsonby watched him, grinning. The schoolboy earl had no chance whatever of getting loose. Pon had taken excellent care of that.

"Keep it up!" he said. "Try as hard as you like."

"You cowardly rotter!"

Pon laughed again.

"You're not goin' to leave me here like this, I suppose, while you cut?" asked Mauleverer, at last. "I don't know what sort of a place you've dragged me into, but my friends may never find me here."

"You can bet on it that they won't!" answered Ponsonby coolly. "But I'm not goin' to cut yet, Mauleverer. I came here for that Holiday Annual, and I'm not goin' without it. As you've been idiot enough to tumble into my hands, I'm goin' to make use of you!"

"Go it!" said Mauleverer. "I'd like to know how."

"Where have those cads put their packs?"

"Find out!"

"I'm goin' to find out—from you!"

"Are you goin' to twist my arm, as you did Bunter's?" asked Lord Mauleverer contemptuously. "You can twist it off, you cur, before I'll tell you a word!"

Ponsonby shook his head.

"More ways of killin' a cat than chokin' it with cream!" he answered. "You're goin' to tell me exactly where to put my hands on that Holiday Annual, and as soon as I'm sure that the coast is clear, I'm goin' after it."

"Rats!"

"Otherwise," said Ponsonby, coolly and deliberately, "I shall leave you here! As you've said, your friends will never find you. Like the prospect?"

"You dare not!"

Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders.

"I fancy they'll hear me, anyhow, if I shout long enough," said Lord Mauleverer.

"I shan't leave you able to shout!"

"My hat! You're a pretty specimen of a rotter, ain't you, Pon?" said Mauly. "May I inquire again what you are doin' out of chokey?"

Ponsonby took a handkerchief from his pocket.

"Are you goin' to tell me what I've asked?" he said.

"No!"

"Take your chance, then," said Ponsonby, setting his teeth. "You've got to stick here, anyhow, till I get clear. Tell me what I want to know, and I'll send word to your friends where to find you, once I'm out of this! Two or three hours of it, perhaps. Keep mum, and I'll leave you where you are till to-morrow."

"I don't think you dare!"

"You'll see!" said Ponsonby venomously.

"I suppose you know that you could be put into prison for this?" remarked Lord Mauleverer.

"That's enough! Last time of askin'!" snapped Pon savagely. "What have you got to say?"

"Only go an' eat coke!"

Pon did not speak again. He bent over the helpless Mauly and gagged him with the handkerchief. It was impossible for Mauleverer to resist, and



Whack, whack, whack ! Billy Bunter piled in with terrific energy. The frying-pan rose and fell like a flail. It rang again and again on Ponsonby's trousers, and the Highcliffe junior squirmed and roared and shrieked and yelled. "Ow ! Wow ! Stop it ! Keep that fat lunatic away !"

in a few minutes he was securely gagged.

"Think you can call to the other cads now?" asked Ponsonby mockingly. Lord Mauleverer's eyes gleamed at him. But he could not speak even the faintest whisper.

Taking up the electric torch, Ponsonby turned away. He walked into the secret passage, and the schoolboy earl was left in dense darkness.

It seemed incredible to Mauly that even the hardened young rascal of Highcliffe really intended to carry out his threat. But he was soon aware that there was no doubt of it. Ponsonby's footsteps died away along the stone passage, and the gleam of the torch disappeared from sight. Huddled in a corner of the stone cell, unable to move hand or foot, unable to utter a sound, Lord Mauleverer was left alone, in darkness so intense that it was difficult to believe that only a few feet above his head the September sunset was glowing over the old castle of Hoad.

Ponsonby's face was a little pale as he reached the outlet of the stair and peered out through the ivy again. But there was no sign of relenting in his face. His bitter enmity to the Greyfriars party was too implacable for that.

Standing by the screening ivy, he peered out. The sun was setting over woods and fields, glowing with crimson and gold. He could hear the voices of the hikers, every now and then, calling to one another, and to Mauly ! He dared not venture out, and he stood and waited, and gritted his teeth with impatience.

Presently the fat voice of Billy Bunter came to his ears, addressing some of the hikers a little way off.

"I say, you fellows, didn't you find that beast Pon ?"

"No; he's cleared off, I fancy," answered Bob Cherry. "Seems to have vanished into thin air."

"The rotter twisted my arm."

"Why didn't you punch his nose?"

"Oh, really, Cherry ! I say, where's Mauly?"

"Blessed if I know ! He seems to have gone off somewhere. I haven't seen him for an hour or more."

"Look here, Cherry, you jolly well tell me where Mauly is!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "I'm looking for him!"

"Perhaps he's guessed that one!" chuckled Bob. "That may be why he's out of view, old fat bean!"

"Beast ! Look here, if you fellows are going to camp here, I'm jolly well going to leave you to it!" declared Bunter. "I'd rather go back to the inn. So would Mauly ! Well, I shall go with Mauly ! I don't want to go without Mauly, because—"

"Because somebody will have to pay the bill?"

"Ha, ha, ha !"

"No !" roared Bunter. "Because we're pals, you beast ! Besides, if Mauly pays the bill I shall square later—I'm not a chap to stick a fellow for money, I hope !"

"Oh crikey !"

"Well, where's Mauly?" demanded Bunter.

"Puzzle—find Mauly !" chuckled Bob.

"Beast !"

The voices died away and the footsteps. In the stone doorway behind the ivy Pon grinned sourly. Evidently the hikers had no suspicion that anything had happened to Mauleverer; and so long as Mauly remained a prisoner in the underground cell, they were not likely to guess that he had fallen foul of the dandy of Highcliffe. And it

seemed that they were going to camp in the ruined castle that night—a chance, surely, for Ponsonby to "snaffle" the volume he had so long hunted for.

Until the last gleam of daylight was gone, Pon dared not emerge from his hiding-place; but he waited more patiently now—with a cheery anticipation of getting hold of that Holiday Annual, getting back to the village with it, and scudding away in the green Austin with his prize.

And in the darkness and silence of the hidden cell, Lord Mauleverer, bound and helpless, heard footsteps passing on the stone-lagged floor, only a few feet above him, and knew that they were the footsteps of his friends—and could only lie and wonder when—and whether—they would find him and rescue him !

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Night !

"WHERE on earth's Mauly?"

"Goodness knows !"

"Haven't seen him for hours !"

The hikers were camping for the night in the dismantled hall of Hoad. Fine as the day had been, there was a hint of returning rain, and they were rather glad to have a roof over their camp—the only roof that remained intact, or almost intact, in the dilapidated old place.

But that was not their only reason in selecting the site of the camp. It was in this long, low, dusky shadowy apartment that the "ghost" had recently been seen; and they were after the ghost of Hoad !

All the Greyfriars fellows had made up their minds that they weren't going, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,335.

if they could help it, without seeing the ghost—and that, if they saw it, they would not be scared away like the Highcliffe fellows. The ghost of Hoad, if he appeared that night, was in danger of rather severe handling.

The cooking-stove was lighted, and a number of candles, which they had brought from the village, were stuck in crevices on the walls. There was rather a wavering and ghostly illumination in the old hall, round the spot selected as a camp—farther off, the darkness thickened.

Billy Bunter blinked uneasily round into the shadows. In bright daylight Bunter was not afraid of ghosts; but after dark he felt a few tremors. Still, for the moment he was thinking chiefly of supper—an important function to Bunter, and second in importance only to dinner!

The hikers, however, were thinking of Mauleverer. What had become of him was a mystery to them.

They had not found Ponsonby; and, supposing that Pon had made his escape, they had dismissed him from mind. They did not for a moment think of Mauly's absence in connection with the Highcliffe fellow.

It was probable enough that Mauly, as Bunter had suggested, might have preferred a bed at the Golden Pig to camping in the ruins. But it was very improbable that he would have gone back to Hoad without a word. Neither could they suppose that any mischance had happened to him in rambling about the ruins. They could only conclude that he had rambled off, and would return later.

"Gone for a walk, and missed the way back!" said Johnny Bull. "That would be Mauly all over."

"I suppose that's it!" agreed Harry Wharton. "If he went a distance, and turned back after dark, he might easily miss the way. I suppose he will turn up later."

"The esteemed Mauly will turn up like a ridiculous bad penny," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"We can keep his supper hot!" said Bob.

And the hikers ate their supper, expecting every moment to hear the voice or footstep of Mauleverer.

But he did not come, and after supper Wharton went to the arched doorway and stared out into the night.

A few drops of rain were falling, and clouds hid the stars. Darkness lay like a cloak over the ruined castle of Hoad and the deep woods that encircled it.

It was not much use to think of looking for Mauleverer. If he had gone for a walk, and missed the way back, he might have been in any direction, at any distance! And the hikers could only imagine that that was the explanation of his absence.

Wharton returned to the camp round the stove.

"No sign of him?" asked Bob.

"No. I suppose nothing can have happened to him," said Harry.

"Well, what could have?" asked Nugent.

"Nothing, of course! He's missed his way; he's bound to turn up, sooner or later—"

"Unless he wanders back to the village and puts up at the Golden Pig again!" grinned Bob.

"Well, I suppose he might! Anyhow, he knows where to find us."

"I say, you fellows—" Billy Bunter blinked at the hikers through his big spectacles. "I say, ten to one Mauly's got into the village—let's all go back,

shall we? A walk after supper will do us good."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Lot of slackers, sitting about—instead of going for a walk after supper—"

"We've done a good bit of walking to-day," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "And if you're afraid of the jolly old ghost, Bunter, you can start for Hoad as soon as you like."

"The—the fact is, it's rather uncanny here," said Bunter. "I mean, it's draughty, fearfully draughty! I'm not afraid of ghosts, of course—I hope I've a bit more nerve than you fellows—I'm really thinking about Mauly. He may be anxious about us—"

"Well, trot off and relieve his anxiety, if you find him at the Golden Pig!" grinned Bob.

"I don't want to go alone—it's jolly dark in those beastly lanes! Not that I'm afraid of the dark, of course. But—"

"Ring off, old fat bean! Roll up in a blanket, and go to sleep, and dream that you're home at Bunter Court, among the dukes and princes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! I say, you fellows, you'd better keep watch to-night!" said Bunter. "Not for the ghost, you know, but tramps might come round—or those Highcliffe cads—some of you had better stay awake and keep watch—"

"Leave it to you, partner!" said Bob. "Beast!"

For some time the hikers sat up, chatting, and wondering where Mauly was, and whether he could amble in. But he did not come, and they thought about bed at last. A day's rambling had made them all tired and sleepy. They spread the ground-sheets and unrolled the blankets. The candles were blown out, with one exception, a single candle being left alight to glimmer in the old hall, and guide Mauly if he came.

Billy Bunter blinked into the thick shadows with uneasy eyes.

The other fellows, however, were not nervous. They were ready to welcome the ghost of Hoad if the spectral visitor came; but they certainly did not feel disposed to sit up for him.

Very soon after rolling themselves in their blankets the Famous Five were fast asleep.

It was Bunter—generally the best sleeper in the party—who remained awake! He closed his little round eyes many times, but they always opened again! Bunter could not help thinking of that grinning ghostly skull that had been seen "walking" in that very apartment; and it did not seem anything like so absurd now as it had seemed in broad daylight. To Billy Bunter's fat mind the thick shadows were peopled with grinning skulls and ghostly skeletons, and every whine of the wind was a sound of ghostly clanking chains to his fat ears.

He could not sleep!

Again and again he blinked about him uneasily, whilst the other fellows slept soundly. A long hour passed—very long to Bunter! He was tired, and he was sleepy; but he could not sink into slumber. And suddenly he gave a violent start as an unmistakable sound came to his ears! His fat heart throbbed as he heard a soft and cautious footfall.

It could not be Mauly returning—Mauleverer would not creep about on tiptoe like that! If Mauly came he would come quite audibly, and call to his friends as he arrived! It was not Mauly—but who—what—was it? Billy Bunter felt his fat flesh creeping like

gooseflesh as he listened, with horrid thumps at his podgy heart.

The candle was guttering. It cast a slight, flickering light in a dim circle—all outside was blackness. Through the blackness came those creeping footsteps, chaining Bunter to his blankets with terror. And then a head and shoulders loomed in the circle of dim light—a figure bent over the stack of hikers' packs—and Bunter gave a squeak of relief.

"Pon! I say, you fellows, wake up—it's Pon!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Painful for Pon!

HARRY WHARTON opened his eyes.

"What—" "Pon!" yelled Bunter. All his supernatural terrors vanished at the sight of the Highcliffe fellow.

"Pon!" roared Bob Cherry, on his feet in a twinkling.

Ponsonby, rummaging among the rucksacks, jumped up and spun round, with a gasp of affright. He made a bound towards the arched doorway.

Whiz! Bob Cherry grabbed up the bread-bag! He hurled it with unerring aim as Pon ran. It crashed on the back of Pon's head, and pitched him forward, and there was a bump and a howl as he landed on his hands and knees.

"Pon!" yelled Bob. "Collar him!" He was after the dandy of Highcliffe like a shot. As Ponsonby staggered to his feet, Bob's grasp closed on his collar.

Ponsonby was dragged back into the candlelight. He struggled savagely as he was dragged, but he had to go; there was no arguing with the swing of Bob Cherry's hefty right arm.

All the hikers were awake now, and on their feet. Billy Bunter was grinning from one fat ear to the other.

"I say, you fellows, lucky I was keeping watch, what?" chuckled Bunter. "I spotted him! The fact is, I rather thought he was hanging about, and I kept watch for him, you know—"

"You did?" ejaculated Nugent in astonishment.

"Yes, rather! While all you fellows were snoring like pigs!" said Bunter loftily. "I stayed awake to watch for that rotter! I wasn't thinking of the ghost, you know—nothing of that sort—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" sneered Bunter. "But I can jolly well tell you that Pon would have got away with it this time if I hadn't been keeping watch."

"Will you let go, Cherry, you ruffian!" said Ponsonby, in a low, concentrated tone of rage and fury.

"No fear!" answered Bob cheerily. "A sneaking rotter who comes mooching round a camp to pinch things has got to have a lesson. You twisted Bunter's arm this afternoon—"

"I say, you fellows, hold him while I twist his arms," exclaimed Bunter.

"Nunno! But you can give him a jolly good walloping!" said Bob. "That's what he wants, and what he's going to get."

"Yes, rather!"

"The walloppfulness is the proper caper!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin. "It will teach the ridiculous Pon to keep his absurd hands from the pickfulness and the stealfulness."

"Bend him over!" said Harry Wharton.

Ponsonby struggled fiercely. But he was bent over in Bob's sinewy hands, face down to the stone flags.

Billy Bunter took the frying-pan. "Hold him steady!" he said. "Ha, ha, ha!" Whack!

Bunter was not a hefty fellow! But he put an enormous amount of beef into that whack! The frying-pan fairly rang on Pon's trousers.

The yell that came from Pon awoke almost every echo in the ancient ruins of Hoad!

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Billy Bunter piled in with terrific energy. Pon had twisted his arm—and Pon was paying for it now! Bunter's idea was that he should pay with interest! And he did!

The frying-pan rose and fell like a flail. It rang again and again on Pon, who squirmed and roared and shrieked and yelled.

The hikers looked on, grinning. The fellow who had come like a thief in the night needed a warning to keep clear of the hikers' camp! He was getting one—with a vengeance!

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ow! Wow! Oh!" roared Ponsonby. "Ow! Stop it! Leave off! Keep that fat lunatic away! Yaroooooh!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Yaroooo! Stop it!" shrieked Pon wildly. "Oh gad! Oh crumbs! Oh crikey! Ow! Wow! Wow!"

"That's enough, I think," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We can let the cad off with that!"

"Rot!" hooted Bunter indignantly. "I haven't given him a dozen yet! I'll give him about a hundred."

Whack!

"Hold on!" gasped Bob. "Pon

doesn't want a hundred! Do you, Pon?"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Chuck it, Bunter—"

"Rats!" roared Bunter, and he smote again.

Whack!

"Whooooop!"

Bob Cherry released the writhing, wriggling Highcliffian. In the opinion of the Famous Five, though not in Bunter's, Pon had had enough! Pon, certainly, agreed with the Famous Five on that point!

He bounded away as he was released! Bunter made a last swipe, and missed, and the frying-pan clanged on the stone flags.

"I say, you fellows, hold him!" yelled Bunter. "Collar him! Let me give him a few more—say a couple of dozen—"

"Come back and have that couple of dozen, Pon!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Only a sound of running footsteps answered. The dandy of Highcliffe was fleeing for his life.

"After him!" yelled Bunter.

The hikers did not heed; Pon had had enough, and that was that! But Billy Bunter's yell reached Pon's ears as he fled, and spurred him to greater speed. He fairly raced away to the old castle gate and raced out into the lane. He went down the dark lane as if he was on the cinder-path. Pon was not thinking of "snaffling" that Holiday Annual now; he was thinking only of putting a safe distance between himself and the hikers. He went racing down

the lane in the darkness of the overhanging branches, and there was a sudden crash.

Pon reeled back from the collision! So did the unseen person he had run into!

"Ow!" gasped Ponsonby, as he sat down.

"Oh! Ow! Who—what—" stuttered a voice as the other party sat down, too. "Who—what—ow—who—" It was the voice of Mr. Timothy Watkins, the estate agent, of High Hoad.

What Mr. Watkins was doing there at that hour, Pon had no idea—certainly he had never dreamed of running into him, or anybody else, in that lonely lane. But it was evident, from his voice, that Mr. Watkins was angry at being knocked over—there was no doubt about that! Ponsonby heard him scrambling up in the dark, and he scrambled out of the way.

"Who's that?" hissed Mr. Watkins.

"Who knocked me over—who—" He caught a glimpse of Ponsonby dodging, and smacked, and the smack caught Pon on the side of the head and sent him reeling across the lane.

"Ow!" gasped Pon.

He dashed away again, just in time to escape another angry clout. With his head singing he raced away, stumbling and tumbling, anxious only to escape.

He dropped into a walk at last, as he sighted the lighted windows of the Golden Pig in Hoad. He had had no luck—and he was sore in body and in mind. There was only one consolation for the defeated young rascal—Lor!

(Continued on next page.)

What's behind the punch?



THERE'S more in this than "meets the eye"—as one would-be champion soon found. It needs physical fitness and a steady hand. Wrigley's helps before and after any event. It relieves tension, makes you feel fit by making your mouth cool and fresh. Always chew Wrigley's after every meal—it helps teeth to stay clean and white . . . sweetens the breath. It is the ideal thirst quencher . . . with the lasting flavour.

In two flavours—P.K., genuine peppermint flavour; Spearmint, pure mint leaf flavour. Four generous pellets in every 1d. packet. . . the purest money can buy.



BRITISH MADE

WRIGLEY'S

MEANS BETTER CHEWING GUM

Mauleverer was having a worse time still! Whether Pon would really have left Mauly bound and gagged in the dismal underground cell all night may be doubtful! but now, in his rage and spite, he had no remorse. He thought of it with savage, malicious satisfaction as he tottered on panting to the inn.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mauleverer Makes a Discovery!

LORD MAULEVERER stirred a little in the black darkness of the stone cell.

How long had he sat there, unable to move, unable to call out, in the blackness, he did not know. It seemed like days—but he knew it could only be hours—perhaps a very few hours, but endlessly long to the imprisoned Mauly. He could guess that it was night; the sound of footsteps on the old flags above his head had long died away. It began to look as if Pon intended to carry out his threat of leaving him there till the morning; and the hapless Mauly could only make up his mind to bear it with a stiff upper lip. And then he stirred as a glimmer of light came through the blackness from the direction of the secret passage.

He had no doubt that it was Ponsonby coming back—and it was a relief for even the rascal of Highcliffe to come. But as he listened to the tread of approaching feet it dawned on him that it was a heavier tread than a schoolboy's—it seemed that it was a man who was coming. And as a dim form loomed up in the glimmer of a small lantern Mauleverer could see that it was not Pon, though he could not see who it was.

Mauleverer did not stir now.

A man, shrouded in a long raincoat, with a soft hat pulled down over his face, had entered the stone cell. The small lantern in his hand cast only a glimmer, and as he set it down on the stone slab in the middle of the cell, with its back to Mauleverer's corner, he left the prisoner of the cell in complete darkness.

Evidently he had not the faintest suspicion that anyone was there.

Mauly did not make a movement. He could have drawn the man's attention by shifting in the dark corner; but he was not sure yet that he wanted to draw it. Certainly he would have welcomed any chance of release; but it was far from certain that he would have had help to expect from this stealthy, surreptitious prowler of the night.

For this man, whoever he was, was obviously up to no good. He knew a secret of the old castle which was not generally known; and he was creeping into the subterranean depths, cloaked and muffled, at a late hour of the night. Obviously he was a suspicious character. Mauleverer wondered whether he might be a poacher, or even some crook who used the secret place under Hoad Castle to hide his plunder. Anyhow, he wanted to know something more of the man before he drew his attention.

Not once did the man glance round the cell. Plainly he was accustomed to using the place, and to finding it empty. Naturally it was not likely to cross his mind that a young rascal fleeing from the hikers had discovered the place by accident that day, and shut up another fellow there. Whoever the man was, it did not occur to him for a moment that he was not alone.

Leaving the lantern glimmering on the stepping-stone, he groped on the floor, and lifted a large stone from its place. The lantern light was directed on him as he moved, and Mauleverer, from the

darkness, watched him. From the orifice in the floor the man drew a bundle.

Mauleverer felt his heart beat painfully.

He could scarcely doubt, at that moment, that he was in the presence of some thief who had concealed there the proceeds of a robbery. What might happen if the man discovered that he was under observation was rather alarming to think of.

But alarm gave place to utter amazement as he watched the man's further actions. The bundle was opened, and from within it the man drew what looked like a fancy costume, such as might have been used in amateur theatricals. It was a dark, close-fitting suit, with complete face mask and hood, and strange markings showed on it as it was unfolded.

Stripping off his raincoat and hat, the unknown man proceeded to put on the black costume.

Mauleverer could only stare.

The man's back was to him, and the light was dim, and he could not make him out clearly. But something familiar about his aspect struck Mauleverer. He was sure that he had seen the man before, and recently.

Having put on the black suit, the man hooked a little mirror on the wall, where the lantern light fell, and was busy for a few minutes before it. His motions showed that he was using theatrical make-up, not on himself, but on the black gauze mask that covered his face from brow to chin.

Mauleverer heard a low chuckle in the cell.

The man turned, and the lantern was immediately extinguished.

Blackest darkness rushed on the schoolboy's sight. But in the darkness came a glimmer of strange light.

A shudder ran through him.

Standing there in the darkness was the faint outline of a skeleton form, and clear and distinct above it the outlines of a grinning skull.

Mauly's heart almost ceased to beat for a second.

But he knew at once what it meant.

It was the man, dressed in black, with the skeleton and skull depicted on the costume in luminous paint. He had been touching up the paint of the skull before the glass, and it glowed and glimmered in the dark; but the outlines of the skeleton below were dim; he had taken no trouble with the rest of the figure.

Mauleverer heard a faint movement, and, to his amazement, realised that the man was getting up on the slab of stone in the middle of the cell.

There was a faint whirring sound.

The blackness was broken by the dimmest of glimmers from above. One of the great stone flags had risen from its place, leaving an opening in the roof of the cell, which was the floor of the apartment above.

It was all clear to Mauleverer now, of course.

This was the ghostly figure that Pon & Co. had seen in the old hall of Hoad the previous night. This was the trickster who had played ghost. And he had found out that another party—the hikers—had camped in the ruined castle, and he was there to play the same trick over again. The ghost of Hoad was about to "walk"—to frighten the Greyfriars hikers as he had frightened the Highcliffians—and to add one more wild tale to the many wild rumours about the place.

Evidently the old hall of Hoad was above the stone cell, and the hikers were camping there, for the glimmer from above, faint as it was, showed that a candle was burning.

Mauly heard the faint sounds as the disguised trickster lifted himself from the stepping stone into the apartment above.

But he could utter no word of warning to his friends; he could not even get on his feet; he was helpless, and could only wait in deep anxiety for what was to follow.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost Walks!

SNORE!
Groan!

Billy Bunter had fallen asleep at last. His deep snore rumbled through the dusky old hall of Hoad. The candle stuck in the crevice of the wall was guttering, but it still shewed a dim, flickering light on the camp of the Greyfriars hikers. Beyond a short radius was all dark. And from the darkness came the sound of a deep, hair-raising groan.

It alternated with the snore of Billy Bunter. But though it did not wake Bunter, it awakened others.

Harry Wharton started and raised his head.

The eerie sound from the darkness caused a shiver to run through the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. He felt the blood thrill to his heart.

Groan!

Wharton scrambled to his feet.

"Wake up, you fellows!" he panted.

They were all awake in a moment and on their feet, staring round into the dark shadows of the old hall.

"Oh!" gasped Bob Cherry suddenly.

"Look!"

The juniors caught their breath.

In the darkness, at a distance, appeared a grinning skull, which seemed to float in the blackness. Only faintly could the outlines of a skeleton form be discerned under it.

Harry Wharton and Co. gazed at it spellbound.

Clank! Clank! Clank!

It was the sound of a rattling chain.

"Oh crumbs!" panted Nugent.

"What—"

Groan!

Clank!

Harry Wharton set his lips.

He was startled, almost dumbfounded by the hideous apparition. But he was made of sterner stuff than Ponsonby & Co.

The sight of the grisly spectre had been enough to set Pon & Co. racing out into the night. But it did not produce that effect on the chums of the Greyfriars Remove.

They drew together, gazing spellbound at the apparition, their hearts beating fast and hard. But they stood steady, and did not think of flight. The flickering candlelight glimmered on a group of pale, staring, startled faces.

There was a sudden yelp from Bunter. Bunter was not sleeping soundly that night, and he was dreaming of ghosts. He opened his little round eyes, to behold the spectre of Hoad in the darkness, and he gave a startled yelp and scrambled up.

"I say, you fellows! Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter. "I say, it's the gig-gig-ghost! Oh! Owl! Help!"

Groan!

Clank!

"Yaroooh! Help!" roared Bunter.

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" growled Johnny Bull; but there was a shake in his own voice. The hideous, glimmering apparition in the darkness was enough to shake any fellow's nerve.

"Owl! Keep it off!" shrieked Bunter. "It's coming! Yoooh! Help! Oh dear! Keep it off!"



Bob Cherry stepped down into the cell. The next moment a yell of astonishment woke all the echoes of Hoad. "Mauly!" yelled Bob, his eyes alighting on the bound and gagged junior. "What?" "Mauly—here—"
The hikers scrambled down and stared at Lord Mauleverer in stupefaction.

The glimmering skull seemed to float towards the group of startled juniors. A chain clanked, and there was another deep, dismal, hair-raising groan.

Bob Cherry stooped, behind his comrades, and jerked the Holiday Annual from his rucksack. He rose with that volume in his hand and a gleam in his eyes.

Whiz!

The volume flew through the air true as a bullet to its aim. It crashed fairly on the grinning skull that gleamed from the darkness.

Crash!

"Oh!" came a startled gasp from the spectre.

Evidently the ghost of Hoad had not expected that! Probably the hikers were the first who had stood their ground and adopted offensive measures towards the grisly spectre. Anyhow, it was clear that the ghost was taken by surprise.

The crash of the Holiday Annual on the grinning skull sent the ghost spinning backwards, to fall on the stone flags with a bump which showed that, for a ghost, he was remarkably solid.

Bump!

"Ooocogh!"

"Got him!" roared Bob. "Collar him before he can dodge!"

"What-ho!"

The hikers rushed forward.

Any supernatural fears they might have had, of course, vanished when they heard the ghost crash with a solid bump and heard a breathless howl from him. Obviously it was a human being they had to deal with.

As they rushed forward they saw the gleaming skull rising—the ghost was scrambling up to run for it! But the ghost of Hoad had no time to run! Bob's handywork with the Holiday Annual prevented that. Had they rushed on him in the first place it would

have been easy for the trickster to drop back into the cell below and close the stone trap and vanish mysteriously. But now he was sprawling and scrambling, and they had ample time to reach him before he could get away.

Their grasp closed on solid human limbs in the darkness. And they all grasped together, and grasped hard.

"Wow!" gasped Johnny Bull, as he received a fierce blow, and staggered back and fell. The ghost, evidently, was desperate.

"Hold him!" panted Bob.

"Collar him! Stick to him!"

Four fellows grasped tenaciously, and Johnny Bull scrambled up and joined in again. In spite of his furious struggles the trickster was secured, and dragged along the floor into the candlelight.

"Let me go!" came a panting voice from under the gauze mask. "It was only a joke! Let me go!"

"I've heard that voice before somewhere," said Harry Wharton. "I fancy we shall know him—"

Gripped in the hands of the hikers, the ghost of Hoad had no chance of escape. Bunter lighted candles, and Harry Wharton jerked aside the painted mask on the face of the "spectre." And there was a yell of astonishment from the Greyfriars fellows as the face of Mr. Timothy Watkins, the estate agent of High Hoad, was revealed.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

"WATKINS!"

"The esteemed and

ridiculous Watkins!"

"Great Scott!"

"You trickyascal!"

The hikers stared in blank amazement at the revealed trickster. Mr. Watkins' face was convulsed with fury,

The ghost of Hoad was laid at last, and it had proved to be Mr. Watkins! It was an amazing discovery!

"What does this mean, Mr. Watkins?" demanded Wharton.

"Find out!" came the snarling answer. "Let me go! You've no right to detain me! Release me at once, confound you!"

Wharton's face was grim.

"You've got some sneaking, rotten reason for playing this rotten game," he said, "and you're jolly well going to be shown up to all the people you've fooled and taken in and scared. Get a rope, Bunter. We'll tie his hands and walk him into the village, got up as he is—and let them all see what the ghost of Hoad is like!"

"Good egg!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

And in spite of Mr. Watkins' struggles and furious expostulations his hands were tied behind his back, and, as a further precaution, his feet also were tied. The hikers were not disposed to stand on ceremony with the rogue, and they were quite determined that he should be shown up in his true colours.

"Now let's see where he came from," said Bob Cherry. "He can't have walked here got up like that. How did you get in, Watkins?"

"Find out!" snarled Mr. Watkins.

The hikers were not long in finding out. Taking the candles, they searched along the hall, and in a few minutes discerned the open flagstone over the old cell.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here we are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "This is the jolly old ghosts' entrance and exit!"

He lowered a candle into the opening and peered into the cell.

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"A secret passage!" said Harry.

"Yes; come on!"

Bob stepped down on the stepping-stone below, and thence to the floor of the cell. He saw Mr. Watkins' raincoat and hat there, and then—a yell of astonishment woke all the echoes of Hoad.

"Mauly!" yelled Bob.

"What?"

"Mauly—here!"

The hikers scrambled down. They stared at Lord Mauleverer in stupefaction.

They grabbed him from the corner; released him from the bonds and the gag, almost in the twinkling of an eye. They helped him into the hall above.

"What the thump—"

"How on earth—"

"We thought you'd gone for a walk and lost your way—"

"Mauly, old man—"

"Jolly glad you men dropped in!" yawned Mauleverer, rubbing his cramped arms. "I've had a rotten time."

"But who—what—"

"Dear old Pon! By gum, I hope Pon won't be gone before I get to the village! I want to see Pon—badly!"

"Pon!" repeated Wharton blankly.

"Yaas! He got me rather at a disadvantage, or he couldn't have handled me like that," said Mauleverer. And he explained what had happened.

"By gum! It's rather lucky the ghost walked to-night," remarked Nugent. "Mauly would have been sticking there till morning."

"Yaas! And I wasn't enjoying it a bit! You've got the ghost?" Lord Mauleverer grinned at the bound figure huddled in the candle-light. "I rather fancy I know the sportsman; I couldn't quite make him out when he was

dressin' up down there, but I thought I— Oh gad! Watkins!"

"Jolly old Watkins!" said Bob. "And we've got him—and we're going to take him to Hoad just as he is!"

"Oh gad! What a surprise for them! You fellows got any supper? I'm a bit peckish. If Bunter hasn't eaten everything—"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

Supper was soon forthcoming for Lord Mauleverer, and he ate it with an appetite almost worthy of Billy Bunter; after which the hikers rolled themselves in their blankets to sleep till dawn, and Billy Bunter's snore once more woke the echoes.

There was one who did not sleep, and that was Mr. Timothy Watkins, whose anticipations of the morrow were not likely to let him slumber. The way of the transgressor was hard—as Mr. Watkins was finding out!

Harry Wharton & Co. were up with the sun.

They decided to breakfast at the Golden Pig, in Hoad; they were rather anxious to arrive there—with Mr. Watkins.

So the packs were packed, and Mr. Watkins' feet were released so that he could hike with the hikers, but his hands were left tied.

"You can't take me to the village got up like this!" groaned the hapless trickster. "You can't! You—"

"We'll try!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"For mercy's sake, let me go! I—I'll never play ghost again! It was only a lark—a practical joke!" mumbled Watkins.

Wharton shook his head.

"Even if it was, you ought to be shown up, to put a stop to it," he answered. "But a man of your age doesn't turn out at night to play larks,

Mr. Watkins, like a silly kid. You've got some rotten game on."

"Yaas," said Lord Mauleverer.

"I—I swear—"

"You're the estate agent in charge of this property," remarked Mauleverer. "You've got the sellin' of it. You don't want it to sell—what? Pooks was sayin' somethin' about your wantin' to buy the land for a buildin' scheme you've got on if the price came low enough—what? You're diddlin' the jolly old squire that's trusted you—what?"

Mr. Watkins gave him a bitter look.

"Oh, my hat! Is that it?" exclaimed Bob. "Own up, you rotter!"

"For goodness' sake, let me go!" groaned Mr. Watkins. "This will be ruin to me! It—it's true that I wanted to buy the land, but I could not raise the price. I—I've taken measures to— to reduce its market value—quite harmless measures really. After all, it was only a sort of practical joke. People who came to look at the property have been scared, but—there was no harm really. It's not actionable—"

"Well, as you're such a joker, we're going to let everybody into the joke!" grinned Bob. "Come on!"

And Mr. Watkins, still in the weird garb of the ghost of Hoad, was walked out of the ruins and walked along the sunny lanes to Hoad and walked into the village to the Golden Pig—where Mr. Pooks almost fell down in astonishment at the sight of him. Then he was released.

In ten minutes all Hoad was gathered to stare at Mr. Watkins.

It was the sensation of the century at Hoad.

Mr. Watkins would have been glad to take a hurried departure, but he was not permitted to do so. Excited villagers crowded round him, and he was ducked in the horse trough before he was allowed to go. And it was a wet, weary, and dismal Timothy Watkins that fled at last, while the Greyfriars hikers breakfasted cheerily at the village inn.

Ponsonby rose earlier than usual that morning.

He had to, because after breakfast Lord Mauleverer walked into his room and hooked him out of bed.

Mauly stayed about ten minutes in the room, with the other hikers looking in at the doorway with grinning faces, and Gadsby and Monson staring on silently.

They were hectic minutes for Ponsonby.

He was a gasping wreck when Mauly had finished. Like Mr. Watkins, Pon found that the way of the transgressor was hard.

Leaving him, gurgling for breath and dabbing a streaming nose, on the floor, the hikers departed.

They marched cheerily out of Hoad into the sunny Oxfordshire lanes—leaving Ponsonby gasping and repairing damages, and Mr. Watkins in his office at High Hoad making hasty arrangements for winding up his business affairs in that neighbourhood and departing also.

The ghost of Hoad had been laid—and laid for good—by the Greyfriars hikers. Which was quite a satisfaction to the cheery hikers as they hiked on with all the world before them!

THE END.

(Harry Wharton & Co., the Greyfriars hikers, meet with further exciting adventures next week when they bump into Horace Coker, the fool of the Fifth. The title of the yarn is: "COKER, THE HIKER!" and it's guaranteed to supply a full measure of laughs!)

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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 "borrows" Valetti's car for demonstration purposes. Old Simon's invention proves highly successful. On returning home, however, Bill and Mike discover

JACK WILLIS, who had been left to guard the plans, lying on the floor bound and barely conscious, while beside him is the charred butt of one of Valetti's favourite Turkish cigarettes.

(Now read on.)

Stolen!

"**M**Y hat! The ghastly brute!" Bill Allison's hoarse cry, and a blistering epithet from Mike Doyle, were the only sounds as, for a heart-throbbing second or two, the partners stood thunderstruck, staring dully at the limp form of Jack Willis, the young giant they had left to guard the cottage.

Valetti's work, of course! That was only too obvious. As Mike had prophesied, the Corsican crook had gathered himself for one last onslaught—a smasher.

Worse still, he had launched his "offensive" with a celerity that had taken even Mike by surprise.

Not only had young Willis been laid out, but the kitchen parlour had been ruthlessly wrecked and ransacked. Every drawer and cupboard had been searched, parts of the lino were ripped and torn, and the stuffing hacked out of old Simon Allison's favourite armchair. The room looked as though it had been swept by a small cyclone.

All this the partners noted in one dazed glance. Then, without another sound, they fell on their knees beside Jack Willis, and began the task of reviving him with all speed.

Mike cut through his bonds, Bill un-gagged him and thrust a cushion gently beneath the lolling head. With a groan

the muscular youth opened bloodshot eyes, and tried in vain to sit up.

"Gosh, I'm mortal sorry Muster Doyle—" he began feebly.

Mike silenced him with a soothing gesture.

"All right, son; we'll have that later. Where'd you get hit? On the head?"

Expertly he examined Willis, but found no wound, although the giant winced as Mike's deft fingers caressed the base of his skull.

"There, is it? H'm! You've been coshed by a rubber club, then, which leaves no mark!" growled the Irishman. "Water, Bill—snappy! You bathe his head while I—"

In two long strides Mike was through the inner door, and presently Bill heard him rummaging about in the bedrooms upstairs. When he reappeared in the kitchen some minutes later, his lean face was mask-like. Only the ugly set of his jaw and the bleakness of his eyes gave the key to his true feelings.

"Yeah, he's found 'em! Valetti's got th' plans at last!"

In a quiet, repressed voice, Mike jerked out the grim words in reply to Bill's urgent glance of inquiry. Still outwardly cool, he then swung on young Willis, who, aided by the Avonshire cricketer, had dragged himself to the ruined armchair.

"Well, son, how's the head? Feel like talking now?"

Jack Willis almost wept with mortification.

"Oh, Muster Doyle, I'm mortal sorry!" he repeated brokenly. "I've let ye down bad. I was a fule! Ye see, 'twas loike this. I was keepin' a sharp look-out, loike ye told me, when suddenly I sees an ole tramp stop at th' gate, loike he was comin' in to beg. Then, dang me, if 'ee don't fall flop in th' road. Well, 'ee looked so hungry an' weak loike, that I thinks he's fainted or summat, so, daft-loike, off out I rushes to see to him. And then—"

"And then, Jack?"

The young countryman groaned again.

"Well, sir, no sooner does I bend over him when some worm jumps out from be'ind them elders o' yours beside th' gate, an' knocks me silly. Th' next

I remembers I'm lyin' in here, an' the two fellers—"

"Two, eh?" interrupted Bill quickly. "Was one of them a foul-looking hunch-back?"

"No, sir. There was just this hound disguised as a tramp, an' another feller wearin' a mask. I didn't see much of 'em, either, bein' 'alf under th' table. But, dang it, they searched your place proper!"

"Two men!" Bill and Mike exchanged lowering glances. "That means Len's back in Avonport, then," continued Bill. "Valetti must have got in touch with him somehow after you slammed him last night, Mike, and forced the bloomin' funk to come back from London and lend a hand. That's who the Corsican was waiting for on Avonport Station this morning, I'll bet!"

"They certainly took their time searching this place!" growled Mike. "When did they come here, Jack?"

"'Bout two hours after you'd left for Daleham, Muster Doyle!" muttered the giant, clenching massive fists. "And they left here, laughin' to themselves, just as it got dark. Dang 'em, if they'd on'y given me a fair chance, man to man, I'd ha' swatted th' pair on 'em!"

Mike—a sober, impassive, but highly dangerous Mike—clapped him on the shoulder.

"Be aisy, now!" he nodded, his Irish brogue thickening, as it always did in time of stress. "Ye were up ag'inst th' cleverest son o' Satan in th' world—cleverer even than I tho'ght, bad cess to him! 'Tis meself that's to be blamed." He smiled bitterly. "Sure, an' I tho'ght I had those plans well hid! An' I tho'ght I'd blocked Phil Valetti at every turn. A rale cleverstick, I am! A wise mug!"

Cold flame flashed in Bill's eyes as he wheeled on his friend.

"Cut that out, Mike!" he snapped. "We've all done our best, but Valetti's gone one better this time, that's all. He's got the plans, but he still doesn't know you've already fixed the super-charger, so much good they'll do him! And, anyway, that's not the real point now."

The lad's fist thudded on the table.

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"He and Len have stolen them from us. Also, they've outhed Jack here and wrecked our home. All right! Now we'll go and wreck them. Len's house is our first port of call, Mike. Likely enough, neither of the swabs will be there, but that's our first and best step. Maybe we'll find out something there again. And even if they have bolted already they haven't got such a big start, from what Jack says."

Mike, his lips a thin, tight line, smiled mirthlessly.

"O.K., chief; I'm with you!" he said simply. "Come on, Jack—home!"

Together the comrades helped their unlucky guardsman down the dark lane to the Red Lion. Then, after seeing him safely in the hands of his flustered father, they made a bee-line for their demonstration car in the shed.

Five minutes later they were in Avonport. The last round of the long fight against Phil Valetti and Len had begun.

Surprises All Round!

BILL drove, but Mike gave the orders.

"No, it's no use bustin' up and kickin' their front door in!" he growled to the fiery hothead beside him. "Apart from th' fact that that would give Valetti warning, it might draw in outsiders, which we don't want. We're still handling this our own selves."

"Bill, what we're goin' to do now is to get into that house by the tricky back entrance. Cut off their pet line o' retreat, see? We still don't know whether they're in the house or not; but if they are, 'tis themselves will get the shock of their rotten lives!"

Accordingly, then, Bill stifled his impatience, and swung off towards the lane beside the river. Half-way along he switched off the lights and parked beneath some overhanging trees. That done, the partners covered the remaining fifty yards to the wall of Len's house at the double.

Over that wall, and down into the grounds on the other side they dropped, noiseless as ghosts. And both uttered a silent cheer at what they saw there.

A light! It was but the merest gleam, escaping from behind a drawn blind. But—

It came from the window of Len's study, in the top story of the otherwise darkened mansion.

"Altaby!" grinned Mike. "Maybe that's another plant—but maybe not. We're goin' in to see, anyway!"

Ducking low, treading warily, the Irishman started towards the house. Bill, struck by a sudden alarming thought, caught him up and pulled him to a standstill again.

"Wait!" he hissed. "It's just occurred to me. Look here! We're going after Len and Valetti, but don't forget there's a third member of the gang! What about that terror, Joe the Hump? Supposing he's—"

Mike thrust his hatchet face closer. In the gloom, Bill sensed rather than saw the saturnine grin that twisted his comrade's features.

"I've been waitin' for you to ask that!" he chuckled softly, leading the puzzled youngster on by the arm. "Bill, there ain't no Joe the Hump!"

"Wha-at?" Bill gaped at his partner incredulously. "But—but—"

"But nothing! Listen! When I pinched Valetti's car last night I searched it. Under the back seat I

found a valise, and packed inside was a black mask, a black cloak, black soft hat and gloves—and a leather shoulder-pad! And, Bill, when I found that, I solved a mystery that's puzzled the American police for years, and our own police for two months. No wonder Valetti and Joe the Hump were never seen together by anyone, cop or crook! Savvy?"

"You mean—"

"Yeah! They're one and the same man—and that man is Corsica Phil Valetti! And it's Len who's driven the car when 'Joe the Hump' has raided us, and Len who fixed up the alibis afterwards! Slick, ain't it? But, just the same, that fatal bag's well hidden in the Red Lion shed. Boy, that evidence alone would get Valetti a lifer back in the States!"

By this time the alert pair had reached a small potting-shed; and, with Bill following in flabbergasted silence, the hard-bitten Irishman glided round to the back, and eased himself into the narrow space between the shed and the garden wall. For the first time, then, he switched on his electric torch.

"And here's another mystery I've solved," he whispered. "Found it two days ago. I've been sneakin' in here every night this last week, and goin' over every foot of this garden with a fine tooth comb. See?"

Bill nodded dumbly. Mike was handing out surprises quick and sudden to-night! Now at last he knew why his friend had taken to coming home at all hours lately, and always with traces of dirt on his knees and shoes.

In the rays of the torch glinted a large iron plate—a manhole cover let in flush with the ground. It was the entrance to the secret passage that led up through the cellars of the mansion into Len's study.

Len's father, Jacob Allison—himself a man with many crooked irons in the fire—had had it constructed when the house was built. But his son had made the best—or worst—use of it.

Grasping the ring-bolt, Mike raised the plate, flashed his torch down into the square cavity below. A short iron ladder was clamped to one of the tiled sides, and this he descended cautiously. Bill dropped in after him.

All the youngster's old scruples about housebreaking and calling in the police had weakened long ago. The knowledge that Joe the Hump, the brutal hunchback, was none other than Corsica Phil Valetti in disguise had now quashed them for good.

It was the Corsican's savage hand, then, that had dwelt the crushing blow from which his father had only just begun to recover! And Len himself—his own cousin in person—had driven the getaway car.

Two dull, angry spots of colour dyed Bill's cheeks as he trailed Mike along the dampish, stone-flagged tunnel that ran underneath the garden. The lad was in a fever; burning with fury and impatience.

More than ever now he longed to run amok—to come to bitter handgrips with the treacherous curs who had caused so much suffering and mischief.

"Steady!"

Mike's warning hiss broke in suddenly on Bill's stormy thoughts.

They had reached the end of the tunnel now, and a stab of torchlight revealed a narrow and gloomy shaft, slightly out of the perpendicular, and

running upwards between the outer and inner walls of the house. Squarely built, it was just wide enough to allow a man to ascend in comfort. Another iron ladder formed the means of ascension.

"Nifty idea, ain't it? Sort of false chimney!"

Mike's voice, low though it was, raised sepulchral echoes when he spoke again.

"Well, we're in now, Bill, so watch your step! If Valetti was to cop us from above when we're half-way up, it would be good-night, nurse! And remember this—if we're outhed in here no one will ever know it!"

Bill shrugged. The sinister words, though they sent a thrill through his heart, served only to stiffen his nerve.

"Don't jaw—climb!" he said tersely.

And Mike winked to himself as he set a foot on the first rung of the ladder. Bill plainly was hungry for action, risk or no risk!

Thus the fateful climb commenced.

Up and up they clambered, feeling their way slowly, cautiously, rung by rung. It was a gruelling experience, there in the blind darkness of the shaft. A slip meant broken bones, at least—possibly worse. And both refused to think about what would happen if Valetti suddenly appeared at the head of the ladder and caught them. Doggedly they pushed on. Once and only once was the dead silence broken.

From somewhere out of the black pall overhead floated a sudden jumble of sounds, so faint as to be meaningless. Nevertheless, the comrades halted at once; clung to their precarious perch, listening with bated breath. Another sound came, slightly sharper this time. Then silence again.

For a dread minute that seemed endless the intrepid raiders expected to see a light split the darkness any moment then; expected to hear a harsh, challenging voice, and—perhaps—the harsher roar of a revolver. Their fears, however, proved groundless. And after a while Mike whispered down over his shoulder.

"Someone's in the house, anyway!" he breathed, and smacked his lips softly.

Up again, then, Mike reached the stairhead, drew himself on to a sort of landing, so cramped that his shoulder brushed the walls on either side. He edged onwards to make room for Bill. Two more yards, and his outstretched hand encountered solid woodwork at last.

A door. The secret panel that opened into Len's study! The Irishman, drawing a deep breath, thumbed the button of his torch.

One brief flash was enough. His free hand streaked out then, to settle accurately on a small brass catch.

Holding it, he half turned his head. Orders, short and sharp, hissed sibilantly from the corner of his slit-like mouth.

"Get set for a real swift rush now, Bill! Don't hesitate. Slam in and get 'em on the hop! If they're inside, that's our only hope, 'cos Valetti will shoot if he gets th' chance! I'll take him—you tackle Len. And, here—take this!"

A heavy spanner was thrust into Bill's hand. He seized it, gripping the cold, hard butt tightly.

Mike's body grew tense as a coiled spring.

Now for it!

"Right? Then come on!" he said;

and in one dexterous movement jerked back the catch and slid the panel open.

Light streamed into the passage. Like hounds off the leash, the partners hurtled through the aperture, and—

"Gosh!"

Both shouted at once.

With weapons poised, eyes blazing, they stood rooted to the carpet, while gradually their vengeful expressions

changed to blank dismay and astonishment. For the second time that night they had rushed into a room and found it tenanted only by one injured man.

Across the study table, struggling feebly back to consciousness, sprawled Len Allison.

Of Corsica Phil Valetti the only trace was the heavy aroma of Turkish tobacco!

Left in the Lurch!

BILL'S spanner thudded to the floor.

At their tempestuous entrance Len had raised his head. He was staring fixedly at the comrades now, frowning, trying to focus a pair of bleary eyes. Presently recognition

(Continued on next page.)

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.

WELL, chums, have you done it yet? Done what? Why, ordered your copies of "The Greyfriars Holiday Annual," and "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories." If you haven't—snap into it! Believe me, there's going to be a big rush on these two magnificent Annuals this year, and I wouldn't like any of my regular readers to be left out in the cold.

You'll find all your favourite authors writing for these two fine Annuals, and they certainly have put their backs into it, for the yarns are the kind that will gain your interest throughout. Remember, also, that the price of the "Holiday Annual" has been reduced, and it costs only five shillings this year. When your dad is in a good mood, just whisper a few words in his ear!

Probably you'll find that he is just as interested in seeing the Annuals as you are yourselves. Judging by the letters I get from "old boys," they are every bit as enthusiastic about the famous MAGNET characters as my younger readers are.

These two splendid Annuals get better and better each year, and I and my staff have seen to it that this year's issues are real "top-notchers"—better even than those of last year, and that's saying something!

Ask your newsagent to let you have a peep at them. And ask him, too, about his "Annual club," which puts these magnificent books within the reach of every boy.

HERE is a good yarn that one of our authors was telling me the other day. Remember when Al Capone was leading the gangsters of Chicago? Well, this is the yarn of **THE CLOWN THAT SCARED CAPONE.**

There was a big circus in Chicago, and one of the English clowns had put on a "skit" on a bootlegger's raid, during which a fake hold-up was staged by the clowns, who fired a terrific number of blank cartridges. Capone and his bodyguard were sitting in the front seats, and, as soon as the "firing" started, they bolted for their lives! They thought the whole thing was staged in order to "bump them off" under cover of the firing in the circus ring! Capone didn't go anywhere near a circus after that—and he's not likely to do so again for a long time, seeing that he's now serving a big term of imprisonment.

I was reminded of that yarn by a letter from a reader who asks if I can tell him which was

THE BIGGEST CIRCUS

ever seen in England? One has to go back a few years to remember that particular circus, although some of my really

old readers may have visited the famous Barnum and Bailey's show, which visited England in 1899. It took no less than seventy specially constructed railway cars to remove the circus from town to town, and every car was 60 ft. in length. There were three rings and two stages, and there were as many as seventy horses in the ring at one time. No less than four hundred horses accompanied the circus. There were two menageries, and twelve big tents—one of them capable of holding fifteen thousand people. Altogether 1,200 people were employed by this mammoth circus!

There are not so many circuses travelling in Great Britain nowadays, although on the Continent and in the United States, the circus is still one of the principal amusements.

Here are a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to various questions asked me by readers:

A Cricketing Query (E. L. B., of South-sea): 'Fraid you've "stumped" me! No regular records are kept of "freak" occurrences in cricket.

What is a Chimera? (Jack K., of Sunderland): A mythological fire-breathing monster. There is also a fish known as the chimera which has two pairs of large teeth, and a tail which ends in a point. It is sometimes called "the king of the herrings."

How Many Legs has a Centipede? ("Magnetite," of Benwell): The name means, literally, "a hundred legs," but there are so many different varieties that this term is misleading. Some have many more than a hundred. Others have only thirty. Some tropical centipedes are capable of inflicting a fatal bite.

What is a Dolomite? (Fred Hawkes, of Wrexford): It sounds like an explosive, but it isn't! It is a mineral, consisting of carbonates of calcium and magnesium. The Alps of the South Tyrol are called Dolomites because of the prevalence of this mineral.

HERE is an interesting query from a Bedford reader. He wants to know if it is possible to achieve the feat of

CROSSING EUROPE BY CANAL.

Yes, it is quite possible. One can even travel in a small boat from England to the Black Sea. Once the English channel is crossed—and it has been crossed several

times in canoes and rowing boats—a vast network of canals links up the whole Continent. One can pass through Belgium and Holland to the Rhine, which is also linked up with the Danube by a canal, and thus the Black Sea can be reached. From the English Channel there are other canals which lead to the Mediterranean.

So far as England is concerned, you can travel by canal from the Mersey to London, from the Humber to the mouth of the Severn, or from Leeds to Liverpool. The Caledonian Canal, in Scotland, will take you from Inverness to Fort William.

There is just space for one more query. Sit tight, you Scottish readers! Sam Churchman, of Hayes, asks me a question concerning your national musical instrument, and this is the answer:

THE BAGPIPE IS NOT A SCOTTISH INSTRUMENT!

It hails from Egypt, and was known in ancient Greece. It was in use all over Europe in the fifteenth century. Even to-day, it is used in Poland, Italy, the South of France, and, of course, Ireland. Actually, it was introduced into Scotland by the English. Needless to say, bagpipes vary greatly in different countries, and the Highland bagpipe is the most powerful, and calls for great exertion of the lungs. The Italian bagpipe is a very crude instrument, but, musically speaking, the softer and more melodious Irish bagpipe is the most perfect of all!

Now, don't throw bricks at me, you Scottish readers! I can't help it!

Anyway, let's "pipe down" while we have a look at this list of next week's attractions.

When you get hold of your MAGNET and read the beginning of

"COKER, THE HIKER!"

By Frank Richards,

you'll know you're in for a great treat. Frank Richards never lets his readers down, and this latest yarn of his, telling of the further exciting holiday adventures of the Greyfriars hikers, is certainly one of the finest we have ever published. You'll agree with me when you've read it! So take my oft-given advice, and order your copy in advance. Don't run the risk of your local newsagent being "sold out."

There are plenty of thrills in store for you in next week's exciting chapters of our popular sporting story,

"ALLISON of AVONSHIRE!"

and if you don't chuckle loud and long when you read the extra-special issue of the "Greyfriars Herald"—well, there's something wrong with you.

The shorter features will appear as usual, while I shall be "in the office" answering more readers' queries.

Cheerio!

YOUR EDITOR.

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dawned in the lack-lustre depths. But, strangely, no flash of fear or hatred followed. Nor did the fact that his enemies had discovered and used the secret passage seem to alarm or surprise the young boss of the Allison Works. Instead, to increase the amazement of Bill and Mike, Len suddenly burst into a hysterical titter that ended chokingly in a sob.

At that Bill boiled over and rushed at him. But Mike was there first.

Grasping the pitiful weakling by the collar, he dumped him down in a chair and stood over him, glaring, a dark, menacing figure.

"Now, then, where's Valetti?" he roared. "Come on, you—talk fast!"

Len squirmed. But again that idiotic grin flickered across his white face, only to be replaced next instant by ungovernable, vindictive rage.

"Valetti? Oh, he's gone! Yes, dear Valetti—he's gone!" he babbled, cursing. "Valetti's got your precious plans, and he's bolted! Oh, I know I'm done; I'm beaten! I'll own up; do anything now! We—we raided your cottage to-night; found the plans. That's why you're here, isn't it?"

"It is!"

"Well, then, you're too late! You've got here quickly—quicker than I expected even—but you're too late!" Len clutched his head and swayed to and fro. "Valetti's got 'em!" he almost screamed. "The vile, treacherous rat! He always meant to get them for himself! He's been playing his own game all along; using me as a tool, a dupe; borrowing my money, using my cars and house. And I—I, poor fool, I only found out too late! Phil Valetti, my—my partner!"

Len Allison seemed to have lost his manhood completely. Tears were raining down his cheeks; the tears of a spoilt, pampered youth who never had been able to stomach defeat. Terror had sapped his spirit and will-power. He seemed anxious only to confess everything and indulge his spite against the Corsican.

"Listen," he went on, the words fairly tumbling over each other. "We'd planned to escape to the Continent to-night, if the raid proved successful, and sell your invention there. I've already sold the Allison Works. I'm sick of the rotten concern, anyway, so I got rid of it dirt cheap in London three days ago. And after we left your cottage—in my own car—we raced back here to pick up a few things, cover our tracks, and then carry on."

"And then, while I was collecting some papers from my desk there, Valetti, the cur, suddenly hit me! Hit me with his fist behind the ear! And then he laughed and jeered at me while I lay there!"

"He called me a sucker and a poor sap! He told me all he'd been secretly planning to do, and then defied me to stop him. And"—Len groaned in sheer misery—"I can't stop him, either; I haven't! He's got me—like that! Now you've got me, too, and—and I don't care a hoot!"

Cringing lower in his chair, the wretched conspirator raised trembling hands to his face, while Bill and Mike frowned glumly. Again they had lost the Corsican will-o'-the-wisp, and the discovery came hard. Neither spoke for a time.

Then, with a grimace of disgust, Bill shook his cousin by the shoulder, though not ungently.

"Chuck it, for Pete's sake!" he growled. "Look here, Len, your game's up, so squealing won't help you. Where's Valetti gone? If you can't stop him, we'll have a thundering good try!"

Len's body twitched convulsively. "He's gone to Portsea, in my car—the roadster I use for business," was the

SOMETHING NEW IN NEW BOYS—

is Richard Thurnel, who arrives at St. Jim's in this week's ripping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. For the newcomer is a regular bully and cad, yet no fellow can handle him because he's so strong. There's an ulterior motive, too, behind Thurnel's presence at St. Jim's. Read all about it in "The Mystery Schoolboy!" which appears in The GEM now on sale, price 2d.

shaky reply. "From there he can get a passage across to Ireland, and then he's going aboard a tramp that's bound from Belfast to America—Galveston. Oh, he's got it all fixed up, the fiend! He told me all this before he hit me again and went out slamming the door, the double-crossing!"

Mike cut in with a swift, fierce gesture.

"How long has he been gone? What road's he taking? What's the number of your car?" he demanded; and the rapid-fire questions made Len jerk up his arm defensively.

"He's been gone about ten minutes. Perhaps less. He'll take the secondary roads—through the hills—across Dalem Common, for certain. They're lonelier. And my car number's LQ 05843."

That was enough for Mike. "Portsea—nearly a hundred miles! PQ 05843! Come on, Bill! Last chance!" he snorted. "Leave that pup; he ain't worth whipping! 'Tis the real hound we want!"

Impetuously the Irishman dashed for

the secret panel again and vanished. But Bill stayed behind.

The youngster's steady eyes held a gleam that made his cousin wince as from a blow. His words stung like drops of corrosive acid.

"Len," he said, very quietly, "I came in here to-night to do my best to smash you! Because of your rotten cowardly greediness, my dad looks like having to spend the rest of his life in a bath-chair! But what you've just told us saves your bacon; and, anyway, I can't boot even a worm like you in cold blood! So now I'll tell you what you're going to do!" The lad's voice sharpened. "You stick to your first plan—bunk for the Continent! And stay there! You're my cousin, unfortunately, and we've had enough beastly scandal and trouble in the Allison family already. But if you're still in Avonport when we get back from chasing Valetti, cousin or not, you'll be for it, good and hard!"

Len gaped at him, too dazed for a moment to comprehend Bill's meaning. "You're giving—" Then suddenly his eyes lighted up with wild hope. "You mean, you're giving me a chance? You'll lurch this up?" And he tried to seize Bill's hand.

Bill shoved him back roughly, and squared his hefty shoulders.

"Yes; a chance to go straight, if you can!" he snapped. "Get out of England! If you've still got some private or business matters to settle, settle 'em from the other side of the Channel. And stay there, too! Len, if you ever come back, or trouble dad and me again—" "Bi-ill!"

Up from the depths of the shuff echoed an irritable Irish yell, and Bill, swinging contemptuously on his heel, strode to the open panel. There, however, he turned again to give his shivering cousin a last level stare that seemed to pierce the ruined schemer through and through.

"Look out for yourself—that's all!" he concluded in a tone that carried grim conviction.

Next moment he had closed the panel sharply, and in closing it, shut Len Allison out of his sight for ever.

Even as the youngster began a hasty descent of the ladder, there came faintly the slam of a door. Len, seizing the chance that had so miraculously, unexpectedly, befallen him, was obeying orders.

Bill carried on—to the pursuit of that stronger, more dangerous crook, Corsica Phil Valetti.

(Corsica Phil Valetti's booked for a rough passage when Bill and Mike get their hands on him. Don't miss next week's thrilling chapters of this great sporting serial, whatever you do, chums.)

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No. 50 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

September 16th, 1933.

THE NEW Greysfriars Herald

EXTRA GOOD EDITION

TO THE HEAD (With Great Respect).
Don't trouble to have the Junior Common room cleaned, sir. We're going to mop up the floor with the Fourth as soon as New Term begins!
For the Remove.
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Forty Duck's Eggs, all fresh this season. Collected by a connoisseur!—Apply (with our compliments) to HORACE COKER, Box No. 13, GREYFRIARS HERALD.

BLUNDELL'S RECORD BAG!



PORPOISE-CATCHING OFF EASTBOURNE

Blundell and Bland, who have been doing a bit of fishing from a boat off Eastbourne, had rather disappointing results till one day this week, when their luck changed with a vengeance. It was Blundell's suggestion to try to catch a porpoise.

"Plenty of 'em about: you can often see their bodies half out of the water," he said. "Why not try to net one just for the sport of it?"

Bland said he'd try anything once. So off they went with a net.

Porpoises seemed to be conspicuous only by their absence for a time. Bland thought that that was because the weather was too fine.

"Porpoises only show themselves in stormy weather," he said, during his scanty knowledge of sailor's lore. "Ten to one you shan't see a solitary specimen."

It was only ten minutes after that, however, when Blundell pointed excitedly across the water.

"There's one!" he said. "Beautiful specimen, too, by the look of it! Paddle after it gently, Bland, while I throw out the net."

Bland dipped his oars in the water, sending the boat on the track of the porpoise, the bulky mass of whose bluish body could be seen protruding from the water. In a matter of seconds they were near enough for Blundell to cast his net.

Blundell fully expected the big fish to put up a fight, and he was not disappointed: in an instant the sea was being churned into foam and

AS OTHERS SEE THEM

What I Think of Arthur Carne

By GEORGE TUBB

As a Sixth-Former and a regular member of the First Eleven both at cricket and football, Arthur Carne is entitled to expect a mere tag like me to witter up at the mention of his name. But what Carne's entitled to and what he jolly well gets are two entirely different matters. All the while writing up I'm likely to do won't nourish Carne's self respect for five minutes. So there!

Third-Formers are supposed to look up to the "big noises" in the Sixth and treat them with awe and respect. Well, I ask you, how can you respect a man who dishes out more kicks and cuffs (bearing that rotter Loder) than anyone else at Greyfriars? How can you respect a man who goes out on the tiles and pails with "hookies" and bar longers in Courtland? The fact is, it can't be done—and if it could, I wouldn't do it, anyway!

Blow Carne—that's my idea! "Britons never shall be slaves! Yah!" is the lusty chorus he gets in reply from the throats of the unconquerable Third!

"Surely," I hear someone objecting, "there must be some redeeming feature about this rotter—some strain of goodness to relieve his otherwise murky character?" Let the truth be told, dear reader, bitter though it be: there isn't a suspicion of anything good about Carne—he's just a Hundred Per Cent Blank Outsider!

But carry on with your foul deeds, Carne! You can laugh now; but a day will come in the distant future when a fellow as tall as yourself will stop you in the street and give you a cosh on the boko that you'll remember all your life.

That fellow will be George Tubb!

ANY OLD IRON GLOVES ABOUT?
I'll pay top price for them if there are. I want to make sure of coming down on the fags with a heavy hand next term.—HORACE J. COKER, Box No. 65, GREYFRIARS HERALD.



'Lonzy's Little Letters

Dear Editor—The academic dissolution or abscission of scholastic continuity for recreative purposes commonly known as the Summer Vacation approaches its termination. Rejuvenated by oxygenous diversions, the studious adolescents of our harkens foundations effect their confluence to the stream that leads back to the ancient edifice of Greyfriars, intent on supererogatory scholastic endeavours in the resume of academic distinction. With what enthusiasm do we resume our incursions into the classical and scientific realms? With that zest and spontaneity do we reopen our lexicons? Ah, my juvenile acquaintances, is it not voracious to "separate that, while it is delicious to be on holiday, it is even more delicious to be back at school!"

Zealously yours,
ALONZO TODD.

(Here's 'Lonzy telling us he's glad the hols are nearly over and we'll soon be back at school! Chuck it, 'Lonzy—unless you feel like a form scribbling on first day of Term!—Ed.)

HERO'S MANLY MODESTY

Our Special Representative simply rushed to Scarborough when he heard that Snoop of the Remove had been involved in an heroic rescue.

"Snoop, old man, graters!" he exclaimed, wringing "Greyfriars is proud of her illustrious son! Tell me all about it, so that I can pass on the thrilling yarn to our hungry readers!"

Snoop shrugged.

"It was nothing worth writing home about," he said. "I'd much rather you printed nothing about it."

"The manly modesty of a true hero!" cried our representative. "But the public clamours to hear the story!"

"It was nothing, I tell you," insisted Snoop. "Any other man would have done the same."

"Only your pitifully modesty could lead you to make such a travesty of the truth!"

"I'm not a representative," mumbled our representative.

"Tell the story in your own simple, modest words, Snoop. I beg of you. Did you plunge, fully clothed, into the boiling sea, a look of grim, dogged determination on your face? Did the mighty breakers buffet you with their frozen force? Did the tempest screen past your ears? Did—"

"I'm sorry," said Snoop, quickly. "It was really nothing—nothing at all. I prefer to say nothing about it."

"Then, in deference to the modesty of a hero—a man whose fame will echo down the ages in Greyfriars history—I refrain from pressing you further. Adieu, my brave Snoop!"

And our Special Representative withdrew.

Afterwards he learned that Snoop was the chap who was rescued, not the chap who did the rescuing. Possibly that's why Snoop was so reticent over the affair!

GAMEKEEPER OR TOREADOR?

Greyfriars Man's Altered Appearance

Close all the doors, chaps, and land us your ears! We have a secret to impart that will make you sag at the knees and gasp "Never!" in awe-stricken accents.

When you return to Greyfriars for the new term (for goodness' sake keep it dark, won't you?) there will be one



man you'll have great difficulty in recognising, for the reason that his appearance will have undergone a complete transformation!

One moment he'll remind you of a Spanish toreador—the next, of one of those sinister gamekeepers that used to figure so prominently and villainously in the melodramas of bygone days.

What's the name of this singularly changed chappie? Well, brace yourselves up for the shock, and we'll tell you.

COKER! There! We knew you'd be surprised!

Yes, we quite

appreciate that there's only one Coker, and he could always be recognised a mile off. But it's Coker all the same! What has happened to effect this amazing alteration? Well, it's quite simple, really. During the vac Coker has been going to the pictures occasionally and, after due consideration, has come to the conclusion that a pair of side whiskers like those worn by Ramon Gable, or somebody, would add considerably to his already distinguished (help!) appearance. So Coker has spent the vac growing sideboards!

Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, there ought to be a riot at Friarstable Station when Coker arrives! If there isn't, we suggest that Remove get together and jolly well start one; the idea of allowing Coker's side-whiskers to arrive at Greyfriars unheralded is simply unthinkable! Don't forget, then, to be there with bells on to give a right royal welcome to this pseudo-bull-fighter—cun - villainous - gamekeeper!

P.S.—We've just heard that a welcome won't be necessary after all. Coker accidentally stripped off the right side-whisker while trimming it yesterday, and has had to cut the other to balance things off. Shame!

Thorpe's forthcoming visit to Scotland for the shooting season is sending him into raptures of anticipation. We've always said he was rather inclined to "groove"! I

DICKY NUGENT'S WEEKLY WISDOM

Sheltering in a barn during a recent thunderstorm I saw a pair of tree split from top to bottom.

The tree was struck by lightning. I was struck by what a narrow escape I'd had!

"JERSEY" THE POINT?

Alonso Todd says he's making pull-overs for Hocktious. Well, he always was a bit of a "knit"-wit.



The spectacle of W. G. Bunter on a runaway donkey on Pegg Sands gave the inhabitants a thrill, especially when the donkey stopped unexpectedly and Bunter drew off. Bunter has taken a dislike to donkeys!



When a frog jumped out of Mr. Quetch's desk, all the Remove protested innocently. Skinner, however, seemed to be enjoying a secret joke—but when Mr. Quetch found another frog in Skinner's desk, the joke turned to tragedy—for Skinner!



Oliver Kips is a very supercilious fellow, and dislikes spilling salt, and unkind numbers. The other day, however, he received a remittance for thirteen shillings and he is always an easy "touch" to the blief in unkindly numbers!



When the chums of the Remove visited India with Jinky Bunter, accidentally saved Jinky's life. "Surely Singh has not forgotten, and he is always an easy 'touch' to the blief in unkindly numbers!"



When Lung says there are dozens of characters in the Chinese alphabet, with all of which he is perfectly familiar. Bunter says he wouldn't like to learn Chinese and he is always an easy "touch" to the blief in unkindly numbers!



Mr. Quetch has compiled a "Downsday Book" of Greyfriars, setting forth particulars of every fellow in the school. He proposes to bury a copy under the flagstones in the Cloisters—for the benefit of future generations!

We Refuse to Believe—

That when Stolt was sailing to the Isle of Man last week, he heard something that sounded like "Abandon the ship!" and promptly dived overboard—only to find out later that the remark referred to "a band on the ship"!

REWARD OFFERED!

One Shilling a time—payable out of my first postal-order—to any beast willing to clean my shoes. That rotter Wharton says I ought to clean them myself, but I've told him I can never stoop so low—W. G. BUNTER, Box No. 67, GREYFRIARS HERALD.