

Grand Christmas Story "THE MYSTERY OF WHARTON LODGE!"
and FREE GIFT PICTURES INSIDE.

The MAGNET 2

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THE MYSTERY OF WHARTON LODGE



BY FRANK RICHARDS

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Left!

SLAM!

Click!

It was the door of Study No. 12—Lord Mauleverer's study—that slammed, the lock of that door that clicked, as Billy Bunter rolled into the Remove passage at Greyfriars.

Bunter heard the slam, and he heard the click, and he snorted:

"Beast!"

It looked as if the fellow in Study No. 12 did not want to see Bunter.

That in itself was not surprising. Fascinating fellow as Billy Bunter knew himself to be, often and often fellows did not want to see him. It was not surprising, but it was annoying, for Billy Bunter wanted to see Lord Mauleverer. Very much indeed did the fat Owl of the Remove want to see Mauly.

The December dusk was falling on Greyfriars School. It was break-up day, and most of the fellows were already gone.

Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove had gone in the first brake. And Harry Wharton, so far from accepting Bunter's kind offer to go home with him for the Christmas holidays, had left him sitting in the snow when the brake rolled away. Other fellows had gone; the school was almost deserted now. Some of them wished Bunter a merry Christmas before they left. None of them seemed to desire to make that Christmas merry by taking him along. Nice as he was, planned by Nature to make any party a success, Bunter seemed to be a drug in the market.

Lord Mauleverer's departure was

rather delayed. The schoolboy earl did not go by train like a common mortal. A magnificent car arrived to take Mauly home. No doubt, owing to snow on the roads, the car had arrived rather late. Nearly everybody was gone. Fellows of all Forms had melted away. Of the Remove, only three were still in the school—Lord Mauleverer, waiting for his belated car; Billy Bunter, waiting also for that car; and Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, who, having nowhere to go, was staying at the school over the holidays.

The magnificent car had arrived at last—Bunter had seen it draw up before the House—and he rolled in to tell Mauly, and to mention that he was going in the car also. At least, he hoped that he was. Mauly was kind and good-natured, and hated saying no to any fellow, which Bunter regarded as "soft," and he had no scruple whatever about taking the fullest advantage of that "softness." It was rather irritating to hear Mauly's door slam and lock as he came up the passage.

However, Mauly was cornered, at least. He couldn't get out of the window, that was clear, and Bunter planted himself at the door. He was sure that Mauly was in the study, for he could hear someone moving there. And who, but Mauly, could have locked Mauly's door on the inside?

Bunter rattled the door handle; then he tapped.

"I say, Mauly, your car's come!"

No answer!

"Gosling's putting the baggage on it, Mauly! I say, come out, old chap! You're late already, you know, and it's rather a long step to Mauleverer Towers."

There was no reply from within Lord

Mauleverer's study. Bunter gave a grunt of annoyance. If this was what Mauly considered good manners, the Owl of the Remove did not agree with him. But he restrained his desire to tell Mauly what he thought of him.

"I say, Mauly, can't you speak?" hooted Bunter through the keyhole.

Apparently the junior in the study couldn't. At all events, he didn't. Bunter thumped on the door.

"Your baggage is on, Mauly! Your chauffeur's waiting to start! What's the good of keeping him waiting?"

There was a sound in the study. Bunter started. It was the sound of munching. The fellow in the study was eating cake!

That was an occupation in which Billy Bunter was always prepared to join any fellow, friend or foe! He banged on the door.

"I say, Mauly, it's a jolly good idea to have a snack before starting! I say, I could do with some of that cake!"

Munch, munch, from the locked study!

"Mauly, old chap, I dare say you know that I'm not going home with Wharton, after all!" said Bunter, through the keyhole. "He rather begged of me to go, but I had to tell him it couldn't be done! Same with Smithy! 'No,' I said, 'I'm sticking to my old pal, Mauly.' My very words!"

Munch, munch!

The fellow in the study was going strong on the cake. He seemed to be too busy to speak.

"You'd like me for Christmas, Mauly, old fellow?"

Munch, munch, munch!

"That's settled, then," said Bunter,

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—AMAZING YULETIDE ADVENTURES OF THE CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS

apparently taking silence for consent. "We'll have a jolly good time, Mauly! I'll do some of my ventriloquial tricks—what? Make your uncle jump by making a dog growl under his chair, and that sort of thing. Rather fun to see the old fossil jump—what? He, he, ho!"

Munch, munch!

Not a word from the study, but the sound of munching jaws was incessant. Which was rather unusual in Mauly's study, for the schoolboy earl was by no means particularly keen on tuck. But the fellow in the study was devouring cake like Bunter himself, or like Fisher T. Fish, when that lean youth got a cake for nothing.

"Greedy beast!" murmured Bunter. "Rotter! Pig!" Aloud he went on: "Mauly, dear old chap, let me in, old fellow! You might let a chap have a whack at that cake!"

Munch, munch!

Bunter breathed wrath. It looked as if the fellow in Study No. 12 was going to keep him locked out till he had finished the cake. And all the time, it seemed, he was not going to waste a word on Bunter.

"I say, Mauly, you're keeping the ear waiting!"

Munch, munch!

"It's a long way home, you know."

Munch, munch!

"Pig!" breathed Bunter. Again he was sorely tempted to tell Mauly, through the keyhole, what he thought of him and his manners. But that, obviously, would not have done—if he was going home with Mauly!

The alternative was not attractive. Billy Bunter was never keen on that glorious abode, Bunter Court, at holiday-time. But even the Bunter home was closed to him now.

Mr. Bunter had been having some hard luck on the Stock Exchange. He had been a "bull" when he should have been a "bear"—or else a bear when he should have been a bull. Anyhow, money was tight. Mr. and Mrs. Bunter were spending Christmas with relations.

Bunter's young-brother, Sammy, had been landed on an uncle. His sister Bessie was landed on an aunt. Bunter himself had to share the uncle with Sammy, if there was no other resource. He had not the slightest desire to share that uncle with Sammy.

Mauly was the only other resource. Bunter was prepared to wait outside Study No. 12 if Mauly kept him waiting till midnight. It was neck or nothing! Fortunately Bunter had plenty of "neck."

He waited.

Steadily, without a pause, the sound of munching continued in the locked study. It seemed to be a large cake from the time it took the scoffer thereof to scoff it. Long, long minutes passed. Bunter still waited. There was no chance of his getting any of the cake. But so long as he caught Mauly when he came out it was all right. Mauly was too "soft" to say no, to a fellow's face. Moreover, Bunter was not the fellow to take "no" for an answer. Nothing short of a kick would have unhooked Bunter, and he felt sure that Mauly would not go to that length. He had only to wait.

The December dusk deepened. Bunter began to feel rather uneasy lest Mr. Quelch, or some other master, should spot him and inquire why he was not gone. The Remove passage, generally in a buzz when the fellows were there, was dusky and deserted and dismal. Even Fisher T. Fish was not to be seen—not that Bunter wanted to see him.

Fishy, Bunter knew, had fished for invitations right and left—a thing Bunter despised. But he had got "left," as he would have described it in his own language. But Billy Bunter wasn't interested in Fishy. All his interest was concentrated on the fellow eating the cake in Study No. 12.

The steady sound of munching ceased at last. He heard a grunt of satisfaction from the study. It was quite unlike Mauly to give such audible expression to his satisfaction. But Bunter was glad to hear it. He had been waiting a quarter of an hour or more; and he was glad to learn that the cake was finished, if that meant the opening of the study door.

"I say, Mauly, buck up!" urged Bunter, through the keyhole. "Don't you want to start before dark? I'm waiting for you, old chap!"

There was a chuckle in the study. Footsteps crossed to the door. The key was turned back. Bunter hardly waited for it to turn before he heaved at the door and hurled it open.

"I say, Mauly—"

He broke off, staring blankly into the study through his big spectacles. A bony youth, with a lean, grinning face, was there. It was Fisher Tarleton Fish. There was no sign of Lord Mauleverer.

"What—" gasped Bunter. "Where the—"

He fairly goggled at Fisher T. Fish. Only Fish was there; it had been Fishy eating the cake! Not for a moment had

**Every mystery has its solution,
but the mystery of Wharton
Lodge can be solved only by
William George Bunter—for he
is the mystery!**

Bunter doubted that it was Lord Mauleverer. But, only too plainly, it wasn't.

"Where's Mauly?" gasped Bunter.

"I guess," drawled Fisher T. Fish, "that that guy is moseying for home jest as fast as his car will burn the wind! Yep!"

"What?" yelled Bunter.

"I'll say so!" grinned Fish. "Jevver get left?"

"But—but—but what—" Bunter stuttered.

"That guy Mauly sure asked me to stick in his study, and lock the door when you moseyed along!" explained Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I agreed to stay as long as it took me to eat the cake!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"It surely was a good cake!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll say I've enjoyed that cake! Sure!"

"Mauly," gasped Bunter—"gone?"

Fisher T. Fish chortled.

"Yep! I guess he was waiting downstairs, and he sure hit the trail pronto as soon as you hit this hyer passage! Jevver get left?"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Fisher T. Fish.

"That—that beast has dodged me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I thought he was in the study all the time—"

"He reckoned you would! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Fishy.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter gave the yelling Fish a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. Then he rolled away in haste, leaving Fisher T. Fish still yelling. Bunter did

the Remove staircase in jumps, the lower passage in bounds. He leaped out of the House doorway into the dusk and the falling flakes—too late!

The car was gone. It had been long gone. Lord Mauleverer evidently was gone, too—long gone. Billy Bunter gazed into the snowy and dusky space, with feelings too deep for words.

A hand touched his shoulder. He blinked round, at the surprised face of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. Quelch, making his own preparations for departure, was surprised to find a member of his Form still lingering about the school.

"Bunter, what are you doing here? Why are you not gone, Bunter?"

Evidently it was time for Bunter to be gone. And—still full of inexpressible feelings—Bunter went!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

In the Dark!

"**C**OLD?" asked Harry Wharton. Hurreo Janset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur, repressed a shiver. The junior from India's coral strand found the British summer none too warm. The British winter he found decidedly "parky."

"N-u-not terrifically!" said the nabob, through his chattering teeth. "But I shall be preposterously glad to get in and derive warmth from a ridiculous fire!"

It was cold—there was no doubt about that. It was a snowy Christmas-tide. The Surrey hills gleamed white through the December dusk. Another fall of snow had come on rather suddenly, and caught the two juniors a mile from home. Flakes danced on a keen, searching wind, which seemed to the Indian junior to penetrate through his thick overcoat as if it had been paper. Wharton and the nabob, home for the holidays at Wharton Lodge, had gone for a ramble that afternoon, and they were returning by a snowy and rather sticky lane when the snowfall restarted after the interval.

"We'll take a short cut," said Harry. "It's less than half the distance across the park. Hop over this fence!"

"The shorter the esteemed cut the better!" agreed Hurreo Janset Ram Singh; and he clambered after his chum over the park palings.

Within, the old leafless trees, ridged with snow, rose like spectres in the dusk. The ground was like a mantle of white, with no trace of a path. But Harry Wharton knew every inch of the grounds round his home, and he started across the park, winding among the frosty trunks without a pause, the nabob tramping after him. The darkness was deepening, the snow falling more thickly, and it was scarcely possible to see a yard in advance.

"Ripping weather for Christmas!" Wharton remarked.

"Eh? Oh, yes!" gasped the nabob. "The ripfulness is terrific! Perhaps a little too terrific! Oooogh!"

Harry Wharton laughed. He was enjoying the keen, frosty air, and the falling flakes did not bother him. It was rather different with the dusky junior from the sunny Orient.

"We'll be in in ten minutes!" he said.

And they tramped on among the frosty old trees. Through the winter gloom, the lighted windows of Wharton Lodge began to gleam in the distance—

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,349.

a comforting sight to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. But the lights in the distance seemed to make the darkness near at hand more intense. Wharton, leading the way, was only a few feet in advance of his chum, but the Nabob of Bhanipur could not see him.

"My esteemed Wharton!" called out the nabob.

"Hallo!" Wharton called back. "This way!"

"Right-ho, my absurd chum! It would be terrifically unpleasant to be lost in this excellent and ridiculous wilderness!" gasped the nabob. "Wait momentarily for me!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh groped on round the big trunk of an oak that his chum had passed. His hand came in contact with an overcoat.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed. "I thoughtfully supposed that you were farther on. Why—what—Whooooo!"

The nabob gave a sudden yell. The overcoat he had grasped twisted suddenly from his hand. The next moment a sudden, violent push sent him staggering backwards, and he landed on his back in the snow.

"My esteemed hat!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Oh crumbs! My idiotic chum, is this a time for absurd larking? Ow!"

There was a swift rustle among the frosty trees. Hurree Singh sat up, gasping for breath. That sudden shove had almost winded him.

Wharton's voice called:

"Coming, Inky?"

"Oooogh!" gasped the nabob. "You silly ass—"

"Hallo! What—?" Wharton was heard groping back. "Where are you?" He almost stumbled over the sitting nabob. "Why, what the thump are you squatting there for, Inky?" He peered down at his chum blankly. "Taking a rest in the snow?"

"My esteemed and idiotic chum, I could not help adopting a sitful attitude when you pushed me over backfully!" gasped the nabob. "What are you larking for, you ass?"

"Who pushed you over, fathead?"

"You did, you ass!"

"I did!" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment. He stooped and grasped the gasping nabob by the arm and helped him to his feet. "What the dickens are you talking about, Inky? I was yards away. You must have bumped into a tree—"

"The tree had an overcoat on, then, and it also had a hand that shovefully pushed me backfully!" grunted Hurree Singh.

Wharton stared at him.

"Look here, Inky, don't be an ass! I never pushed you over; I never knew you'd stopped till I nearly fell over you!"

"Then there is somebody else in this esteemed and terrifically cold spot!" said the nabob. "For certainly I touched an overcoat, and I was pushfully overturned."

"Somebody else here!" repeated Wharton. He smiled. It was unlikely enough that anyone was wandering in Wharton Park after the fall of dusk in the snow and the bitter wind, and still more unlikely that any unknown wanderer should have pushed the nabob over. "You're dreaming, Inky! You must have got a bump from a branch or something."

"Let us proceedfully go on," said the nabob in a very quiet tone.

"This way, old bean!" said Wharton cheerfully.

He led the way again, and the dusky junior followed him. They came out on

the terrace in front of the house; but Wharton did not head for the entrance porch. He had his own way into his "den" at Wharton Lodge—an old stone stair at the side of the house, which led to a balcony on which his windows opened. Once or twice he called to the nabob, who answered only in monosyllables. They reached the stone stair, one side of which was against the wall, the other protected by a balustrade thick with ancient ivy, now mantled with glimmering snow.

Wharton tramped up the steps, the nabob following in silence. They reached the little balcony, which was thick with snow. Through the french window came the ruddy glimmer of a log fire within. Wharton threw open the glass door, and kicked the snow from his boots.

"Trot in, Inky! You'll get warm at last!" he said, with a laugh.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh entered in silence. Wharton followed him in, switched on the electric light, and stirred the burning logs in the wide old hearth. The wood fire blazed up with a warmth that was grateful and comforting to the Indian junior. He threw off his coat, and bent over the fire; but the usual cheery smile was absent from his dusky countenance. Wharton pulled up a deep armchair for him.

"Sit down, old bean! You look jolly cold!" he said. "You'll soon warm up." He gave the logs another stir. "That better?"

"Thank you, yes."

Wharton gave him a glance. For the first time he noticed that his dusky chum was unusually silent and grave.

"Anything wrong, Inky?" he asked.

"Not at all—fully."

"Look here! You're not shirty about anything, surely!" exclaimed Wharton, in surprise. It was utterly unusual for the good-tempered, amiable nabob to be "shirty." He was patient and good-tempered, even with Billy Bunter at Greyfriars—still more so with his friends. Even Bob Cherry was not more cheery and good-humoured than the Nabob of Bhanipur. But there was no mistaking the grave coldness on his bronze visage. He did not reply, and Wharton stared at him harder.

"Look here, Inky, old chap! What's the row?" he asked, in his direct way. "If there's anything amiss, cough it up."

"It was exceedingly unpleasant to be shoved over backfully in the snow, my esteemed Wharton!" said the nabob quietly. "And whyfully did you state that you had not done so?"

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Wharton. "I told you I never shoved you over! Why should I?"

"It was an idiotic lark, I suppose," said Hurree Singh. "But whyfully not say so?"

"Because I didn't do it!" exclaimed Wharton warmly. "I'm not ass enough, I hope, to play such a silly trick; but if I did I should own up! Can't you take my word for it?"

"The word of my esteemed chum is as good as gold!" said the nabob, his dusky face clearing. "Nevertheless, I was knocked over by some person, who shoved me backfully in the dark!"

"Well, it was not I!" said Harry, a little gruffly. "If it really happened, somebody must have been there—goodness knows whom! I think it must have been a branch that caught you."

"It was nothing of the kind, my esteemed Wharton!"

"Well, it's not at all likely that anybody was hanging about there in the dark and the snow," said Harry. "Anyhow, I never touched you, and I hope my word's good enough?"

"Quitefully!" said the nabob.

And the matter dropped, and seemed to have been forgotten, when the chums of Greyfriars went down to tea with Aunt Amy and Colonel Wharton.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Talk on the Telephone!

B UZZZZZZZZZ!
Colonel Wharton, smoking an after-dinner cigar by the fire in the hall, glanced up as the telephone bell rang. Miss Amy Wharton, his sister, was knitting on the other side of the cheery log fire. Aunt Amy was generally knitting, for the benefit of the local poor.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sat on either side of a chess table, deep in a game—too deep to notice the ring on the telephone in the cabinet across the hall. Outside the snow was falling steadily, and the wind wailed round the mullioned windows and red roofs of the old house on the Surrey downs.

The colonel laid his half-smoked cigar down, and crossed to the telephone cabinet, stepped in, and took up the receiver. And Wells, the butler, who had appeared silently from nowhere to answer the ring, faded away again as silently.

"That Wharton?" came a voice over the wires, as the colonel placed the receiver to his ear.

"Speaking!" said the colonel. It did not occur to him, naturally, that he was not the Wharton required!

"Oh, good! Got a cold?"

"What? No!"

"Your voice sounds a bit gruff! If you'd got a cold, it would serve you jolly well right, if you come to that!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" ejaculated the colonel. He had supposed that it was some friend or acquaintance ringing him up; but this did not sound very friendly.

"I mean, after the way you've treated me, you beast!"

"Good gad!"

"Not that I bear malice, you know," went on the voice. "After all, you don't know any better, Wharton! You never had good manners. In fact, your manners were always rather rotten! I dare say you got 'em from that old fat-headed fossil of an uncle of yours."

Colonel Wharton stood as if transfixed. The mention of an "uncle" appraised him that this peculiar telephone call must be intended for his nephew! It was somebody who knew Harry who was phoning. Harry was the "Wharton" who was wanted! But the way in which Wharton's uncle was referred to rather took away the breath of the old soldier.

The voice on the telephone rattled on cheerfully:

"Well, never mind that! I'm not the fellow to think of grudges at Christmas-time! I'll tell you how the matter stands, old chap! I've turned down Mauly! I really meant to give him some time this Christmas; but you know what a thumping bore he is! I felt, after all, that I couldn't stand it! I'll tell you what! I'll give you a look-in!"

"Who is speaking?" hooted the colonel.

"Eh? Don't you know my voice, fat-head? Bunter—your old pal, Bunter! My people are rather keen for me to go to the South of France with them this Christmas! Of course, I should have a gorgeous time! But I really prefer to see old friends. As you'll be having Bob and Nugent and Bull with you later, we shall all be together again—just like Greyfriars, what? That will be ripping! What do you think?"

"Bunter—"

"Yes, Bunter! Don't you know my voice, you ass? I say, Wharton, what about it? You said something about your uncle not liking me very much—but that's all right! I can pull the old donkey's leg all right."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped the colonel.

"He's a bit of a savage old bulldog, I know," went on the happy Bunter. "Bit of a wet blanket at a Christmas party, and all that! But, dash it all, I can stand him! I've got a lot of uncles myself, and I know what they're like. You only have to pull their silly old legs."

"Good gad!"

"Leave the old ass to me! I'll manage him! Personally, of course, you'll be glad to see me, what?"

last time I stayed with Harry, and—and I shall be so glad to see you again! I—I hope you don't think I was calling you names, sir. I was speaking of another old fool—I—I mean—"

The receiver jammed on the hooks with a jam that made the instrument jump. Bunter was suddenly cut off.

Colonel Wharton strode out of the telephone cabinet, with a brow of thunder. Wharton and Hurree Singh had both heard his angry roar, and they looked at him rather curiously, forgetting chess for the moment.

"Harry!" barked the colonel.

"Yes, uncle!" said Wharton, in wonder.

"Have you asked a—a—a young rascal named Bunter here for Christmas?"

"No fear!" answered Harry promptly.

that Billy Bunter's fat car was within reach of a pull.

Buzzzzz!

It was the telephone again!

Colonel Wharton looked up with a grunt.

"Probably that's Bunter again!" he said. "You had better take the call, Harry."

Harry Wharton went to the telephone with a rather grim expression on his face. A well-known fat voice came through.

"That you, Wharton? I mean, Harry?"

"Yes, you blithering freak!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"What do you want, you image?"

"I seem to have got on to your old donkey of an uncle by mistake, old



"I wonder if that fat idiot Bunter has got home?" said Harry Wharton. "I hate kicking out even that fat fooler at this time of the year." "The misfulness will not be a terrific calamity," said Hurree Singh. On the other side of the bed-room door Billy Bunter heard every word.

"You impudent young scoundrel!"

"Eh?"

"You disrespectful young rascal!"

"What?"

"You unmannerly young cub—"

"I—I say, is that Wharton speaking?" squeaked a startled voice.

"It is Colonel Wharton speaking!" roared the old, military gentleman, in a voice that almost made the telephone rock.

There was a gasp on the wires.

"Oh! Oh crikey!"

"You young rascal—"

"Oh lor! It's the old fool himself!" came an involuntary exclamation from Bunter at the other end. "Oh jiminy!"

"If I could reach you, sir, I would box your ears!" hooted the incensed colonel.

"Oh! Oh, really, sir! I—I—I didn't mean—that is to say—oh lor!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I—how are you, sir? I hope you're well! I—I've always remembered how nice you were, sir, the

"I am glad of that!" The colonel calmed down. "You have, of course, as you know, every liberty to ask any friend you like, my boy. But—that impudent young rascal! Good gad! You are not in the habit, I presume, of discussing your uncle with your friends, as an old donkey, and an old fossil, hay?"

"Certainly not!" said Harry, flushing. "Has that fat chump—"

"Well, if he's not coming here, never mind," said the colonel. "By gad, I'd like to box his ears! Yes, by gad!"

"If I see him before next term at Greyfriars, I'll jolly well kick him," said Harry.

"The kickfulness is perpetually necessary for the esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Colonel Wharton sat down again and started a fresh cigar. He was still frowning grimly; and doubtless wishing

chaps! He seemed annoyed about something—he cut off rather short! I was going to ask him to call you to the phone—"

"Is that the lot?"

"No, old fellow! The fact is, I'm rather thinking of coming along your way to-morrow—"

"Put a 'Holiday Annual' in your bags first."

"Eh, why?"

"Because if I see you, I'm going to kick you all the way back to the railway station!"

"Beast!"

"Good-bye; and remember my tip!"

"I say, old chap, hold on! I never meant your silly old uncle to hear me calling him an old donkey—"

Wharton jammed the receiver back on the hooks as his uncle had done—with an expression on his face very like his uncle's, at that moment! He also was

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,349

wishing that Bunter's fat ear was within reach. He went back to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and chess—and there came no further ring on the phone. Bunter had given it up—for the present, at least!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Snowballs for Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"The esteemed Bunter!"

It was the following day, and a bright wintry sun shone down on snowy hills and hedgerows. Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came out of the gates of Wharton Lodge to take the road to Wimford. There was a circus at that little town, which the two juniors were going to honour with a visit. Outside the gates, a fat figure, muffled in coat and scarf, was pacing to and fro in the carpet of snow, every now and then blinking towards the gates impatiently through a pair of spectacles. As the two juniors emerged, that fat figure turned to them with a grunt of relief.

"I say, you fellows, I've been waiting!" said Bunter peevishly. "I fancied you'd be coming out sooner or later, so I thought I'd hang about a bit, see? Glad to see you, old fellows!"

Bunter spoke with effusive cordiality; indeed, with affection. At the same time, there was a rather uneasy blink behind his big spectacles. Even Bunter's "neck" was hardly equal to his present proceedings.

"The gladfulness is entirely on your side, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Buzz off, you fat fly!" growled Harry Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"The buzzfulness off is the proper caper!" said the nabob.

"You shut up, Inky!" said Bunter. "I'm talking to Wharton—you needn't butt in. Bit thick you sticking on to the chap, I think, the way you do—sticking him for a holiday nearly every vac—"

"Kick him, Inky!" said Harry.

"Not the sort of thing I'd do!" said Bunter, with a wary eye on the nabob. "But there it is—some fellows are particular, and some ain't! Harry, old fellow—"

"Have you forgotten what I told you on the phone last night?" asked the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"He, he, he! I can take a joke, old chap! I say, it was rather unfortunate my getting through to your uncle by mistake! These old jossers always get offended if they hear what a fellow really thinks of them! It was really unfortunate!" said Bunter. "That's why I thought I'd speak to you before coming up to the house."

"Oh! You were coming up to the house, were you?"

"Well, naturally, old fellow, as I'm going to give you a few days these hols! I say, is your uncle fearfully waxy?"

"Frightfully!"

"I say, old chap, you can soothe him a bit, somehow! I admit it's rather unfortunate! Think he'd believe it was all a joke, and that I knew he was on the phone, and was just—just joking—"

"I fancy not! And that's not the sort of joke he likes! Any more to say before I kick you?"

"Beast! I mean, look here, dear old chap! Having turned Mauly down, and refused Smithy's invitation—and having written to that chap D'Arcy of St. Jim's that I can't come to him—"

I'm rather in a scrape. Of course, Nugent would be glad to have me, but I can't stand his mob of brothers and sisters! I might give old Bob a turn, but then there's his father—old Major Cherry's even a grumpier beast than your uncle—Here, keep off!"

Bunter jumped away just in time.

"The buzzfulness-off—" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, shut up, Inky! There's Bull—but I can't stand Bull—not at home among all the other Bulls! Of course, I'll put up with him here, when he comes along, Harry!"

"You won't!" said Harry.

"Well, good, if he's not going to be here—"

"He's going to be here—but you're not! For goodness' sake, shut up and cut off! You've got my uncle's rag out, you blithering fathead, or I might have squeezed you in!" said Wharton impatiently.

"Well, that was unfortunate—but, after all, he's an old ass, and you can stuff him somehow! I'll tell you how the matter stands!" said Bunter. "My people have gone to relations at South-end—I mean, they've gone to the South of France for the winter. Sammy's gone to my Uncle George—and, of course, Uncle George would be delighted to see me, too—"

"No accounting for tastes!"

"But I should hardly care for it! There's never enough grub at Uncle George's!" said Bunter sadly. "It's not much I eat, as you know! Still, a fellow expects something decent at Christmas. What? Of course, I could go to Aunt Martha with Bessie—she'd be delighted—she never wrote that if Bessie came she'd have to come without either of her brothers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! Look here, old chap, I expect you to stand by me, after all I've done for you!" said Bunter warmly. "You can hardly let a fellow down, I think."

"If you'd had sense enough not to insult my uncle, I might have managed it, you blithering owl!" said Harry. "Now it's no go! So chuck it!"

"Well, look here, I'd come in quietly and you needn't mention it to your uncle at first!" suggested Bunter. "I'll lie low a bit in your rooms, till you've had time to soothe the old fathead! What about that?"

"The old what?"

"The old fathead—Here, keep off!" yelled Bunter, dodging again. This time he did not dodge quickly enough. There was a bump as the Owl of the Remove rolled over in the snow.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Have another?" snapped Wharton.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I jolly well won't stay with you now! See? Think I could stand your old fossil of an uncle, and your old frump of an aunt? No fear! If you think I can stand your mouldy old relations, Wharton, I can jolly well say—Yaroooooh! Whoooo! Yow-ow-ow!"

Whiz! Whiz! Wharton gathered handfuls of snow, and opened fire.

Snowballs pounded on Billy Bunter right and left.

Wharton seemed angry—why, Bunter did not know! But there was no doubt about the fact!

"Go it, Inky!" panted Wharton. "Give him a few!"

"The fowlfulness will be terrific!" grinned the nabob gathering snow.

Whiz! Whiz! Crash! Smash!

Bunter rolled and roared.

"Ow! Leave off, you beasts!"

Yaroooooh! Oh crikey! Oh lor'!

Whoop!

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The fat junior scrambled to his feet. Snowballs still whizzed, hard and fast, fairly raining on William George Bunter.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

Whiz! Smash! Crash!

"Ow! Oh jiminy! Boasts!" shrieked Bunter.

He ran for it. Snowballs whizzed after him, pounding on his podgy back as he fled. Down the road went Billy Bunter at top speed and behind him, for a considerable distance, ran the two juniors, gathering snow and whizzing snowballs as he ran. Loud howls and squeaks came from the Owl of the Remove as he leaped and jumped and bounded.

Wharton and the nabob stopped at last, panting for breath. Billy Bunter, going strong, vanished in the distance. The chum of the Remove turned back and walked in the direction of Wimford—done with Billy Bunter! So they supposed, at least! But, as a matter of fact, they were far from done with Billy Bunter yet!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Uninvited Guest!

"**B**EAST!" groaned Billy Bunter. It was dismal! It was chilly! It was getting dark!

Bunter was not enjoying life!

Harry Wharton and his chum, in the circus tent at Wimford, had probably forgotten his fat existence. If they had thought of him, they would hardly have guessed where he was at the present moment!

Bunter was on the snowy lawn, below the terrace that ran before Wharton Lodge! From there, in the thickening winter dusk, he could see lighted windows and the ruddy glow from the fire in the old hall.

That ruddy glow looked inviting and hospitable. But it had no hospitality for Billy Bunter! Once, as he stood under a leafless tree, he had glimpsed Colonel Wharton at the open door, looking out at the weather. There was nothing encouraging to Bunter in the old, bronzed visage of the colonel.

Even Bunter realised that it was unfortunate that the colonel had taken that call on the phone, and listened to Bunter's genuine opinion of him! But for that, he had no doubt that Wharton would have taken him in.

Wharton was, in Bunter's opinion, soft, though not so soft as Mauly. Soft enough for Bunter's purpose—but for that dashed, grim, old gargoyle of an uncle! That had torn it!

By a tactful process of buttering-up, perhaps, Wharton could have set the matter right somehow. Instead of which he had snowballed Bunter, and walked away to Wimford, evidently glad to be done with him!

Bunter blinked at the lighted windows and groaned.

But for one circumstance, even the Owl of the Remove would have given it up and taken the home-trail.

But Bunter, like Cortes of old, had burned his ships behind him!

Bunter Court—otherwise Bunter Villa—was shut up. The kind aunt who had accommodated Bessie Bunter, declined Billy Bunter at any price! Uncle George was the only resource.

After being so cruelly let down by Mauly, Bunter had tried Uncle George. Sammy Bunter was there, and Billy

joined him there. But a couple of days with Mr. George Bunter had fed him up.

Mr. George Bunter, as it happened, was also fed-up!

The feeling, in fact, was mutual!

On the very first day a cake had been missing from the larder. On the second a pudding was missing! Mr. George Bunter was not one of those hospitable uncles who love to see fellows eat! He seemed to fancy that six helpings at meal-times was enough for a fellow! He was quite cross when the cook complained.

That same evening a cold fowl was missing! Upon which, Bunter's Uncle George informed him that it was time that he was missing, too! Bunter's telephone call to Wharton Lodge had followed.

STOP FOR A LAUGH AT THIS WINNING JOKE!

For the following rousing rib-tickler George Bradshaw, of 110, Wanlip Lane, Birstall, nr. Leicester, has been awarded one of this week's **USEFUL PENKNIVES**.



Old Gentleman: "Do you know what happens to little boys who smoke?"
 'Erbert: "Not 'arf I don't. Nossy Parkers comes an' worrits 'em abaat it. You're the fifth to-day!"

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

Owing to the unfortunate fact that Colonel Wharton had taken that call, Billy Bunter told Sammy that he would have to put up with the stingy old codger after all!

Unluckily, the "stingy old codger" came into the room in time to hear the remark! That did it! Bunter had to start in the morning!

Going back was not to be thought of! There was a probability of Uncle George's boot entering into the discussion if he did.

Bunter rang up Mauleverer Towers. He was informed, from that palatial establishment, that Lord Mauleverer was away with friends. This was the last straw! It was Wharton Lodge or nothing!

It looked as if it were going to be nothing!

Darkness was falling!

Bunter, like the unhappy gentleman

in the poem, was in danger of finding his lodging on the cold, cold ground!

What was to be done?

Who was to be done?

Standing under the leafless tree, in the thickening winter gloom, Billy Bunter thought out that problem.

He was even minus a railway fare! Travelling expenses had reduced his cash resources to threepence!

On threepence a fellow could not get anywhere! Neither could he put up at the humblest inn!

It was, indeed, a knotty problem.

There was, in fact, only one answer to the riddle! Billy Bunter got into motion at last. The darkness was thick enough to screen his movements. He crept along the terrace, and passed round the corner of the building. He knew his way about, from many previous visits. He reached the stone steps that led up to the balcony outside Wharton's room.

Up those steps went Bunter!

Wharton's "den" had a door on the balcony, and it was unlikely that the beast had fastened it in the daytime. Bunter reached the balcony, and groped over the french window.

He gave a grunt of satisfaction as it opened to his touch.

He rolled in and shut the french window behind him.

He did not venture to switch on the light.

There was a glimmering of red embers in the hearth, and Bunter stirred them, and added a few logs, making a cheery and ruddy fire.

Then he stretched himself in Wharton's armchair, with his feet on the hearth, finding the warmth grateful and comforting after the bitter cold out of doors. The snow was beginning to fall again at nightfall. The hapless Owl of the Remove had, at least, found a shelter from the weather.

What he was going to do when Wharton came back he had not yet decided. It was a difficult matter to decide.

Only on one point was Bunter decided—he was not getting out! He had got in—and he was not getting out again!

He remembered that there was an unused attic, up a little stair near Wharton's rooms. As a last resource, he could stow himself away in that! Anyhow, he was staying!

That beast, Colonel Wharton, would get over his beastly temper some time! Harry Wharton might remember all that Bunter had done for him, and show a proper feeling of gratitude! Something might turn up, anyhow! At least, he was under a roof! A judicious moment might be selected for revealing his presence. Anyhow, there he was!

Thinking deeply—much more deeply than was his wont—Billy Bunter rested in the deep, comfortable chair, and toasted his toes at the fire—very much on the alert, in case of a surprise.

Any servant who came to the room would naturally be surprised to find him there, and would certainly report his unexpected presence to the master of the house. And Bunter did not want to meet Colonel Wharton! He would as soon have met his own Uncle George!

He pricked up his fat ears at the sound of a footstep at the door on the corridor.

He sat upright in the chair.

He was on the alert—and intended to dodge out of sight if there was any arrival. But the footstep was followed by the immediate opening of the

door. It occurred to Bunter—too late—that he ought to have been out of sight already! Really, it was not prudent to sit before the fire, toasting his toes, when his presence in the house was to be kept—for the present—a dead secret. But it was too late to think of that now!

The door opened and someone stepped in. The high back of the armchair concealed Bunter, unless the newcomer came towards the fireplace.

But as the newcomer was most probably someone who had come to mend the fire, Bunter was booked!

For a moment he was utterly dismayed. It looked as if his little game was going to be knocked on the head at the very start.

But Bunter's fat brain, under unaccustomed pressure, worked swiftly. The Greyfriars ventriloquist had his own resources in a tight corner.

Bunter's trick of ventriloquism was weird and wonderful. It was, as Bunter boasted, a gift. That, certainly, was true; for had it required much intelligence, Bunter could hardly have done it.

He could imitate any voice at Greyfriars, from the bark of Mr. Quelch, to the fruity tones of Mr. Prout; from Lord Mauleverer's lazy drawl, to the staccato snap of the Bounder. Something unusual in the fat gullet was perhaps the cause—perhaps even the fatness thereof! Great singers, as Bunter sometimes told the Remove fellows, were always fat!

Not that Bunter was a great singer! But there was no doubt that he was a great ventriloquist!

Bunter had little time to think. Whoever had opened the door had switched on the light, and was stepping across the room towards the fireplace. A few moments, and the fat Owl of the Remove would have been revealed.

Snarl!

It was a sudden, savage snarl as if from some particularly ill-disposed dog, and it came or appeared to come, from the direction of the balcony.

The footsteps stopped.

Bunter heard the unseen person who was crossing the room turn in the direction of the window. Evidently he was surprised.

The footsteps re-started, this time crossing to the window behind the high back of Bunter's armchair.

With his fat heart thumping, Bunter peered round the chair, at the back of the newcomer, who was facing the window.

Although he had only a back view he recognised a lad, who was a relative of Wells, the butler, and employed as a page at Wharton Lodge. His name was Thomas, and Bunter had seen him a good many times before, though he did not want to meet him now.

Thomas went to the french window, opened it, and stared out on the dusky, snowy balcony. Apparently he was looking for that snarling dog, which certainly had no business to be there.

"Shoo!" said Thomas. "Shoo! Get out of it! Shoo!"

As there was no further sound from the dog, Thomas was satisfied that he had "shooed" it away, down the steps to the garden. He closed the window again.

"Thomas!"

It was, or seemed to be, the voice of Mr. Wells, the butler, from the corridor.

"Oh, yes, sir!" called back Thomas.

"Go down to the kitchen at once!"

"I came up to mend the fire!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,349.

"Never mind the fire! Do as I tell you!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

To Bunter's immense relief Thomas crossed to the door, switched off the light, and went out, closing the door after him.

Bunter gasped with relief.

Thomas, no doubt, was surprised not to see Mr. Wells in the corridor; but he was an obedient youth, and he went down to the kitchen at once.

Billy Bunter grinned.

He had saved his fat bacon. Immediately he quitted his comfortable quarters in the armchair. Thomas was fairly certain to come back before long as the fire had to be kept in, against Master Harry's return. Bunter had plenty of time to get out of sight.

A door opposite the window opened into Wharton's bed-room. Bunter promptly got on the other side of it.

There he sat on the bed, prepared to dodge underneath the same at a sound. Ten minutes later he heard a sound of logs being placed on the fire in the adjoining room, and there was a glimmer of light under the communicating door. Bunter dived under the bed, and palpitated there till all was silent again.

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Tortures of Tantalus!

"TEA in the study," said Harry Wharton, with a smile.

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled a dusky smile, and nodded.

The chums of Greyfriars had returned from Wimford in time for tea. Colonel Wharton and Miss Amy were out, and the juniors were left to themselves. On such occasions Wharton liked to "tea" in his den, which was cosy and reminiscent of the study at Greyfriars School.

So, having given due instructions to Wells, Wharton went up to his room with the cheery nabob.

The little incident of the previous day, when Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had been so roughly and mysteriously shoved over in the dark under the trees, was forgotten now. Wharton's belief was that Inky must have bumped into a branch in the dark; while the nabob was satisfied that some person unknown had knocked him over, though why, he had no idea. There had been for a few minutes a faint "shirtiness" on the subject; but that was quite washed out now, and the matter dismissed. Both the juniors were looking very bright and cheery as they came into Wharton's den. They had enjoyed the circus at Wimford, and they were looking forward to the coming of Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent, and Johnny Bull and the festivities of Yuletide.

Christmas was only a few days off now, and already Wharton Lodge had a rather festive look. Aunt Amy had been decorating her dear nephew's room, and bright holly gleamed from the walls.

Thomas brought in the tea. Thomas was a chubby youth, generally wearing

a broad grin on his plump countenance. That grin was now absent, and Thomas looked subdued and glum. Noticing that circumstance, Harry inquired the cause.

"What's up, old bean?" he asked cheerily.

Thomas' grin returned at once.

"Nothing, sir," he answered. "Leastways, it's all right. Mr. Wells did call me."

"Wells called you?" repeated Harry blankly.

"And he forgot," said Thomas. "Jest in a few minutes, sir, he forgot. 'I wasn't my fault.'"

"Oh, Wells called you, and forgot, did he?" said Harry, rather puzzled. "Well, we all forget things at times, Tommy, old sport."

"Jawing a chap," said Thomas.

"Oh!"

"I come 'ere, sir, to mend the fire, which was my duty," said Thomas. "I wouldn't let you, sir, come in out of the snow and find the fire out. Mr. Wells calls me from the passidge. 'Go down to the kitchen,' he says. And I goes down."

Thomas frowned, evidently with a sense of injury.

"I sees Mr. Wells in the 'all," continued Thomas, "and he asks me if I've mended the fire already. 'You told me to go down to the kitchen,' I says. 'I did not,' he says. Just like that, sir."

"Wells doesn't generally forget things," said Harry. "Sure he called you, kid?"

"Plain as I 'ear you now, sir. And he says to me, says he, 'I did not call you,' he says. 'Go and mend Master Harry's fire at once,' he says; 'and don't be lazy!' 'Me lazy, sir!' said Thomas warmly."

"The forgetfulness is a privilege of advanced and venerable years, my esteemed Thomas," said the Nabob of Bhanipur soothingly. "It is the duty of esteemed youth to exercise terrific patience in dealing with venerable johnnies."

Thomas grinned.

"Oh, yes, sir!" he said. "And Mr. Wells is always kind, and very seldom speaks sharp, sir. Only he did call me."

And, having finished laying the tea, Thomas retired, happily unconscious of the fact that a fat youth, listening on the other side of the bed-room door, was grinning from one fat ear to the other. That little misunderstanding between Mr. Wells and Thomas rather amused Billy Bunter.

"Might fancy ourselves in the study at Greyfriars—what?" said Harry Wharton, as he poured out the tea. "Only I wish that Bob and Franky and Johnny were here, old bean."

"The wishfulness of my esteemed self is also great, but the arrivefulness of our ridiculous friends will shortly eventuate," said the nabob.

"I wonder if that fat idiot has got home?" said Harry, remembering the unimportant existence of Billy Bunter. "Bother him!"

"Bother and blow him!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I hate kicking out even that fat fooler at this time of the year, but even if I wanted him, I couldn't land him on my uncle, after what the blithering idiot gabbled on the phone. I don't think uncle would stand it, if I did."

"The missfulness of the esteemed Bunter's company will not be a terrific calamity."

"Hardly," said Wharton, laughing.

On the other side of the bed-room door Billy Bunter shook a fat fist.

Listeners, it is said, never hear any good of themselves; and that was often Bunter's fate.

Bunter was hungry. He was always hungry, if it came to that. But now he was specially, fearfully, frightfully hungry.

He could scarcely resist the temptation to open the door, and take the risk of joining the tea-party in the next room.

But the remarks he heard had a discouraging effect. Obviously if a propitious moment for revealing his presence was to come, it had not come yet.

That stuffy old colonel, it seemed, still had his back up. It was a sad fact that he never had liked Bunter. Why, Bunter could not guess; but there it was.

But to remain in hiding, hungry, while tea was going on, only a few yards from him, was sheer torture to Billy Bunter.

Tantalus, of old, was tormented by the sight of food always just out of his reach. Now Bunter could fully understand and appreciate the tortures of Tantalus. Never had he been so tantalised.

Peering through the keyhole, he could discern the two juniors at the tea-table; and the good things on the table. The click of crockery reached his fat ears. There were poached eggs, and a large cake, and a dish of jam-tarts; and the fragrant scent of fried sausages reached him, and made his mouth water. Tantalus' experiences in olden times were a mere joke to this! Both the juniors, hungry after a long walk in the December cold, were doing justice to the spread. Billy Bunter could have groaned aloud—though he took good care not to do so! He had a horrid certainty that discovery meant the order of the boot!

But he had to eat!

This was more than flesh and blood could stand!

Bunter set his fat wits to work.

Necessity is the mother of invention! Somehow, those two frightful beasts had to be got away from the room for a few minutes, at least, while Bunter took the keen edge off his appetite. The scent of sausages spurred Bunter on.

He tiptoed away from the communicating door at last to the bed-room door in the corridor.

He opened that door, and blinked out cautiously through his big spectacles.

No one was in sight, naturally. A light burned in the passage, and Bunter could see a row of doors in one direction and the landing in the other.

He tiptoed out.

His first proceeding was to switch off the corridor light. He felt safer in the dark.

Then, with beating heart, he tapped at the door of Wharton's den. The Greyfriars ventriloquist was ready for action again!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Who?

TAP!
Harry Wharton glanced round to the door.

"Hallo! Come in!" he called out.

The door did not open.

But a voice—which anyone at Wharton Lodge would have sworn was the rather mumbling voice of Thomas, the page—answered:

"Oh, Master Harry! Please come down at once, sir! There's been an accident, sir, and the colonel's a-talkin' on the phone, sir."

"Oh!"

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Harry Wharton leaped to his feet. Why Thomas called through the door, instead of opening it, would have puzzled him if he had given it a thought. But the startling news that there had been an accident banished all other thoughts from his mind. Colonel Wharton and his sister were out in the car—and the snowy roads were dangerous enough. Wharton fairly bounded to the door.

He reached it so quickly that Billy Bunter, outside, had barely time to whip back into the next room and shut himself in.

The next moment Wharton's door flew open.

"An accident!" panted Wharton. "Who—?" He stared. The corridor was empty. Naturally he had expected to see Thomas there!

But without a pause he dashed away towards the stairs, with Hurree Jamset Ram Singh at his heels. Both the juniors were equally alarmed and anxious. They did the stairs three at a time, and rushed breathless into the hall below.

Bunter, in the bed-room, could hardly believe in his good luck!

He lost no time.

Wharton and Inky were still on the

stairs, running and leaping down, when Bunter opened the communicating door and whipped into Wharton's den.

Staying only to stuff a sausage into his mouth, the fat Owl of the Remove gathered up his plunder.

There was a rucksack hanging on the wall, used by Wharton in his camping excursions. Bunter grabbed it down, stuffed the cake into it, and followed up the cake with the tarts and a pile of toast. Meanwhile, he munched the sausage. The sausage disappeared in record time. Another followed it, and then Bunter made a clean sweep of what remained of the poached eggs. There were some other things left—but Bunter dared not linger! Probably for the first time on record the Owl of the Remove turned from a tea-table on which there remained things to eat! With his bag of provender in his fat hands he bolted back into the bed-room, closed the door, and dived under the bed with his plunder. Bunter's motions generally resembled those of the tortoise. Now, a flash of lightning had hardly anything on Bunter!

Meanwhile, Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had rushed down into the hall, and Harry bounded

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,349.

into the telephone cabinet. To his surprise, the receiver was on the hook! He grabbed it off.

"Number, please!" It was a voice from the exchange. If Colonel Wharton had been on the phone at all he was cut off.

"Wells!" shouted Wharton.

"Master Harry!" The butler of Wharton Lodge came across the hall, with surprise in his usually expressionless countenance. "What—"

"Did you take the call? What has happened?"

"There has been no call, sir!" said the astonished Wells.

"No call on the phone!" exclaimed Wharton, stupefied.

"No, sir!"

"Has not my uncle rung up—"

"No, sir!"

"But—hasn't there been an accident and—?" Wharton fairly gasped in his amazement.

"Not that I am aware of, sir! Certainly there has been no call on the telephone!" said Wells.

"I—I—I—what—what did Thomas mean, then? Has that young idiot been scaring me for nothing?" panted Wharton. Anxiety gave place to anger. It was a relief to find that there had been no telephone call about an accident. But such a heartless trick was intensely exasperating.

"Thomas—" repeated Wells blankly.

"The young rascal! Has the kid taken to playing idiotic practical jokes, or what?" roared Wharton, red with anger. "He came up to my room and called in that there had been an accident and that my uncle was speaking on the phone!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Wells.

"It is an esteemed and idiotic practical joke!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur, in wonder. "The execrable Thomas must be off his ridiculous rocker!"

Wells frowned portentously.

"Thomas, sir, is a relative of mine," he said with dignity. "I can hardly believe that he has done such a thing, sir! If so, he must be discharged immediately! The boy has been rather queer to-day—he fancied, or said he fancied, that I called him out of your room this afternoon—"

"Where is he?" demanded Harry.

"Robert!" Wells addressed one of his retainers. "Where is Thomas?"

"Upstairs in the master's room, sir, a-cleaning up some snow which blew in at the winder, which the colonel left it open—"

"Call him at once!" said Wells.

Robert went to fetch Thomas.

There was a glint in Harry Wharton's eyes as he waited. Such a trick, which had alarmed him for the safety of his relatives, was not to be forgiven. Had Thomas been a Greyfriars fellow, like himself, Wharton would certainly have punched his head, hard. As the matter stood, it was the "sack" for Thomas.

Robert came back in a few minutes, followed by Thomas, who had a wondering expression on his chubby face.

"You young sweep!" shouted Wharton. "What do you mean by it?"

Thomas blinked at him.

"Wot 'ave I done, sir?" he asked.

"You know what you've done, you young rascal! Why should you play such a beastly rotten trick on me?" exclaimed Wharton indignantly.

Thomas' eyes seemed to be almost popping out of his chubby face, in his amazement and dismay.

"I ain't done anything!" he exclaimed in bewilderment. "What have I done, sir? I been sweeping up the snow what

blew into the master's room, sir, which the winder was left open—"

"You came to my room and called through the door that my uncle had had an accident—"

"I didn't!" gasped Thomas.

"You didn't?" stuttered Wharton.

"Course I didn't, sir! Why should I?"

"Thomas, how dare you contradict Master Harry, who saw you—?" began Wells.

"I didn't see him," said Harry. "He called through the door. But I know his voice."

"The knowfulness is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, his dark eyes very keenly on Thomas' dismayed face.

"I didn't!" gasped Thomas. "I never did, sir! I wouldn't! 'Ere's Robert! I say he come to me in the master's room—"

"I found him there, sir!" said Robert.

"He must have gone back there after calling me," said Harry. "But if you say you didn't, Thomas—"

"I didn't, sir!" gasped Thomas. "I'll swear I didn't! As if I'd play such a trick on you, sir!"

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"Well, I certainly thought it was your voice," said Harry. "Didn't you, Inky?"

"The thinkfulness was terrific."

"It wasn't me, sir!" said Thomas almost tearfully. "I wouldn't go for to do such a thing—"

"Who did, then?" demanded Wells. "Someone did!"

"I dunno! I didn't, Mr. Wells!"

Wharton gave the boy a searching look. Someone, it was certain, had played that unfeeling trick. Why, was a mystery. If it was not Thomas, it was someone else. And the voice had certainly sounded like Thomas'. But the almost tearful earnestness in the chubby face disarmed Wharton.

"Well, if you deny it, kid, I'll take your word," he said. "But I'd like to know who played that rotten trick!"

"So would I, sir!" said Thomas. "I'd like to punch his head, sir!"

"If you are satisfied that it was not Thomas, Master Harry—" said the stately Wells.

"I'm bound to take his word," said Harry.

"Thank you, sir!" said Thomas.

"I shall inquire into the matter sir, with your leave," said Wells.

Harry Wharton nodded and went up

the staircase again with the nabob, both of them greatly perturbed and perplexed. They left Wells and the others in a buzz below.

"What do you think, Inky?" asked Harry, as the juniors came back into the den. "The kid looked as if he was telling the truth. But—"

"The lookfulness was terrific," agreed the nabob. "But the butfulness is also preposterous."

"Well, thank goodness it was only a false alarm, anyhow! Let's finish our tea," said Harry. "Why, what—Great pip! Who's been here?"

He stared blankly at the denuded tea-table.

Hardly a thing remained!

"My esteemed hat!" ejaculated the nabob, equally astonished.

"The—the—the young sweep!" gasped Wharton. "That's why he played that rotten trick—to get us out of the room while he bagged our tea! It must have been Thomas, of course! Who else?"

"The who-fulness is terrific. It is like an esteemed grub raid of the execrable Bunter at Greyfriars," said the nabob in astonishment.

Wharton made an angry stride to the door.

But he paused.

He had told Thomas that he would take his word. And, though he had now found out the motive for the wretched trick, he felt that he could not reopen the matter. Possibly, too, the culprit had not been Thomas—though who else it could have been was a mystery. Anyhow, in the circumstances, he felt that Thomas had to be given the benefit of the doubt—and that was that!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Lodging for the Night!

BILLY BUNTER scarcely breathed. Huddled under Harry Wharton's bed, the fat Owl of the Remove blinked in the light that had suddenly come on.

He blinked at a pair of feet at the bedside.

They were not Wharton's feet. It was not yet Wharton's usual bed-time—and on holiday he was rather likely to be later than was usual at school. Bunter fancied they were Thomas' feet. Anyhow, they were the feet of someone who had come into the bed-room to get it ready for the night. Standing beside the bed, that someone was only a yard from the fat Owl, stilling his breathing underneath. Bunter heard the rustle of a coverlet, and a hand brushing on a pillow. Then the feet moved away, and Bunter saw more and more of their owner as he crossed the room to the fireplace. There he knelt down to ignite a wood fire, and Bunter could see that it was Thomas.

Thomas ignited the fire and watched it burn up. But Bunter no longer watched Thomas; he huddled right out of sight of that youth under the bed, fearful that a chance glimpse might discover him.

But Thomas, of course, had no idea that anybody was under the bed, and he did not glance in that direction.

Leaving a cheerful fire burning to greet Master Harry's eyes when he came up to bed, Thomas quitted the room and went along to the next to perform a similar service for the Nabob of Bhanipur. He turned out the light as he went, leaving the room illumined only by the glow from the fire.

Billy Bunter was glad to hear the door shut after him.

In other respects Bunter was not feeling glad. He was feeling worried.

If he had not dared to reveal his presence at Wharton Lodge before, much less did he dare to reveal it since the trick he had played on the captain of the Remove.

A grub raid was not likely to make Wharton angry for long, but the false alarm of an accident to his uncle had certainly angered him deeply.

At present he attributed the whole thing to Thomas, or to some person unknown. The discovery of Bunter would, of course, enlighten him. At the thought of it Bunter could almost feel the impact of a boot on his tight trousers.

He had to lie doggo.

Fortunately, he had had something to eat. He had not had enough, of course; but that was nothing new, he never had enough. He had parked enough to last

him for some time. Now he was both tired and sleepy. Going to sleep under a bed was not to be thought of. Besides, the beast might look under his bed before he turned in.

Where was Bunter to sleep?

He thought of the attic over the bedrooms. From previous visits to Wharton Lodge—under different conditions—he remembered that attic. No light and no fire; but nobody ever went there, which was the chief thing. Sleeping on the bare floor without blankets on a night in December was impossible, especially for Bunter. But there were plenty of bed-clothes at hand. It was easy enough to snaffle them.

He heard Thomas come out of Hurrec Singh's room and pass the door, going towards the service staircase. Thomas was gone—and the coast was clear.

Nobody now was likely to be rooting about till bed-time.

If bedclothes were snaffled they would be missed. That was a difficulty. It might lead to suspicion that some extraneous person was in the house. That meant a search—and the boot for Bunter!

Thomas had been suspected of bagging the juniors' tea. But Thomas could hardly be suspected of bagging the bed-clothes!

Bunter had to think this out. It was irritating and annoying, because he was drowsy and would much rather have gone to sleep. But there was no help for it.

He rolled out from under the bed at last. There was a lurking fat grin on his face.

He had the idea!

(Continued on next page.)



"Linesman's" store of Soccer knowledge is at the disposal of all MAGNET readers. Send along your queries to him, c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and then look out for a reply in this weekly feature.

LEARNING SOMETHING IN ADVANCE!

ONE of the strange things about football, when you come to think of it, is that the big clubs should regard Cup-ties as much more important than League games. But they certainly do in one respect. As soon as the Cup-ties appear on the programme we hear of officials of this or that club going specially to watch the opponents against whom their side has been drawn in the knock-out competition.

I have even heard of a whole team being taken to see a replayed Cup-tie so that they could sum up the possibilities of their ultimate opponents in the Cup competition. As I have told you previously, I am a great believer in this idea of knowing your opponents, because to a certain extent if a football team knows what it is up against, then that team knows what they have to do in order to win the match.

What strikes me as strange, however, is that the big clubs, concerned as they are in winning a Cup-tie, and going to such lengths to work out the schemes beforehand, do not apply the same principle to their League games.

After all, if it is accepted that by watching forthcoming opponents a Cup team has a better chance of beating those opponents, then surely by watching forthcoming League opponents they would have a better chance of beating them.

I am very glad to note, in this connection, that the officials of at least one League club think they can learn something in advance. You know that Port Vale have done particularly well this season. They are among the surprises of League football. Nobody expected them to make a big show in the Second Division, but they have done it. And I can now let you into a secret. Every Saturday an official of Port Vale has watched a match in which the opponents of Port Vale for the following week have been concerned. That official has then gone back to the players and given them ideas as to what they should

do—the sort of game they should play in order to beat their opponents. I don't say that this is the sole secret of the success of the Port Vale club this season, but it is just one of the little things which tell.

CLUBS AND THEIR COLOURS!

A MAGNET reader who is very much interested in the Everton club, asks me about the colours which are worn by the players. These Everton players wear royal blue shirts and white knickers with a blue stripe down the sides. I can tell you about that strip of blue. Some time ago the players of the Everton club told the officials that they could not always distinguish a friend from foe without looking up. So the blue stripe was introduced to the knickers to rid the players of this necessity.

So now, when an Everton player has the ball at his toe, he does not need to look up to see a colleague to whom he may pass the ball. He merely looks at the knickers, and noticing the blue stripe down the side, is able to find his colleague with the ball. This is another little thing which counts.

Personally, I have never been able to understand why more originality is not shown in choosing the attire which shall be worn by the players of the leading clubs. There are so many whites, blues, and reds that the clubs which use these colours have to change quite frequently, and the change leads to confusion. I sometimes think that it would be much easier if only two colours of shirts were allowed in football—say blue for the men playing on their own ground, and red for the teams playing away from home.

In the old days it used to be a rule that the club oldest in membership of the League should have the prior right to their own colours. Then the rule was altered so that the team playing at home could wear its own colours in League games. In Cup-ties, however, there is now a different rule altogether. When two teams

are drawn together whose colours clash then both teams have to make a change.

EXTRA TIME FOR PENALTY KICKS!

A SOMEWHAT intricate problem has been sent to me from a reader at Manchester. It refers to the extra time which must be allowed for the taking of a penalty kick after the ordinary time has expired. You know, of course, that if, in the last few seconds of a game, the referee considers that a penalty kick should be awarded, the ordinary time must be extended for the purpose of allowing the penalty kick to be taken. Now comes the query as to how much extra time should be allowed.

Just recently, in a match in the Manchester district, so I am informed, the referee stretched the time so that a penalty kick should be taken. The taker of the kick sent the ball against the goalkeeper, who pushed it out. The taker of the kick followed up, and banged the ball into the net. Should a goal have been allowed?

The answer is in the negative. If the taker of a penalty kick, for which extra time has been allowed, does not score with the first kick, then the time is up automatically, and the game should be declared finished.

Certain complications arise in regard to this question, concerning which the rules are not very clear. The Scottish Football Association, for instance, have asked for a ruling in the case of a goalkeeper partly stopping a ball from such a penalty kick which twists out of his hands and goes into the net. Is it a goal? Personally, I think a goal should be allowed, but the fact that the Scottish F.A. have queried this shows that there is a difference of opinion on the point. I think that the question of a goal or not a goal depends on the result of the one kick from the penalty spot.

I have a letter from a player in the Brighton district who thinks he is good enough to make progress in the game, but who is worried as to how his prowess shall be brought to the notice of the leading clubs of the district. I don't think this ought to be very difficult, and I suggest that a note to the manager of the Brighton and Hove Albion club would at least result in the ambitious player getting a trial. After all if we bring fellows from South Africa—as we have been doing—just to have a trial with English clubs, and all expenses paid, surely the home player can get a trial. If my correspondent does not get the trial which he desires I hope he will write to me again.

"LINESMAN."

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THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Exit the Nabob!

"GOOD-NIGHT, old chap!"

"Good-night, my esteemed Wharton!"

It was ten o'clock; later than bedtime at Greyfriars. The two juniors came up together, and Wharton said good-night to his guest at the door of the latter's room, and then went on to his own.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh entered his room and switched on the light and closed the door.

His first step was towards the fire; welcome to any fellow on a freezing December night; doubly welcome to the youth from the sunny East! Standing by the fire, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh glanced at his bed—and jumped!

"My esteemed hat!" he ejaculated.

He stared at the bed.

Under the combined supervision of Miss Amy Wharton and the excellent Wells, household matters at Wharton Lodge worked as exactly as if they went by machinery.

It was impossible, of course, that a guest's bed had been left in that state by careless hands.

Indeed, the nabob had been in the room once or twice, and then the bed had been in apple-pie order.

Now it was utterly dismantled! All the bedclothes were gone—even to the pillow and bolster.

Who had played this extraordinary trick?

With a slight grimace in his usually

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smiling and good-natured dusky face, the nabob picked up the handkerchief that lay beside the bed.

Crumpled and a little grubby, it looked as if it had fallen by accident from a pocket.

The grimace in his dusky face intensified as he glanced at the initials worked in the corner of the handkerchief.

He laid it down, and stood very silent and still.

It was Harry Wharton's handkerchief! Wharton had been there and dropped it; that was the only conclusion to be drawn. He had dropped it beside the dismantled bed.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's lips set in a tight line.

This sort of thing, at school, might be a jape! Such japes were quite out of place at home, between host and guest! Wharton, moreover, was the last fellow to play such a trick—merely as a trick! He was no practical joker like Wibley of the Remove—not even a thoughtless fellow like Bob Cherry. He was not in the least the kind of fellow to act unthinkingly.

The dusky face of the nabob hardened and hardened.

If Wharton had done this, he had not done it thoughtlessly! And Wharton, it appeared, had done it! There was his handkerchief, dropped in bundling up the missing bedclothes! No servant in the house would have dared to play such a trick—or could have had any imaginable motive for doing so!

Back into the nabob's mind came the incident in the park! He had been roughly shoved over—knocked over! Wharton had denied having done it—

but even in denying it, had admitted that he did not believe that anyone else had been at hand! Inky had taken his word! But now—

He had been mystified by that incident! He could not be mystified by the present one!

When a fellow treated a guest in this way, it meant only one thing; he did not want him!

The colour glowed in the nabob's dusky cheek!

Almost always he spent the holidays with Wharton. His native land of Bhanipur was far away. Colonel Wharton, who had known his father in India, took it as a matter of course that Wharton Lodge should be his home in England. Never had it crossed the nabob's mind to doubt that he was welcome there!

But now—

He had other friends! Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, would have made him more than welcome. Lord Mauleverer would have welcomed him to Mauleverer Towers.

Standing very silent and still, the nabob thought it out.

Bob Cherry, in his place, would probably have gone along to Wharton's room and asked him what the thump he meant by it.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh did not think of doing that.

If he had out-worn his welcome in a friend's house, he had only one wish—to withdraw himself as quietly and unostentatiously as possible. A row would serve no purpose; and he did not want a row.

And there was the colonel to be considered, and his kind sister—both hospitality itself, and attached to their Indian guest. Least said soonest mended!

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh did not ring for Wells and more bedclothes. He did not even think of it. To let the matter come to the knowledge of the servants was too mortifying.

Bunter had wondered whether Inky would kick up a row, or take the thing quietly with offended dignity. He had thought the latter the more probable of the two! Obtuse as Bunter was, there was a considerable vein of slyness in him as in many stupid people. He had read the Indian prince's character aright!

Hurree Singh could not, in the circumstances, go to bed! He could not quit the house immediately without a painful explanation with Colonel Wharton!

He turned off the light and sat in an armchair before the fire, after piling it with logs.

He was not going to say a word! He could not do so, in fact, without landing Wharton in trouble with his uncle, who was very meticulous in matters of hospitality to a guest! Certainly he did not desire that. He was deeply, bitterly wounded and offended; but like a true Oriental, the more deeply he felt, the more deeply he was disposed to hide his feelings.

It was long before his eyes closed.

But they closed at last; and did not open again till the pale winter dawn was glimmering in.

The fire had burned out by that time; and the Nabob of Bhanipur shivered as he rose from the chair. It was a cold and snowy morning.

The hour was early; no one else was stirring yet, except the old colonel, who was always an early riser, and perhaps the early housemaids. The nabob lost no time.

He sat down at the table to write a note, which he enclosed in an envelope and sealed. Then he rapidly packed a suitcase.

He blinked through several drawers in a chest till he came to Harry Wharton's handkerchief-box. From that box he extracted a handkerchief which had Wharton's initials in the corner. He crumpled it in his grubby hands to give it the appearance of having been in a pocket.

Then he rolled to the door and blinked cautiously into the passage.

The coast was clear.

He whipped along to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's room. From hearing Thomas' movements, he had no doubt that it was the next bed-room to Wharton's. As soon as he entered it he knew that it was right; various possessions of the Nabob of Bhanipur were in sight. Thomas had left a nice fire burning, which gave Bunter all the light he wanted.

He dropped Wharton's handkerchief beside the bed.

Then he coolly stripped the nabob's bed, making up sheets and blankets into a bundle, and pillow and bolster and eiderdown quilt into another bundle.

In the course of that labour he discovered a hot-water bottle in the bed, which he gladly appropriated and stuck into one of the bundles.

A cautious blink into the dimly lit corridor showed him that the coast was still clear. Moving at unusual speed, he bore first one and then the other bundle along to the little stair that led steeply up to the attic under the eaves.

The attic door was locked, the key in the outside. Bunter unlocked it by the light of a match and put the key on the inside.

He carried his bundles in.

Then he locked the attic door after him.

He blinked round rather dismally in his new quarters. There was a little dormer window, through which came a pale glimmer of winter starlight and the gleam of snow on the roofs.

It was cold! It was chilly! It was dismal! But it was a case of any port in a storm!

And Bunter had to make the best of it!

After all, he had sheets and blankets and a warm quilt and a hot-water bottle! Matters might have been worse—much worse!

And he was sleepy!

He rolled himself in the bedclothes, rolled the quilt round him, and lay down, with the hot-water bottle at his feet!

Really, it was not so bad!

There was a grin on his fat face as he laid his bullet head on the pillow. Hurree Singh, finding his bed-room in that dismantled state, and Wharton's handkerchief on the floor, could hardly come to any conclusion but that his chum had been japing him!

It might lead to a row between the chums of the Remove! That did not matter, so long as it did not lead to Bunter!

Or Inky might be deeply offended and dignified, and in that frame of mind, disclaim to utter a word of complaint! Unassuming as he was, the nabob never forgot that he was a prince in his own country. That, in Bunter's opinion, would be best—it would make him quite safe!

Anyhow, Bunter had a feeling that he had done all he could, and had acted with great astuteness. He had done his best; and no fellow could do more!

With that happy conviction in his fat mind, Billy Bunter went to sleep—fortunately for him, too far from the occupied rooms for his snore to be heard!



Colonel Wharton grasped his nephew by the collar with one hand and Hurree Singh with the other. Then, with a powerful wrench, he dragged them apart. "What the thump—" panted Wharton. "Oh! You, uncle!" "How dare you?" rumbled the colonel. "Fighting, by gad!" The two juniors stood crimson and panting, under the stern, angry glare of the colonel.

Stepping quietly, he descended the stairs. An early housemaid in the hall looked at him. Wells—appearing, as usual, silently from nowhere—bade him a respectful good-morning—his eyes dwelling rather curiously on the suitcase in the dusky schoolboy's hand.

"It's early, sir!" said Wells.

"Quitefully so!" agreed the nabob. "Perhapsfully you will have the kindness, my esteemed Wells, to deliver this note to the worthy Wharton when he comes downfully?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Wells.

He took the note, and opened the door for the nabob. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stepped out into the December dawn, glimmering on a world of white! At that untimely hour, there was no taxi to be had; and he had to walk to the railway station at Wimford, a good distance from Wharton Lodge. He started down the drive, carrying his suitcase.

Wells gazed after him. He was puzzled. Colonel Wharton had gone out for an early walk; but the nabob could hardly be going for a walk, with a heavy suitcase in his hand.

Wells realised that something was amiss.

He glanced at the note in his hand, wondering what it contained. Then he glanced again after the disappearing form of the nabob.

There was only one conclusion to which Wells could come. There had been some "row" between the schoolboy friends, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was going. The note left for Wharton, and the suitcase in his hand, were proof that he was going. Wharton, evidently, did not know.

"Dear me!" said Wells. "Dear me!" Wells considered the matter.

A quarrel and a parting at Christmas-time between two fellows who had been such chums was not at all the thing.

It rather distressed Wells, who was a kind-hearted, portly gentleman.

Hurree Singh had bidden him give Wharton the note when he came down. By that time the nabob would be gone beyond recall. Having considered the matter, Wells decided that it would be judicious not to wait till Master Harry came down, but to take the note to him at once—which was very judicious of Wells, in the circumstances.

Meanwhile, the nabob, suitcase in hand, was tramping up a snowy road, his face to the wintry wind. Billy Bunter, snoring in the attic, was dreaming—of turkey and mince pies. He did not dream how very successful his astute scheme had been. Had he done so, no doubt the fat Owl would have smiled in his sleep.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Shindy!

"H'M! Master Harry!"

Harry Wharton awakened at the sound of a voice and an apologetic cough. He sat up in bed and blinked at Wells.

"Hallo! Overslept myself—what?" asked Harry, rubbing his eyes. "Is it getting late?"

"No, sir; it is very early," said Wells. "I have taken the liberty, sir, to awaken you to give you this note from Master Hurree Singh, who has just gone out."

Wharton was still a little sleepy, but those words from Wells made him very wide awake.

"Hurree Singh gone out, and left me a note! What the thump—" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment.

"He had a suitcase, sir," said Wells, "and, in the circumstances, I thought I

had better bring you the note immediately, although Master Hurree Singh requested me to give it to you when you came down, sir."

Wharton took the note and opened it. Wells turned on the bed-light, and the captain of the Greyfriars Remove read the letter from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with gathering amazement and dismay in his face. It ran:

"Dear and esteemed Wharton,—In the ridiculous circumstances, you will probably not be terrifically surprised at my prompt and welcome departure. The regretfulness is preposterous that I have not soonerfully observed that my absurd company was superfluous. Doubtless you will agree that the least said the soonerfully repaired, and perhapsfully you will explain to the estimable colonel and the admirable miss that my sudden french leave was deplorably unavoidable."

"H. J. R. S."

Harry Wharton gazed at that letter, almost wondering if he was dreaming. He read it, and read it again, in utter wonder, and then blinked at Wells.

"How long has Inky—I mean, Hurree Singh—been gone?"

"Perhaps a quarter of an hour, sir."

"Is my uncle down yet?"

"Yes, sir. The colonel has gone for a walk before breakfast."

"Tell Thomas to get my bike round."

"There is a great deal of snow on the ground, sir."

"Never mind that!"

"Very good, sir!"

Wells retired, and Wharton bounded from his bed. What Hurree Jamset Ram Singh could possibly mean by his remarkable conduct, Wharton could not

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,349.



(Continued from page 13.)

begin to guess. Evidently there was some sort of a misunderstanding, though he could not imagine the cause. His one thought was to get after the nabob before it was too late and make him explain. With a good start, and being unlikely to lose time on the road, the nabob would reach Wimford and catch the early train before he could be overtaken if Wharton went on foot. It was no weather for cycling, but he had to risk it.

In five minutes Wharton was running downstairs. Thomas, blinking with sleepy eyes, was holding his bike ready for him outside. Wharton took it hurriedly.

"Lot of snow, sir," said Thomas. "Mind you don't get a skid, sir."

Wharton shot away to the gates, ran his machine into the road, and started for Wimford. He could not doubt that that was the direction taken by Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. The village station was nearer, but there were no early trains there.

The bike shot along the snowy road.

It was hard riding. Snow was on the road, hard and frosty, and several times the machine slipped and skidded, and Wharton barely righted it again. But he kept on fast. Somehow he had to catch Hurree Singh before Hurree Singh could catch the early train from Wimford.

But the nabob, though he had a well-packed suitcase to carry, had made the best of his start, and was making good speed. Wharton was a mile from home when he spotted a dark figure on the white road ahead, bag in hand, tramping steadily and swiftly along in the rising wintry sunlight.

He rode on, rapidly overhauling the nabob. As the bike drew nearer Hurree Singh probably heard it, but he did not look back. Harry Wharton shouted:

"Inky! Hold on!"

Then the nabob glanced over his shoulder. His dusky face was expressionless, but his eyes were like steel.

He gave the captain of the Remove one cold glance, and then strode on again, rather faster than before.

"My hat!" breathed Wharton.

He slogged on through the snow. But for his certainty that there was some strange, extraordinary misunderstanding, his own anger would have risen hot at that icy look from the nabob, and he would have stopped and turned back. As it was, he rode on harder than ever, and drew swiftly nearer the tramping junior.

"Inky! Stop! Oh crumbs!" gasped Wharton, as the bike skidded again, and this time he failed to right it.

It shot away right after the nabob, and before Wharton quite knew what was happening, it crashed into Inky's back.

There was a yell from Hurree Singh as he was knocked over headlong, sprawling in the snow, his suitcase flying from his hand.

Wharton landed with a bump in a

drift of snow beside the road, and sprawled there, panting for breath.

Hurree Singh was the first on his feet. But Wharton was quick to clamber up out of the drift.

He ran towards Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, who was rubbing the damaged place where the skidding bike had hit him.

"Inky, old chap—" panted Wharton. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh ceased to rub his bruise and drew himself erect. He stared the captain of the Remove in the face.

"Whyfully have you followed me?" he demanded sharply.

"I want to know what you mean, you silly ass!" exclaimed Wharton warmly. "What the dickens is the matter with you, I'd like to know?"

The nabob shrugged his shoulders.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Look here, Inky—"

"I am Inky to my friends!" said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"My only hat! And aren't we friends any longer?" exclaimed Wharton, too astonished to be angry. "What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say!" answered the nabob coldly. "If the esteemed Wells has given you my letter—"

"I have it here! That's why I bolted after you."

"I see no reason for boltfully pursuing a departing and unwelcome guest!" said the nabob, with a curl of the lip. "As I have said in my ridiculous letter, I regret terrifically having outstayed my welcome in your absurd residence—"

"Look here, Inky, let's have this plain!" said Harry. "You've got some sort of bee in your bonnet! What's put this into your head?"

"Is it not the esteemed fact?"

"Of course not, fathead! You must be mad," said Harry, in wonder, "cutting off like this, when our friends are coming in a day or two! If we were at Greyfriars, I should think somebody had been pulling your silly leg—some mischief-making worm like Skinner—but there's nobody at home to do such a thing. Have you been dreaming, or what?"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh fixed his dark eyes keenly on Wharton's rather excited face. He was puzzled.

"The understanding is not great!" he said. "Your absurd words do not coincide with your ridiculous actions!"

"If I've done anything—" said Wharton blankly. "I haven't the faintest idea what! Give it a name, Inky! I don't know what it is."

"The knowfulness is terrific!" said the nabob coolly.

"You don't mean to say that you don't believe me, Inky?"

"Quitefully so!"

Wharton stood still. His anger was rising now. But he kept his temper.

"If you want to clear," he said quietly, "I don't want to stop you. But you're making out that I've done something that makes you think you're unwelcome in my uncle's house. I want to know what it is! You're bound to tell me that!" He gave a start. "You're not thinking of what happened the other day, when you fancied I'd barged you over in the park—"

"It was not fancy!" said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "Some ridiculous person barged me over; but I believed what you said. Perhapsfully I was terrifically dense not to take a hint. But what you have done since leaves me no absurd doubt in the matter."

"What have I done, you fathead?"

"It is absurdly useless to discuss that when the knowfulness is great. What is the use of idiotic humbug?"

"Humbug!" repeated Harry.

"Exactly! I shall make no complaint to the esteemed colonel, if that is what troubles you!" said the nabob, his lip curling again. "You may tell him what you please, and I shall say nothing."

He stepped to his fallen suitcase, picked it up, and swung away up the road towards Wimford.

Harry Wharton stared after him, almost in stupefaction.

"Inky—" he gasped.

The nabob strode on.

Wharton dashed after him, and caught him by the shoulder. He fairly wrenched away the suitcase, and flung it into the snow.

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh spun round at him. His dark eyes were flashing and his hands were clenched.

"Leave me alonefully!" he rapped.

"I am going—"

"You're not going till you've explained yourself!" roared Wharton, his eyes flashing, too. "You're treating me rottenly—"

"That is terrifically appropriate for a rotter—"

"You're calling me a rotter?"

"Precisefully!"

"By Jove, if we hadn't always been friends, I'd—"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh stepped to the suitcase again. Wharton pushed him back from it.

"You've got to explain—"

"Stand asidefully!" shouted the nabob.

"Not till you've explained—"

There was a push, a shove, a punch, and then, equally angry and excited, the chums of the Remove were fighting.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Quite Mysterious!

COLONEL WHARTON started.

He almost jumped.

The old military gentleman had been enjoying his walk in the keen, frosty morning. Now he was coming back towards Wharton Lodge, with a good appetite for breakfast and a healthy glow in his bronzed cheeks.

He expected to find his nephew and his nephew's schoolboy guest down when he got to the lodge. Certainly he did not expect to find them on the road, a mile from the house—and still less, undoubtedly, did he expect to find them scrapping!

But that was what he saw as he came swinging along the road with his military stride.

He stared blankly at the unexpected and amazing sight. He came to a halt in his astonishment, hardly believing his eyes.

"Good gad!" ejaculated the colonel. And he strode forward with thunder in his brow.

Two excited fellows were punching one another wildly when the colonel arrived on the scene, his approach unobserved in the excitement of the moment.

Colonel Wharton intervened promptly.

He grasped Harry by the collar with one hand and Hurree Singh with the other. Then, with a powerful wrench, dragged them apart.

They staggered to right and left of the angry old gentleman.

"What the thump—" panted Wharton. "Oh, you, uncle!"

"Who the— Oh!" gasped Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "Esteemed sahib!"

The two juniors stood crimson and panting under the stern, angry glare of the colonel.

"What does this mean?" roared Colonel Wharton. "Fighting, by Jove!"

Harry, is that your treatment of a guest under your roof?"

"Oh! I—I'm sorry I—I—" stammered Wharton.

"The sorrowfulness is terrific!" gasped the nabob. "There was momentary and unfortunate loss of esteemed temper."

"Explain yourselves!" hooted the colonel. "What does this mean?"

The juniors were silent. Colonel Wharton glanced at the bike, sprawling in the snow, then at the suitcase. The bike was Wharton's, the suitcase was Hurree Singh's. The colonel stared at the latter, as if it had been the ghost of a suitcase.

"That is your bag, Hurree Singh?"

"Yes, esteemed sir."

"Where were you taking it?"

"To the railway station."

"Does that mean that you were leaving us?"

"Exactly so."

"Did you follow Hurree Singh on your bicycle, Harry?"

"Yes!" gasped Wharton.

Colonel Wharton looked from one to the other. He was intensely angry, and his old bronzed face was very grim. But he was cool and calm.

"This must be explained," he said.

"Have you been quarrelling?"

"Not that I know of," answered Harry.

"Why were you going, Hurree Singh, without a word of leave-taking?"

The nabob flushed deeply.

"I requested your excellent nephew to explain, sahib!" he answered. "I have reason to depart suddenly."

"What reason?" barked the colonel.

No answer.

"Can you explain this, Harry?"

"No!" answered Wharton. "Inky's got his back up about something, that's all I know! If I've done anything, I'm sorry, but I can't imagine what it is."

"Has my nephew given you offence, Hurree Singh?"

"I have no execrable complaint to make, my esteemed sahib! For reasons of personal nature I desire to depart from your hospitable roof."

"You mean," said Colonel Wharton grimly, "that my nephew has given you offence, but that you do not desire to tell me so."

"Perhaps you can get out of Inky what's the matter, uncle," said Harry, considerably cooler now. "I can't make him out! I'm sorry I got excited, but it was enough to make any fellow wild! Inky, if you won't tell me what's the matter, can't you tell my uncle?"

"I have nothing to say," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh icily. "Exceptfully that I desire immediate and prompt departure."

"You will certainly not leave us like this!" said Colonel Wharton. "I shall allow nothing of the kind! During the vacation, Hurree Singh, I am responsible for you to your headmaster. If you desire to change your quarters, you must acquaint me with where you are going, and why! You will now pick up that suitcase and walk back to the house with me!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's lips set.

There was a long pause.

"I am bound to obey order of esteemed sahib!" said the nabob, at last, and he picked up the suitcase.

"I'm glad you understand that!" granted the colonel. "Pick up your machine and come along, Harry!"

Wharton picked up the bike and wheeled it on. Not a word was spoken during the return to Wharton Lodge.

Arrived at the Lodge, Colonel Wharton stalked in, still with a deeply corrugated brow.

Wells, in the hall, eyed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh very curiously. From a

housemaid, Wells had received an amazing report, which had caused him to visit Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's room almost running! Wells' eyes lingered on the nabob's suitcase!

Judging from the look of affairs, it really seemed that the guest at Wharton Lodge had walked off with his bedclothes packed in the suitcase—for they were not to be found in his room! Which was amazing!

Wharton went to put up his bike. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stood by his suitcase, his dusky face set and expressionless. Wells gave a deferential cough, and spoke to his master in a low voice that the nabob could not hear.

"Excuse me, sir!" he murmured. "But something so very extraordinary has happened—"

"What—what?" barked the colonel.

"The bedclothes are missing from Master Hurree Singh's room, sir!"

Colonel Wharton gazed at his butler.

"The—the bedclothes?" he ejaculated.

"Yes, sir!"

"Missing?" gasped the colonel.

"Yes, sir—sheets and blankets and all, and—"

"What on earth do you mean, Wells?"

"It's very extraordinary, sir!" murmured Wells. "But such is the case. Janet called my attention to it only a few minutes ago, sir, and I went at once to the room. All the bedclothes are missing!"

"Good gad!"

Wells coughed again.

"I—I suppose the dark young gentleman is—is quite right in his head, sir?" he murmured.

"Wha-a-at?"

"It is so very extraordinary, sir, for a young gentleman to pack up his bedclothes in a suitcase, and walk off with them—"

"Very extraordinary, if true!" gasped the colonel. "Are you mad, Wells?"

"Well, sir, they are gone—completely gone!"

Snort, from the colonel.

"Nonsense! Absurd! How can they be gone?"

"They are missing, sir, and cannot be found!"

"Nonsense!" hooted the irritated colonel. "Utter nonsense! Why should the boy play such an absurd trick?"

The colonel stalked away to the breakfast-room. Wells, excellently trained butler as he was, gave the slightest shrug of the shoulders.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Culprit!

BREAKFAST at Wharton Lodge was rather a silent meal that morning.

Colonel Wharton was in a state of suppressed irritation. Harry

Wharton was puzzled and annoyed. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh wished himself anywhere but where he was. Only Miss Amy Wharton, unaware that anything was amiss, was in her usual kind and placid mood; and, having the conversation to herself, she talked gently and sweetly about little preparations she was making for the benefit of the poor in the village that Christmas.

After breakfast, the two juniors were told that the colonel desired to speak to them in the library, and they repaired to that apartment to wait for him.

They waited in silence.

Wharton made one attempt to break through the quiet, impassive reserve of the nabob, and failed.

"Look here, Inky!" he said. "We both played the fool when my uncle came on us on the Wimford road this morning. We lost our tempers! I'm sorry, and I dare say you are! My uncle's upset about this! I can't make you out! Can't you tell me what's the matter?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh did not seem to hear.

He moved across to the window, and stood looking out at the snow-gleaming trees, with his back to the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

Wharton bit his lip, and said no more.

It was some little time before the colonel entered. His brow was grim and stern when he came, and he closed the door after him with almost a bang.

He strode across to the fire, stood with his back to it, and faced the two schoolboys, the nabob coming from the window towards him.

"Now," said Colonel Wharton, in a deep voice, "this matter has to be explained. I can hardly believe, Harry, that you have been guilty of any discourtesy towards a guest—one of your own school friends—"

"I hope not," said Harry.

"Hurree Singh must have had a reason for his action! You do not know what it is?"

"I have no idea."

"Very well. Now, Hurree Singh, explain yourself! You are a guest here, but you are also a schoolboy under my charge, for the moment. I command you to tell me why you left my house at an early hour."

"The departfulness seemed to me the proper caper, sahib!" answered the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Why?"

No answer.

"Inky seems to think that I don't want him here," said Harry. "What's put the idea into his head I can't imagine. So far as I know, I've done nothing. I was simply astounded when Wells gave me his letter—"

"His letter? Give it to me!"

Wharton passed over the nabob's farewell note. His uncle read it through, with frowning brows.

"There is some misunderstanding," he said. "Certainly it appears that Hurree Singh has a false impression. What has given you this impression, Hurree Singh?"

"I desire to say nothing, honoured sahib."

Colonel Wharton looked from one to the other.

(Continued on next page.)

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the other. Wharton's face expressed only perplexity; Hurree Singh's nothing at all. The old, military gentleman was growing more and more mystified, and more and more irritated.

"It is clear to me," he said, "that you fancy that my nephew has done something, and you will not tell me, because it may make me angry with him. That is all very well; but I must know the facts. You have not been playing some schoolboy trick, Harry, which your friend has taken in bad part?"

"No!"

The nabob glanced at Wharton for a second, with a flash of scorn in his eyes. It was but for a second, but it did not escape the colonel's keen observation.

"So that is it!" he said. "That is what you have in your mind, Hurree Singh! What has my nephew done?"

No reply.

"Now," said the colonel, "I have learned from Wells that some inexplicable trickery has been going on. The bedclothes have been removed from Hurree Singh's room. Do you know anything of this, Harry?"

"My hat! No!" said Harry blankly.

"You did not remove them?"

"Of course not!"

"You, Hurree Singh, are not so foolish as to play a silly trick on the servants in this way?"

"Certainly not!"

"Very well! A trick has been played! Did you find the bedclothes missing when you went to bed last night, Hurree Singh?"

Wharton started, and stared at the nabob.

"Who on earth could have played such a trick?" he exclaimed. "Inky, you ass, if anybody pulled your leg like that, surely you weren't fool enough to think that it was I!"

The nabob compressed his lips, and did not answer.

"We are getting to the truth, I think!" said the colonel sharply. "Hurree Singh, answer me at once. Did you, or did you not, find your bedclothes missing when you went to bed last night?"

"Yes, sahib!"

"Then how did you spend the night?"

"In the excellent armchair by the fire."

"And why," demanded the colonel, "did you not make the matter known at once?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was silent.

"Was it because you believed that my nephew had played that silly trick on you, and you believed that it was meant to signify that he did not desire you to remain as his guest?"

"Inky, you ass——"

"Let Hurree Singh speak!" rapped the colonel. But the nabob did not speak. Colonel Wharton went on: "A handkerchief belonging to you has been found lying in Hurree Singh's room, Harry. Did you drop it there?"

Wharton's hand went to his pocket.

"No; my hanky's here," he said.

"Besides, I haven't been in the room."

"You are sure of that?"

"Of course!"

"Did you see my nephew's handkerchief there, Hurree Singh, and did it lead you to believe that he had played that miserable and foolish trick?"

"So that's it!" said Wharton. "You might have had a little more sense, Inky! Why couldn't you come along to my room and speak out?"

The nabob's lip curled

"You have acted thoughtlessly and inconsiderately, Hurree Singh," said Colonel Wharton. "Pride is all very well, but there is such a thing as common sense. Someone has been

guilty of rascally trickery. I have no doubt that I can lay my finger on the person concerned."

Hurree Singh gave a start.

"Wells informed me yesterday of a foolish practical joke played by the boy Thomas!" said the colonel. "It appears that he gave my nephew a false alarm, and brought him running down to the telephone in the belief that there had been an accident."

"Thomas!" exclaimed Wharton. "Of course! That young sweep——"

"Thomas!" repeated the nabob blankly. "I did not think——"

"You ought to have thought!" rapped Wharton. "You might have remembered that he'd played a silly trick before."

Hurree Singh's face set again.

"Your handkerchief was there," he said coldly. "If it was Thomas, he could not have dropped your handkerchief."

"That, of course, was a part of the trickery," said Colonel Wharton. "I take my nephew's word on that subject, Hurree Singh, and expect you to do the same. The handkerchief was placed there by the trickster, to give a false impression."

Hurree Singh was silent.

Colonel Wharton touched the bell, and Wells appeared at the door.

"Send Thomas here," said the colonel.

"Very good, sir!"

Thomas appeared in a few moments. His chubby face had a rather alarmed look, and he blinked from one face to another.

"Thomas!" rapped Colonel Wharton. "Yesterday you played a foolish practical joke on my nephew."

"Oh, sir! I never did——"

"Silence! I should have passed over that incident, but now you have repeated your foolish and disrespectful conduct, and caused a misunderstanding between friends. You will leave this house to-morrow! You are discharged, Thomas!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Thomas.

"You will tell Wells where you have hidden the bedclothes——"

"I ain't touched them, sir! I don't know nothing——"

"Silence!" roared the colonel. "If you have purloined these articles, and removed them from the house, you will be severely dealt with. I warn you to inform Wells at once where you have concealed them! Go!"

"Oh, sir! But——" gasped Thomas, overwhelmed with dismay.

"Go!" roared the colonel.

And Thomas, in a state of utter bewilderment, went.

"Now, my boys," said the colonel, more calmly, "the matter is cleared up. It was a misunderstanding. Let there be no more."

He dismissed the juniors with a gesture, and they left the library together.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Strained Relations!

"MASTER HARRY——"

"You young rascal!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Don't speak to me, you young sweep! You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!" said Wharton indignantly.

Wharton and Hurree Singh had gone out on the frosty terrace after leaving the colonel. To Wharton's mind the mysterious matter was now cleared up. There seemed no doubt about that. But he was feeling considerably sore about it. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh

hardly knew what to think. Keen and astute as he was, the nabob was quite perplexed. The hapless Thomas came creeping out, looking like a fellow whose world had fallen to pieces. The two juniors were worried and troubled, but their feelings were nothing to poor Thomas.

"I never did it, sir!" said Thomas, almost tearfully. "As if I'd play such a game on a friend of yours, sir! Won't you speak a word for me to the master, sir?"

"You're not denying it?" exclaimed Wharton angrily.

"Course I am, sir, when I never did it! You don't believe that I did it, Master Hurree Singh, sir?" Thomas appealed to the nabob.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his dusky head.

"The believableness is not terrific, my esteemed Thomas," he answered.

"You hear what your friend says, Master Harry," urged Thomas. "He knows I wouldn't do it, and him always kind to a feller. If you speak a word to the master——"

"Oh, ring off!" snapped Wharton. "You'd better go and tell Wells what you've done with the things, you young sweep! Out!"

Thomas gave him a beseeching look, but he "cut" without saying anything more.

Wharton faced the nabob with a glitter in his eyes.

"Now let's have this out, Hurree Singh," he said, between his teeth. "There may be some excuse for you thinking I'd played that rotten trick, finding my hanky there. But you've heard me tell my uncle that I knew nothing of it. Can you take my word, or not?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked at him in silence for a long moment. From the appearance of things, it looked as if Wharton had played that trick on him, as a hint that he was no longer wanted at the Lodge, and had lied about it afterwards to avoid trouble with his uncle. But that was not in the least in accord with what he knew of Wharton's character. It was scarcely possible to suppose that Harry Wharton had lied like a fellow of Billy Bunter's stamp. Yet he was convinced that the hapless Thomas was innocent. He spoke at last.

"I am boundfully compelled to accept your word, my esteemed Wharton," he said slowly.

"Then what did you mean by telling Thomas you believed him?"

"I believe him completely."

"You believe me, and believe him, too!" snapped Wharton. "That means that you believe that there's a third party in it."

"That is the lookfulness of it."

"Who, then? Who do you fancy snaffled your bedclothes last night? Old Wells?" asked Wharton, with angry sarcasm. "Or one of the maids?"

"That is scarcely possible. But——"

"Well, who then?"

The nabob shook his head.

"The knowfulness is not great," he answered.

"My uncle, perhaps?" There was something very like a sneer in Wharton's tone. "Do you think the colonel has taken to playing schoolboy japes on a guest?"

Hurree Singh smiled faintly.

"You know that that young idiot, Thomas, played a potty practical joke on us both yesterday," said Wharton resentfully. "He gave me a rotten scare, and snaffled the cake while we were gone down to the phone. Isn't it



Billy Bunter struck match after match, to get his bearing, as it were. He could not venture to turn on the light. It was not the most comfortable way of taking supper. But the fat Owl cared little for that as he got busy. For a good half-hour there was a steady sound of munching, varied by an occasional grunt!

as clear as daylight that he's done this, too?"

"It looks like it," admitted the nabob; "but—"

"But what?"

"But I think he was speaking with terrific truthfulness. The putfulness of your idiotic hanky in my room was not a practical joke. It was an act of preposterous rascality. The esteemed Thomas is a fool, perhaps, but I do not thinkfully consider him a rascal."

"Well, I should never have thought so," said Harry slowly. "He always seemed a decent kid enough, and I thought he rather liked me. I always rather liked him. But the facts speak for themselves."

"I thinkfully opine that we have not yet ascertained the ridiculous facts. There is a thirdful party in the absurd matter."

"Well, who then?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh could only shake his head. Perhaps, at the back of his mind, he was not wholly convinced of his chum's innocence. There was a silence.

"Oh, let it drop, then!" said Harry, at last. "If you're satisfied now that I haven't acted like a pig, as you supposed—"

"If I have wrongfully doubted you, my esteemed Wharton, the apologise is terrific."

"If!" exclaimed Wharton. "Then you're not satisfied yet?"

"Yes," said the nabob, though with an almost visible effort. "The satisfaction is total. I cannot think that you would tell lies. I am terrifically satisfied on that point."

"Thanks for that much!" said Wharton sourly. "That's something, I suppose." He tried to make his tone more friendly. "Coming out?"

"It is terrifically cold!" murmured the nabob.

"The lake's frozen. Let's get our skates."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh paused.

"If you will excusefully forgive me, I will proceed to my room and write a letter," he said. "I have long delayed a communication with my old esteemed tutor, the moonshee Mook Mookerjee at Bhanipur."

"Just as you like," said Wharton curtly.

He went for his skates, and went out to the frozen lake by himself. It was a bright, clear, frosty morning, and the ice was hard and good; but the captain of the Greyfriars Remove did not enjoy the skating very much.

Hurree Singh went to his room.

It was true that he had a letter to write to Mook Mookerjee, the wise old moonshee of Bhanipur, who taught him the wonderful English he spoke. And he wrote it in the weird Indian characters which Greyfriars fellows, when they saw them, compared to crawling spiders and ants.

But when he had finished that letter he did not join his chum.

He remained in his room, thinking.

It was not easy for a bitter and unpleasant impression to be removed from his mind. He believed, or tried hard to believe, that his chum had not offended, and that he was as welcome as ever at Wharton's home. But he wished that he was anywhere else. Yet, in the circumstances, he could scarcely leave. It was a disagreeable position all round; but it seemed that there was nothing to be done.

The chums of the Remove did not meet again till lunch. Then they tried to be as friendly and cordial as of old—but not with much success. Miss Amy, fortunately, noticed nothing; but

her brother did, and his brows knitted grimly more than once.

The chums of Greyfriars, for the present, were not enjoying life—but, if they had only known it, still less was the unknown cause of the trouble finding life enjoyable! Billy Bunter was having an awful morning!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Artful Dodger!

"Oh lor'!" said Billy Bunter, for about the hundredth time.

Bunter had slept till about ten o'clock in the morning. That was so much to the good.

But when he awoke he awoke hungry! Not a crumb remained of the provender he had bagged the previous day. In the peculiar circumstances, the fat Owl of Greyfriars would have done wisely to put himself on rations! But Bunter seldom acted wisely—and he had not even thought of that!

He had slept quite soundly and comfortably. Had anyone gone up the attic stair, certainly the fat junior's hefty snore would have been heard. Luckily for Bunter, no one did.

"Oh lor'!" repeated Bunter.

He wondered a little what Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had done, and what had happened, and whether there had been a row. But he did not think much about it. The fact that he was hungry occupied his thoughts, to the exclusion of lesser matters.

He rather regretted now that he had turned in and slept so soundly. In the darkness of the night he might have hunted provender.

But it was too late to think of that now.

What was he going to do?

He had landed himself at Wharton Lodge. Apparently he would be able to remain there unsuspected.

But no fellow could live without food—least of all Billy Bunter! The question of the commissariat was urgent!

He intended of course, sooner or later, to make his presence known—
anxious as he was for a burrow, he was not keen on spending Christmas-tide hidden in an attic—even if there was a supply of grub!

But he had to make sure first that the revelation would not be followed by the impact of a boot on his tight trousers, and sudden departure into a cold, unfeeling world!

How was he to make sure of that?

It was rather a problem.

If he could catch that beast, Wharton, in a good temper—an if the beast, being in a good temper, could prevail on the other beast, his uncle, to get good-tempered, too—

It seemed doubtful!

Still, there was no hurry to put it to the test—if he could only obtain supplies to tide him over for a time.

That was the urgent pressing matter! There was the rub! He got up hungry! He grew hungrier every moment! There was no breakfast! The bare idea of missing lunch also was excruciating.

He silently unlocked the door, to blink out of his hidden quarters. Either of the juniors might have left chocolates, or something of the kind, in his room.

Again, and again Bunter blinked out, but was frightened back by the sound of a footstep or a voice. There were servants about. Once he heard the voices of the maids; and once a snatch of conversation came to him, in voices that he recognised as those of Wells and Thomas.

"I never did it, Mr. Wells, sir!" Thomas was saying.

"Don't you tell untruths, Thomas! You're discharged, and you deserve it!" said Wells severely.

They were in the passage below the attic stair, and every word came clearly to Bunter, with his door ajar, and his fat ears pricked up to listen.

"But I never did, sir—"

"You pay attention to me, Thomas!" said Wells. "Tell me at once what you've done with the bedclothes from Master Hurree Singh's room."

"I ain't touched them, Mr. Wells."

"What are you giving all this trouble for, Thomas? I can't believe you're thinking of stealing bedclothes. What have you done with them?"

"I tell you, sir—"

"The colonel may charge you with theft, if you don't return them," said Wells. "Think of that, Thomas!"

"I never did—"

"I've looked in your room! Have you taken them out of the house, or what?"

"I ain't never—"

"Oh, go away, you young rascal!" said Wells.

Billy Bunter grinned over that little talk. He realised that Thomas had been found guilty of the raid on Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's bedclothes!

Bunter was sorry for Thomas! He quite pitied him. Still, it was all to the good, he considered; for this suspicion of Thomas made it improbable that anyone would suspect that there was an extraneous person in the house. Later on, of course, Bunter

would clear Thomas of that unjust suspicion. For the present it was all right!

Later in the morning Bunter blinked out again and listened. All was quiet now. No doubt Hurree Singh's bed had been provided with a new outfit. The servants had finished there. The coast was likely to be clear, unless he ran into one of the juniors.

Bunter was so hungry by this time that he felt that he had to risk it. Besides, he had heard the gong downstairs that announced lunch—though not for Bunter! He thought of boldly presenting himself at lunch, and trusting to his cheek to save him. But the thought of the old colonel's grim, knitted brows daunted him. He dared not!

He crept silently down the attic stair.

Nobody was about!

With beating heart, the fat junior crept into Wharton's "den." A fire was burning there, and he warmed himself before it for a few minutes. But he had no time to waste. If anyone came upstairs to that quarter of the house, his retreat to his hiding-place was cut off. He dared not linger.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter, as he spotted a box of chocolates lying on Wharton's table.

It was one of Aunt Amy's many gifts to her dear nephew, Wharton, who was not keen on sweetmeats, had not opened it yet. Bunter saved him that trouble. Rapidly he opened the box and stuffed chocolates into his hungry mouth.

There was only a pound of chocolates in the box. Bunter disposed of them very swiftly. He was about to replace the lid on the cardboard box, when it occurred to him that, if Wharton moved it, he would feel by the lightness that it had been emptied.

That was easily remedied. Bunter filled the box with wood-ashes from the grate, and then replaced the lid.

The box now weighed as much as before. No discovery would be made till it was opened.

Bunter could not guard against that! Still, as the beast hadn't opened it yet, probably he wouldn't be opening it in a hurry!

The fat Owl proceeded to root about the room for more provender. But there was no more to be found.

He passed into Wharton's bed-room; but that apartment was also drawn blank! He opened the door on the corridor, blinked out and listened, and then crept along to Hurree Singh's room. With the juniors at lunch, he felt fairly safe in rooting about their quarters.

Nothing of an eatable nature was discovered in the nabob's room. Bunter grunted with disgust.

Whenever Bunter was a guest anywhere, there was always something to eat in his room; he took care of that! But other fellows did not seem to think of such considerations, important as they were.

"Oh lor'!" said Bunter.

A pound of chocolates had, at least, taken the keen edge off his appetite. There might be a chance later of another raid, if Wharton tea'd in his den again, as he had done the day before. All that the fat Owl could do now was to creep back to his burrow, and, as there was nothing more to eat, take it out in sleep. Fortunately, he could always sleep!

He was about to creep out of Hurree Singh's room when there was a footstep outside.

Bunter jumped.

There was no escape!

He gave a wild blink round. If it was the nabob coming to his room he was fairly caught.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He leaped to the bed and plunged under it! Hardly a moment later the door opened, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came in.

Bunter had a view of his feet as he crossed over to the fire and threw a log on it.

Then the nabob sat down, taking a set of pocket-chess, and apparently working out a game from memory.

Bunter palpitated under the bed.

Ten minutes later there came a tap at the door, and it opened.

"Coming out?" asked the voice of Harry Wharton.

"I am terrifically interested in working out an absurd problem," answered the nabob.

"Very well!" said Harry quietly; and the door closed again.

Terrifically interested as he was in the problem, the nabob laid down the chess, rose to his feet, and paced restlessly to and fro.

Bunter, under the bed, had a continuous view of his feet, passing and repassing.

Obviously, even to the obtuse Owl, there were strained relations; the chums of Greyfriars were not on their old familiar footing. Bunter's trickery had had its results! Serve them jolly well right, the beasts, was Bunter's unuttered comment! It was some satisfaction to know that, uncomfortable as he was, he had caused discomfort.

To his great relief, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh went out of the room at last. Probably now that Wharton was gone he was going out on his own! Greatly relieved to be rid of him, Bunter crawled out from under the bed. Ere long he was safe back in his attic, rolled in blankets, and finding comfort in slumber.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Alarm in the Night!

MIDNIGHT! Billy Bunter was wide awake!

Probably it was the first time on record that the fat Owl of the Remove had remained awake at midnight's witching hour.

But he had slept a good deal during the day; and he was too hungry to sleep now.

Bunter was not only hungry! He was famished! He was ravenous! He had a keen understanding of the feelings of shipwrecked crews in open boats at sea!

Sleep was impossible!

Again and again, Bunter listened with the door of the attic ajar, till all sounds had died away.

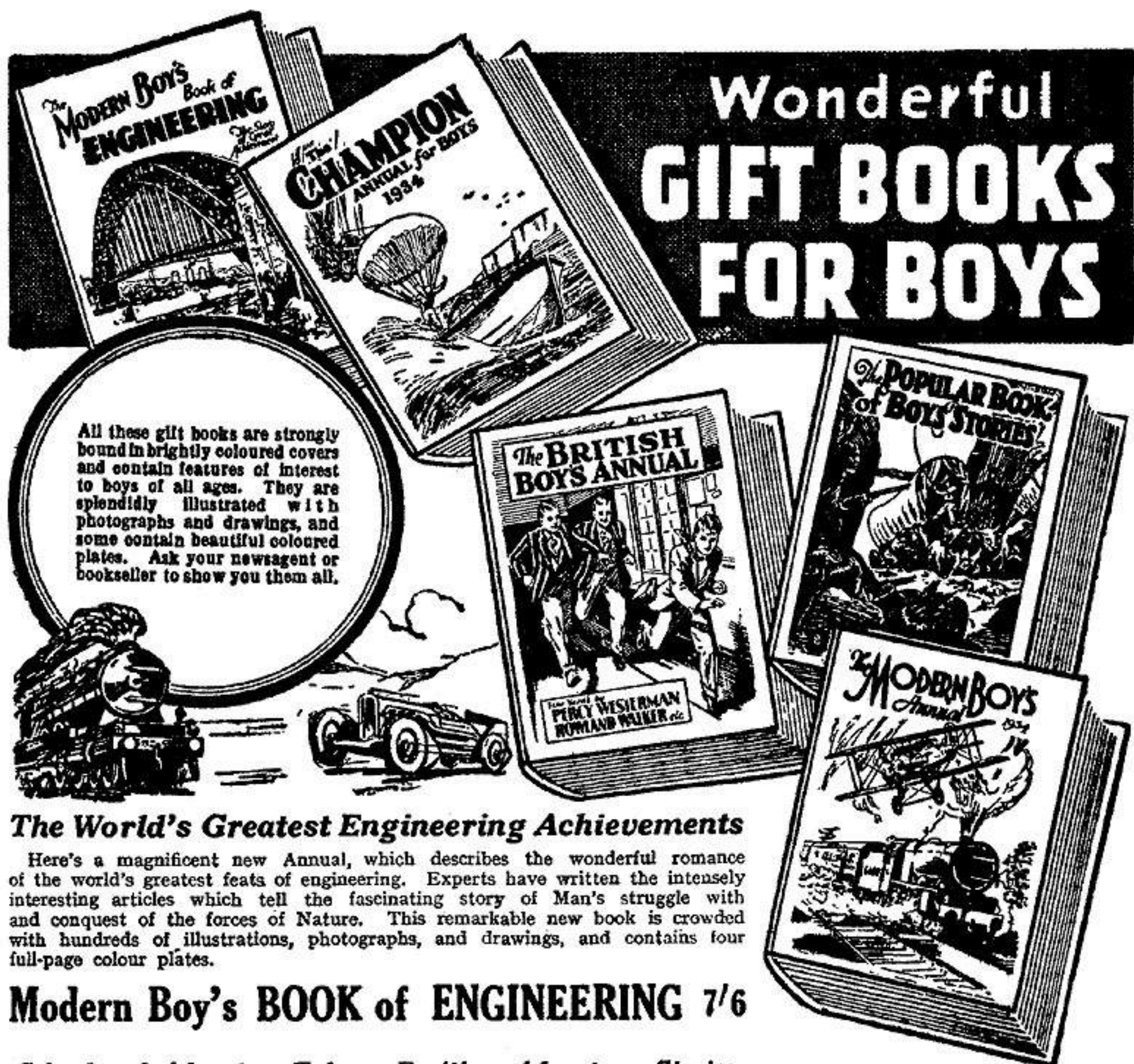
At any risk he had to get hold of something to eat! Even if his presence was discovered, and he was booted out into the winter night, he could stand it no longer! Food was the one thing needful!

But he waited till he heard midnight strike from the clock in the hall downstairs! By that time he felt fairly sure all would be safe!

He knew his way about the house! Even as an invited guest on other and happier occasions, Bunter had displayed a keen interest in the larder! More than once he had paid it a surreptitious visit!

True, his depredations were certain to be discovered in the morning. He had to take the risk! They might think

(Continued on page 22.)



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that it was Thomas again—poor Thomas! They might think that it was the cat! Whatever they thought Bunter had to eat.

He crept out of the attic at last.

All was dark!

The last door had closed; the last light had been extinguished. Bunter was free to roam the house as he liked. He realised that he had to be careful! If there was an alarm he might be taken for a burglar! He was going to be very careful indeed!

The old stair creaked under Bunter's weight as he crept from the attic. In the daytime it was hardly noticeable, but at midnight it seemed eerily loud.

On tiptoe the fat junior reached the passage and crept away towards the stairs.

Everyone had long been in bed. Billy Bunter felt a thrill of uneasiness as he navigated the silent staircase. Midnight silence and solitude and gloom did not agree with his nervous system.

Still, there was really nothing to be afraid of. Silence and darkness could not hurt anybody.

He crept across the shadowy hall to the service staircase, and crept down.

Two minutes more and he was at the ladder.

It was locked; but the key was in the door.

Bunter struck a match.

Then he got busy.

Every now and then he struck a match to get his bearings, as it were. He could not venture to turn on a light.

It was not the most comfortable way of taking supper! But the fat Owl cared little for that! There was plenty—and that was the chief thing! A cold chicken was absolutely delicious to the hungry Owl! A cold pie was a dream of delight! Other foodstuffs followed the fowl and the pie! For a good half-hour there was a steady sound of munching, varied by an occasional grunt!

Then Bunter sighed!

There was still more to eat—but he could eat no more!

Bunter was not a fellow, as a rule, to think of the future! Generally he left it to take care of itself! But on this occasion, mindful of his hungry hours in the attic, the Owl of Greyfriars exercised foresight. He might not have another chance like this! Scratching matches to light him on his pilfering way, Bunter proceeded to stack his pockets with plunder.

All sorts and conditions of eatables were crammed into his pockets till they would hold no more. But that did not satisfy Bunter! There was a basket at hand, and he crammed that, too! Only too well he knew how soon he might be hungry again!

Taking the basket in his hand he crept away to the service staircase and ascended to the hall above.

It was getting towards one o'clock now; and now that Billy Bunter was as full as he could hold, he felt that he would be able to sleep.

His motions were rather slow as he crossed the hall to the stairs. He had rather a lot to carry!

The darkness was deep, but he knew the way well enough. With the well-laden basket in one hand and the other stretched before him to grope the Owl of the Remove crept onward.

Suddenly he gave a gurgle of horror. His outstretched hand had touched something in the darkness—something that moved!

Something alive!

"Oooooogh!" gurgled Bunter in utter terror.

He heard a startled gasp, and had a

glimpse of eyes in the darkness that glared! He had run into somebody—obviously not an occupant of the house, creeping about in the dark as Bunter himself was doing!

A hand grasped at him.

Bunter dodged back, quaking with fear.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Oh! Who—Ow! Help! Oh, help! Burglars! Help! Help! Help!"

In his terror the fat Owl forgot that he had to keep his presence in the house a secret. He forgot everything but his awful terror of that unseen form that was grasping at him. His frightened yell rang through the House from end to end.

A muttered oath came to his fat ears, and he felt the dim figure grasping at him. A hand gripped his fat shoulder.

Without even thinking—he was too terrified to think—Bunter swung up the basket of "grab" and smote.

Crash!

The burglar, undoubtedly he was a burglar, certainly had not expected that! He could not have expected to find anybody up in the dark, at one in

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the morning! Least of all could he have expected the person who was up to be carrying a heavy basket in his hand! Probably the whole affair was a puzzle to the burglar!

The basket crashed fairly into his face, sending him spinning backwards. There was a terrific crash as he landed on his back on the oak floor. The back of his head banged on the hard oak with stunning effect. Foodstuffs of all sorts flew right and left from the basket, and the basket itself flew from Bunter's hand.

There was a sound of a door opening in the distance somewhere. A deep voice boomed:

"What is that? Who is calling? What—"

The sound of Colonel Wharton's voice recalled Bunter to himself. He realised that it was a burglar whom he had floored with the basket. He knew, too, that whoever it was he was sprawling on the floor, out of reach. He remembered that he had to make his own escape.

Colonel Wharton's deep voice had, in fact, almost as terrifying an effect on Bunter as the burglar.

Bunter bolted.

Heedless of the basket he had dropped and the scattered provender, Bunter flew up the stairs. In that thrilling moment

Bunter forgot even food—which was a proof how wildly excited he was!

He reached the wide old oak landing and darted into the passage that led to Harry Wharton's quarters.

Hardly had he bounded into the passage, when the light flashed on in another passage and on the landing and in the hall. Colonel Wharton, alarmed by the sudden outcry in the middle of the night, was coming to investigate, flashing on the electric lights as he came.

But Bunter had disappeared—just in time!

He raced along the corridor on which the juniors' rooms opened. He could hear both Wharton and Hurree Singh moving in their rooms, and see the light gleaming under their doors; the outcry had alarmed them also, and they were turning out.

Bunter did the passage to the attic stair at about sixty m.p.h. Discovery threatened—and never had the fat Owl exerted himself so tremendously.

Wharton's door was opening as the fat junior reached the attic stair and bolted up it.

Again he was just in time to escape before Wharton flashed the light on in the corridor.

Breathless, panting, palpitating, Billy Bunter reached the attic, dived in, and shut the door after him.

He turned the key in the lock.

Then he sank down in a gasping, spluttering heap on the bedclothes and gurgled.

"Oooo-er! Oh lor! Oh crikey! Ooooooogh!"

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Captured!

"BURGLARS!"
Colonel Wharton rapped out the word.

From a switch on the high landing he flashed on the light in the hall below, and, staring over the oaken balustrade, he beheld a startling and remarkable sight.

A man in shabby attire, with a dirty handkerchief tied over the lower part of his face by way of a mask, was sitting up dizzily on the floor of the hall.

He was gasping spasmodically and rubbing the back of his head, which had hit the old oak with a terrific bang.

He was surrounded by a strange assortment of goods—some dropped by Bunter and some by himself as he fell. A silver candlestick, a bronze clock, and several other such articles lay amid two or three loaves, packets of butter and ham and cold meats, several cakes, and other edibles. It was quite an assortment!

Colonel Wharton, in slippers and dressing-gown, stared down at him. He had grabbed up his old Army revolver when he rushed out of his room. With that weapon in his hand he dashed down the stairs to the hall.

The burglar, for the moment, was too deeply absorbed in getting his wind and rubbing his damaged head to heed him.

But as the old military gentleman jumped from the stairs the rascal scrambled to his feet.

"Stand where you are!" roared Colonel Wharton, raising the revolver. "Stand still, you scoundrel, or I'll pull trigger!"

The revolver was not kept loaded. The old colonel, always a stickler for the exact truth, did not say that he would fire. He could scarcely have done so with an unloaded revolver. But he could pull trigger if he liked.



"Ow!" gasped Bunter, quaking with fear. "Help! Burglars!" Without even thinking, Bunter swung up the basket of "grub," and smote. Bliff! The basket crashed fairly in the burglar's face, sending him spinning backwards.

"Lummo!" gasped the man in the grubby mask.

Still rubbing his damaged head he blinked at the colonel, who advanced on him with long strides, the revolver up.

"Stand! Stop!" roared the colonel.

The man in the grubby mask turned and bounded away. There was a double staircase in the hall of Wharton Lodge. As the colonel came from one stair the midnight marauder bounded for the other.

Had the revolver been loaded the old soldier might have dropped him with a bullet in his leg; as it was he rushed after him in hot pursuit.

The shabby man fairly flew. Colonel Wharton was an active man for his years, but he had no chance in a race with the thief. The latter would certainly have won the race, but just then two figures in pyjamas appeared ahead of him.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh arrived on the landing together just as the man in the shabby attire reached it.

"Back up, Inky!" shouted Wharton.

"The back-upfulness is terrific!" exclaimed the nabob.

They jumped at the man together.

They got him on the edge of the landing. With a startled howl, he went over, rolling on the stairs, and the two juniors, clutching him, rolled with him. All three went rolling down, and Colonel Wharton jumped back just in time to avoid being swept away by the avalanche.

"Oh, my hat! Got him!" panted Wharton. "Hold on!"

"Oh, my esteemed hat!"

"Hold him!" roared the colonel.

Excited voices were heard on all sides now. Wells, the butler, appeared, Robert appeared, Thomas appeared, in

various stages of deshabille. In the distance maids were shrieking. The whole house was alarmed.

Three rolling, struggling figures detached themselves in a heap from the staircase and rolled in the hall. As they bumped there, Hurree Singh lost his hold on the shabby jacket. The burglar wrenched himself away from Wharton and leaped to his feet.

The colonel grabbed at him and barely missed as the desperate man dodged. He flew across the hall.

Crash!

Wells was in the way.

He stayed in the way only a split second. He went rolling, with a breathless gasp, and the burglar jumped over him and sprinted on. He would have rushed down a passage the next moment, but Thomas, with great presence of mind, grabbed up a chair and hurled it at his legs.

The missile caught the burglar across the knees, and he made a sudden nose-dive.

Bump!

"Urrrgh!" spluttered the midnight marauder.

"Well done!" boomed the colonel. "Good boy!" His grasp was on the sprawling man the next moment.

"Crikey!" gurgled the burglar.

He struggled. But the muzzle of the revolver was pressed to his ear. The colonel's left hand gripped his collar.

"Surrender, you scoundrel!" boomed the colonel.

"Take that thing away, sir!" gasped the wretched man. "S'pose it was to go off! Crikey! It's a fair cop!"

He surrendered.

"Got him!" panted Harry Wharton.

"Who is it—what? A jolly old burglar, of course—"

"An esteemed and execrable burglar!" gasped the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Collar him!"

Many hands collared the man in the shabby attire. Thomas grasped one arm, Robert grasped the other; Wells, gasping for breath, took hold of his collar. Then the colonel released him. The grubby handkerchief had been torn away in the struggle and the man's face was revealed—a stubbly face, much in want of a shave, and still more seriously in want of a wash.

Evidently he was no professional cracksman in a good way of business; he looked more like a sneak-thief. Probably he had been on tramp, when—at an unlucky time for himself—he had decided to give Wharton Lodge his attention. Certainly he was very shabby, and there was no sign of professional burglarious implements about him.

"It's a fair cop, guv'nor!" said the man in the shabby attire. "'Ere, 'ands off, darkey!" he added, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh added his grasp. "They got me all right!"

"The make-surefulness is the proper caper, my esteemed and dishonest friend," said the nabob.

The man blinked at him. It seemed that he had heard that remarkable flow of English before.

"Oh, you!" he ejaculated. "You're the bloke what grabbed me in the park the other hevening—wot? I 'eard you a-talking and nearly give myself away larling!"

The nabob jumped.

"Wha-a-at?" he exclaimed blankly.

"You—"

"You!" yelled Wharton.

"What is this?" exclaimed the colonel.

"Have you seen this rascal before, Harry?"

"I've not seen him, uncle," answered Wharton. "But—but the other evening—the day before yesterday—we were

coming back through the park after dark, and Inky——"

"It was this esteemed rascal I ran into in the ridiculous dark, and he punchfully knocked me over!" exclaimed the nabob. "At the moment I supposed it was the esteemed Wharton japing me——"

"And I thought that Inky had run into a branch!" said Harry. "And it was this rotter—watching the place, I suppose, before he tried his hand at breaking in——"

"I was shovefully knocked over——"

"Wot was a bloke to do?" demanded the man in the shabby attire. "You run into a bloke and grabbed 'im! 'Course I pushed you hover! And there I was, be'ind a tree, while you was a-jawing——"

"You ridiculous rascal——"

"So you've been watching the place, you scoundrel?" growled the colonel.

"Couple o' days and nights, sir!" answered the midnight marauder. "And this 'ere night I got a winder open, which I thought was luck—though it ain't turned out lucky."

"Wells, take him down to the cellar, and lock him in till morning," said Colonel Wharton.

"Certainly, sir!" said Wells.

"Don't be 'ard on a bloke, guv'nor! I ain't no burglar!" said the man in the shabby attire. "I jest nipped in for a few trifles! Bless your 'eart, sir, I couldn't hopen your safe, not if I knowed where it was! I picks up a candlestick and a clock, and a few other trifles, sir. You'd 'ardly 'ave missed them, and I wouldn't 'ave got morn'n a couple of quids for 'em from a popshop, sir——"

"Take him away!"

With Wells' hand on his collar, and Thomas and Robert holding his arms, the midnight marauder was taken away to a cellar, and locked in for the remainder of the night.

Then the colonel hurried away to reassure Miss Amy, and the juniors went back to their rooms. After which, Wells and his assistants gathered up the scattered plunder in the hall—all of which, naturally, they attributed to the man in the shabby attire, never dreaming that there had been another midnight marauder on the scene.

That unknown marauder, safe in his hidden attic, was listening, with a palpitating fat heart, till all was silent again. Then he rolled himself in blankets and went to sleep.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Another Mystery!

"EXTRAORDINARY, sir!" said Wells.

They were at breakfast at Wharton Lodge. Colonel Wharton had a grim expression on his face. After breakfast he was going to telephone for a constable from Wimpford to take charge of the midnight marauder, locked overnight in the cellar.

Miss Amy Wharton, who had been very much fluttered and flustered by the alarm in the night, had now recovered her usual gentle equanimity; and was, indeed, considering whether the wretched man in the cellar might not be allowed to go free, considering that it was Christmas-tide; and that, to judge by his apparent exploits, he had been fearfully hungry when he got into the house!

Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were both looking very thoughtful. The mysterious incident in the park

had been explained now. The nabob knew that it was not his chum who had knocked him over in the dark, and Wharton knew that the nabob had not bumped into a branch and imagined the rest.

Both were feeling rather compunctious. And both were wondering whether the man in the cellar might not have something to do with the other queer happenings in the house. On his own confession, he had been hanging about the place for two days and nights.

The same idea was in Wells' portly mind. After an apologetic cough Wells got it out.

"Extraordinary, sir!" he repeated, over the coffee-urn. "A silver candlestick, a clock, some golf clubs, several books, sir—picked up in various rooms that were not occupied! But the food——"

"The food!" repeated the colonel.

"The state of the larder, sir, is really extraordinary!" said Wells. "Almost everything eatable was taken away! A basket and a considerable quantity of foodstuffs was found in the hall, where the man had dropped them. But a still larger quantity of eatables is missing, and it is clear that he must have stood in the larder eating them! A very unusual appetite, sir—very unusual indeed!"

HERE'S A HANDSOME CHRISTMAS PRESENT

for L. Yeomans, of 61, Parsloes Avenue, Dagenham, Essex, who submitted the following Greyfriars limerick:

Whilst having a drink once old Popper
Was hit in the eye with the stopper.
"I will never again,"
He yelled out in pain,
"Drink out of a bottle—'tain't proper!"

Send in your limerick, chum, and win a HANDSOME LEATHER POCKET WALLET.

"He must have been very hungry!" said Miss Wharton.

"Undoubtedly, madam," said Wells. "Very hungry, madam—very hungry indeed! Amazingly so! Crumbs and fragments were scattered all over the place. Chicken bones, and——"

"Who gave the alarm?" asked Harry. "That is very extraordinary, sir!" said Wells. "It appears that someone shouted for help, and awakened the master. But none of the servants seems to have been up. I have questioned them all, but no one states that he gave the alarm."

"Someone shouted!" grunted the colonel. "Otherwise I should not have been awakened."

"Certainly, sir! It is very odd that whoever did so does not admit it, as it certainly prevented a robbery! Unless, indeed, the man may have run into something in the dark, and shouted, sir, involuntarily, himself, thinking that he was seized——"

"Very improbable!" grunted the colonel. "I suppose one of the servants was up late, and does not care to admit the fact!"

Wells coughed! If some festive footman had been out late without leave, and had let himself in quietly and run into the burglar, it accounted for the circumstances. But Wells was indisposed to admit the possibility of such

things in his well-ordered household. He passed lightly over that topic.

"With regard to Thomas, sir——" he murmured.

"Thomas! What about Thomas? The boy acted very well last night—indeed, his action caused the rascal's capture," said the colonel. "But that is no excuse for the miserable trick he played on my nephew and his guest——"

"It has occurred to me, sir," said Wells, with his deferential cough, "that possibly Thomas was, as he stated, innocent, in view of what has occurred since, sir! The bedclothes from Master Hurree Singh's room have not been found, and Thomas still denies knowing anything about them."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry. "Is it possible——"

"The possibility is terrific!"

"What!" exclaimed Colonel Wharton. "You think, Wells——"

"Well, sir, the man admits having hung about the house for the last two or three days and nights. He may have found a door or window open—possibly Master Harry's window on the balcony, sir! Certainly it is very odd that he should steal bedclothes, but, in view of the very strange assortment of plunder taken last night, such as loaves of bread, sir, and butter, and a ham——"

"Good gad!" said the colonel.

"The esteemed Wells has hit the rightful nail on its ridiculous head!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I was surefully positive that the absurd Thomas was innocent."

"That's it!" said Harry, with a nod. "Wells has spotted it! Poor old Thomas!"

"Good gad!" repeated the colonel. "What you suggest is certainly possible, Wells! The boy seems to have played one foolish trick—but he may not have played the other! At all events, we shall extract the truth from the man now in the cellar! I will make him tell me the facts, by Jove!"

Breakfast over, Colonel Wharton descended to the cellars, followed by Wells and the two juniors. All were anxious to hear what the midnight marauder had to say on the subject of the mysterious happenings that had caused so much trouble.

Wells unlocked the cellar door.

He threw it open.

Colonel Wharton stared in—at blank space!

"Wells!" he rapped. "Where is the man?"

"Oh!" gasped Wells.

The man in the shabby attire was gone!

There was a barred window to the cellar. Or rather, there had been! Now the bars were lying on the floor! The window was open! It looked on a snowy space at the back of the house. Evidently the man in the shabby attire had not waited for the morning!

He had vanished!

"Gone!" murmured Wharton.

"Dear me!" said Wells.

Snort from the colonel!

"We may catch him yet!" he growled. "I shall certainly, in the circumstances, give Thomas the benefit of the doubt; and you may tell him, Wells, that he is not to be discharged!"

"Very good, sir!"

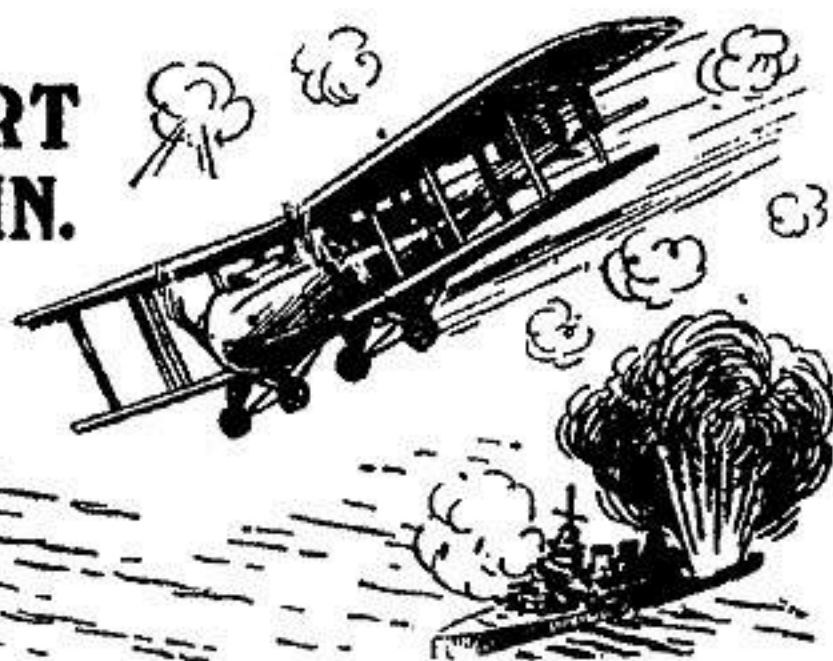
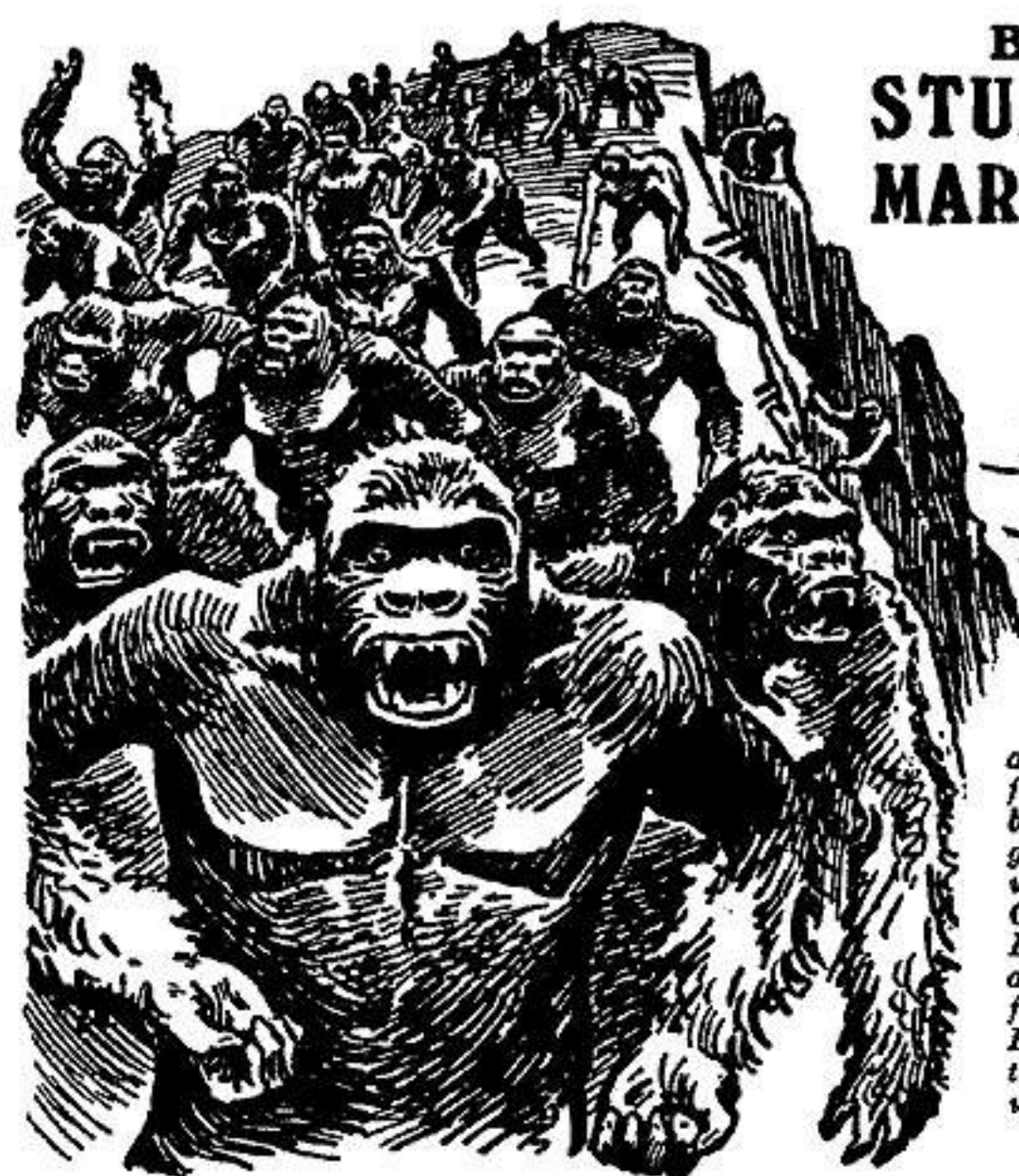
"But that scoundrel must be caught if possible. He may not yet be out of the grounds. I am very anxious to hear the truth from him!"

Colonel Wharton strode away, leaving Wells blinking into the empty cellar. Wharton and Hurree Singh followed the old gentleman. They also were keen to get hold of the man in the shabby attire, and hear what he had to

(Continued on page 28.)

WHEN the GREAT APES CAME!

By
**STUART
MARTIN.**



HOW THE STORY STARTED.

GERRY LAMBERT and **BILLY MURCHIE**, two young airmen, are flying over the African jungle, when they are forced down by an army of apes reared to crush civilisation by a renegade called Stein. By the orders of Big Ling, a giant ape-man, the two pilots are imprisoned—together with a white girl named Lola—in an underground cave. Gerry escapes, but Billy and Lola are taken aboard Big Ling's flying armada, which lays waste a Belgian outpost and captures guns and ammunition in plenty. Billy is then forced to pilot a plane and lead an expedition to strike at Europe. On nearing Algiers, Billy informs Big Ling that the French are signalling and asks for orders. "Tell them we're Belgian troops on air manœuvres," says the ape-man.

(Now read on.)

The Fall of Gibraltar!

OBVIOUSLY this was Stein's instruction. But where was Stein? His big plane was not among the fleet. Billy began to tap out a message. He had been testing Ling. The French station had not signalled, and the message Billy tapped out would be received by every station within a thousand miles. It was a short message the young pilot sent out—a hurried warning to Gibraltar to defend itself against foes from the air.

Having sent it, Billy breathed freely. Morocco loomed up, then Tangier. Gibraltar rose mighty and sullen across the straits. The usual cap of white cloud hung above the peak of the Rock.

Ling raised his gun, holding it close to Billy's body.

"Keep low," he ordered, "and pass over that ship ahead!"

He pointed towards a British battleship that was lying beyond the point of the Rock.

Billy looked back, then down swiftly. In those jerky motions he saw the situation at once. Big Ling was fumbling with the trigger apparatus that controlled the bombs slung below the plane. Close behind came the other planes, driven by the giants, trailing the barges of apes, while down below, the anti-aircraft guns of the warship were being elevated.

A sudden turn of the controls made the plane rock as the bomb fell. Simultaneously, the warship's guns belched shrapnel which fell in showers beyond the plane, the explosion of the shells pitching the craft hither and thither. But the bomb, as Billy intended, missed its objective. The only damage it did was to raise a spout of water ahead of the battleship.

A bellow of triumph from Ling rang out as he ordered the plane to circle the Rock. Round Billy piloted the

mighty machine, and soon he saw the reason for Ling's exultation.

The machine following them had dropped a bomb on the battleship's deck. The guns were silenced for a while, and by the time they began firing again the planes containing the apes were out of sight in the low-lying clouds.

Still, at Ling's dictation, Billy circled the crest of the pile. The second time round, while the ship's guns were belching shrapnel, he saw the daring of the attack.

The barges had been unloaded on the very crest. Down the cliffs apes were swarming, while the giants in charge of the other machines were dropping bombs into the town and on the shipping. Explosion after explosion rent the air.

Meanwhile, Ling kept Billy's machine high above the havoc, while he himself craned his enormous head out of the plane and noted the attack. One machine went down in flames, another struck the face of the cliff and was dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

Then other planes came from inland—planes that were new to Billy, but all filled with apes, which were dropped when the planes passed over the Rock.

They came down in their harness, with the helium bladders at their necks acting as parachutes. They landed everywhere, taking advantage of every crack, every jutting cliff, and howling like mad things.

The streets of the town were a mass of flames and smoke now, and the fort guns, captured by the apes, were firing shell after shell in the direction of the warship. The vessel was forced to draw away, although its guns still fired again and again.

All through this pandemonium Billy kept his head, sending out messages as fast as his fingers could tap them. He warned London of a possible

attack by Zeppelin. He remembered Stein's boasts of the raid he had forecasted, of the plans, so far as he knew them, of these ape-men headed by Stein. But his messages were fragmentary, for he feared that Ling might grasp the situation.

As he eased off sending out these warnings, Ling's voice roared out an order.

"Follow that plane! It is signalling! Follow it! Stein is there!"

Once more the gun was thrust towards Billy. He saw the plane indicated, travelling rapidly northward, a special flag fluttering from its tail.

Ling kept muttering in jubilation.

"We have taken Gibraltar! We have captured the Rock! Now for London! Now for Spain, France, Germany—Europe!"

Over the plains of Andalusia the two planes soared, then into the mountain region of Spain beyond. They were soon far beyond sight of Gibraltar, threading their way among the peaks.

The plane with the flag dropped at last behind a high mountain and landed on a gentle slope. Down came Billy's in its wake. He sat exhausted at the controls, staring at the strange sight before him.

Stein had stepped from his plane, but it was not Stein that Billy stared at, nor Big Ling who crawled out and sent up a howl of triumph. What riveted the eyes of the boy was the fact that here, in the midst of Spain, gorillas were everywhere—on the slopes, on the rocks—crowded like sheep. Thousands of them were there, jabbering and fighting among themselves like monkeys in a zoo.

It seemed as if all the apes in the world had gathered there, and among them stalked giants like Ling, every one holding in his hand a whip of hide. Animals were training animals.

As Billy's eyes travelled over that

scene he became aware of another object that fairly made him gasp with astonishment. In a deep valley to the left he saw the enormous bulk of a Zeppelin, anchored and steady, with passenger cars running the entire length of the envelope. He was still staring at this when Stein, who had been talking with Ling, came over slowly.

"Ling tells me," said Stein, looking up at Billy from the ground, "that you behaved well. That is good. Will you please use the instrument in front of you to send out a message to the world?"

Watching Billy's movements, he began to dictate:

"The stolen Zeppelin, which was removed from the hangar lately in unexplained circumstances, has been sighted heading southwards. It was captured by the forces of Big Ling, the ape-man, who challenges all nations to fight for the world. His armies have just taken Gibraltar from the English after laying waste the communication lines of Northern Africa. Other victories will be broadcast shortly. Big Ling is now in Europe and declares himself king of the world."

Stein watched Billy's every movement carefully to see that the message was sent out correctly.

"And now, Murchie," he said, "we intend to strike swiftly. We will rest here and then strike at London before dawn. The Zeppelin is ready."

"I cannot take part in that!" cried Billy quickly. "Kill me if you like. I will not do it!"

"Don't excite yourself," returned Stein, misinterpreting the words and tone. "You are needing a rest, like the others, and we have plenty of forces for this expedition, which is but a skirmish to divert attention. We have bigger work for you in store. Maybe will be here shortly to resume his guard over you, to see you do not get into trouble with the apes. They are apt to be short-tempered, you know," he added, with a leer.

As he spoke he raised his eyes upward. The hum of a plane sounded faint and droning, like that of a bee. The machine was but a speck among the clouds high above them as it winged its way over the mountains. But Billy's heart thumped in his breast as he watched and listened. He could have sworn that he knew that engine's hum, that the plane already passing beyond the peaks of the hills was the Golden Clipper!

A Daring Deed!

BILLY was not wrong, either. It was indeed the Golden Clipper that was passing overhead, and at the controls was his pal, Gerry.

If Billy had had an anxious time, so, too, had Gerry. Still, although he had been rendered unconscious by his fall from the tree, he had not been trampled underfoot in the jungle, as Stein and Ling had imagined. He had escaped the hoofs of the numberless beasts by a lucky accident. The reeds into which he had fallen were on marshy ground, and were bordered by the prickly hedge that all jungle animals avoid.

He clambered to his feet, and staggered dizzily for some time, trying to collect his thoughts, and gradually the past came back to him. Darkness was falling, and his one hope was to find the

Golden Clipper, and follow Billy's advice.

He located the plane at last, after cautiously walking in widening circles. He saw Stein, too, in the cockpit of the Belgian fighting plane, just taking off.

Gerry waited until Stein got away before he approached the Clipper.

By this time night had fallen. Realising he could do nothing in the darkness, he crept into the cockpit to take a much-needed rest.

It was long after dawn when he awoke. Vacating the cockpit, he cautiously entered the subterranean cavern, in search of food. All was quiet in the vast underground cave, save for the hissing of the geyser and the movement of the pool. As he walked round the edge of the lake he noticed that another figure had been added to the resin-coated statues. It was the figure of Captain Bergen!

Gerry turned away from the ghastly, yellow, transparent tomb, sickened at the sight, but more than ever resolved to do his part to defeat the perpetrators of such terrible outrages.

He found plenty of bananas and other food in the cave's stores, and, partaking of a substantial meal, went back to the Clipper.

There was not much petrol in the tank, and it took Gerry most part of the day to repair the damage to the struts and undercarriage. Then he had to break away the obstructions to allow for a take-off. If ever he worked hard in his life it was then. Numberless hindrances arose and had to be conquered; but Gerry conquered the task, and, after much manoeuvring, he was able to take off with safety.

There was no sign of anything unusual taking place below him as he sped northward. His intention was to call at a Belgian station for fuel. He knew every station on the route and headed for the Congo.

When he sighted the station he saw the ruin to which it had been reduced. A tortured, dying soldier, breathing his last, whispered the news of the apes' attack as Gerry knelt beside him. The petrol store had been fired, but a quantity kept underground had escaped destruction, and Gerry was able to obtain a load.

Had the Clipper not been fitted with a robot pilot worked by gyroscopes, which enabled him to snatch sleep now and then, the task before the young pilot would have been beyond human endurance. Gerry flew fairly low, hoping to catch a sign of the gorilla fleet, but all he saw was the trail of massacre and pillage in their wake. Outpost after outpost had been destroyed. Railways had been torn up. Lines of communication, thriving villages and towns had been laid waste. A hurricane of death and disaster had swept the valleys and the plains, leaving only smoking ruins and blackened soil.

The first sign of the despoilers came into view when Gibraltar was sighted. The booming of guns could be heard, and at some distance from the Rock a warship was stationed, sending shells at the mighty pile. As he flew high above the Rock, Gerry observed the situation.

Ships had been sunk in the harbour, and the town was a mass of ruins, while on the bare surface of the cliffs Gerry saw gorillas scrambling into caves and crevices. It seemed as if thousands of them were there, and the guns of the warship were trained on these forms, sending shell after shell towards them.

Gerry flew northward, over Spain, and then headed for the Bay and England. He saw Cornwall looming up, but he did not stop. London! Heston! Croydon! The evening was drawing in now. His petrol gave out when he was within sight of Aldershot. He came down in a field not far from a military camp, and lay back in his seat, exhausted and worn out, unable for the moment to climb to the ground.

But his arrival had been seen. A car came rushing along the road, and out of it jumped two men in military uniform. They hurried over to the Clipper, and Gerry saw that they belonged to the Intelligence branch of the Service.

"We have been watching for you," said one. "This is the Golden Clipper, and you—"

"How could you have been watching for me? I've just flown from Africa, and—"

"We know. We have been receiving some unusual messages from young Billy Murchie. Rather cryptic stuff. Fragments of warnings of some sort, but we can't place his position exactly. One message came from Gibraltar, another from Spain or France—you know, of course, what has been happening? There's trouble with some animals at Gibraltar—"

"Trouble!" cried Gerry. "There is war! Big Ling has opened war on the world—"

"We want you to tell us about it. Accounts are very scrappy. It is most astonishing. Gorillas have broken wild over Africa, we hear—"

When Gerry told his story the aspect assumed a much more serious phase than his hearers had been inclined to imagine. They took Gerry up to their mess and gave him food, then a higher officer came in and listened to his story. When Gerry finished, the officer nodded gravely, and then took a slip of paper from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"This is the latest message from your pal," he said quietly. "The War Office was inclined to take it as a joke, but after what you have said—if you are not suffering from some sort of hysteria, we—"

Every eye was on the slip of paper. On it were typed, in telegraphic form, the words:

"Stolen Zep attacking London tonight. Giant apes in command.—
BILLY MURCHIE."

"Your friend Murchie," said the officer, "mentioned your name in some of his messages, saying you would explain things. Unfortunately, our battleplanes are all on manoeuvres just now—"

"Listen!"

There was a sound of approaching aircraft and Gerry leaped from his chair and rushed to the door, throwing it open. His eyes searched the sky. The moon was rising, and there in the distance, high above and approaching fast, was a great moving body.

"The Zeppelin!" he cried. "Look!" The huge craft could be seen against the heavens, and it was travelling fast towards London!

"There isn't a fighting plane in the camp!" cried one of the officers, a young fellow whom Gerry rather liked. "It will be over London before we can do anything!"

"The Golden Clipper!" cried Gerry. "Give me petrol! Some bombs!"

But there were no live bombs available. Several agonising minutes passed while mechanics filled the Golden

Clipper's tank. Gerry was already in the cockpit, and into the companion seat climbed the young officer.

"Huskin is my name," he informed Gerry, as he settled down. "Lieutenant Huskin. The old man gave me permission to go. Contact!"

The Zeppelin was far ahead when they rose, lost in the night haze, the moon having been obscured by clouds.

They flew in the direction of London. Lights twinkled beneath them—Guildford, Woking, Weybridge, Walton. The Thames was a silver thread in the gloom. Hampton Court, Surbiton, Kingston. The Golden Clipper tore on.

"There it is!" cried Huskin, pointing ahead excitedly.

Against the lights of London the mighty bulk of the Zep showed up. Huskin handed a revolver to Gerry grinning. The young pilot took it, but shook his head deprecatingly.

Over Putney the chase continued. They were now less than five hundred yards behind the Zep, which was slowing down. Knightsbridge was barely a thousand feet below.

Gerry swung the Clipper over suddenly, and Huskin shifted uneasily.

"What's up?" he cried. "What are you doing?"

Instead of answering, Gerry pointed towards the Zeppelin, which was making for Buckingham Palace. It swung to the left slightly, and Gerry grasped the intention of the invaders in a sudden flash. Buckingham Palace! At that very moment the King was holding Court. The palace was a glare of lights.

"What are you going to do?" roared Huskin, as Gerry swung the Clipper higher.

"Hold tight!" came the answer.

"Hold tight!"

Up zoomed the Clipper above the Zep, and as they tore past the big gasbag Gerry and Huskin could see that the crew in her saloons were composed of apes, and towering above the apes stood Big Ling, his giant form outlined sharply.

The huge ape-man saw the Clipper, and raised his hand in swift signal. A gun cracked and bullets flew through the Clipper's wings.

Up and up went the plane, soaring high above the Zeppelin, then suddenly it turned and nose-dived.

In a dizzy dive it met the huge envelope, and Huskin and Gerry were thrown from the plane as it hit the envelope and tore a huge hole in its side. A terrific explosion followed, as both pilots landed on the Zep and slid down its smooth sides. They would have fallen to death, but for their clutching hands that caught at the steel struts that bore the weight of the saloons.

The dirigible lurched drunkenly, fell away to one side, and then dropped.

The yells of the apes broke out. Many of them clambered from the cars, and Huskin, holding on with one hand, lifted his revolver and took pot shots at them as they appeared.

Meanwhile, Gerry had escaped death by inches. The Clipper disappeared into the night; but a moment later there was an explosion from below and flames shot up towards the Zep.

It seemed as if the airship refused to fall. She hung, drooping in the air, for the gas had not all escaped. Then, from one of the cars came the giant form of Big Ling, revolver in hand.

He saw Gerry, and his face went terrible in fury. Raising his gun, he fired at the young pilot. The bullet caught Gerry in the shoulder, and he would have fallen, had not Huskin gripped him and hauled him back just in time.

seemed certain death. They were over Hyde Park. They saw the flaming Clipper and the forms of running people. And still the Zep drooped and drooped. She was going down by the stern.

Her end came swiftly. A tongue of flame from the burning plane caught the sagging end and leaped high. Sheet after sheet of flames shot up.

Gerry yelled to Huskin excitedly.

"Jump! Down the rope!"

They seized a trailing rope, one of the anchoring chains that had broken loose, and slid down, but when they reached the end of the rope they were still twenty feet from the ground.

They dropped together and were flung across the grass by an explosion that thundered in their ears. One of the bombs striking the ground had exploded. And that explosion was the end of the airship. No bonfire had ever let up Hyde Park as that one did, and in the midst of it the apes who had remained on board met their deaths.

(Gerry has certainly saved London from destruction, but Big Ling's not beaten yet by any means, as you'll discover when you read next week's exciting chapters of this fine thrill-packed story.)

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 Flectway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

HERE is a query from Tom Walters, of Croydon. He wants to know HOW BIG IS THE SAHARA DESERT?

It is calculated to cover an area of more than three and a half million square miles. But the Sahara is not entirely a desert, for there are large patches which are covered with vegetation. There are also rivers, which suddenly come to a standstill and never get anywhere. Apart from the shifting sand-dunes, there are also patches of stony or pebbly desert, and granite hills with volcanic cones. The population of the Sahara is estimated at two and a half millions. In some places the temperature at noon may be as high as 112 degrees Fahrenheit, but at night it drops to several degrees of frost. In fact, it is said that an entire caravan of people were once frozen to death in this region!

Have you ever wondered

WHAT ARE "HIGH" EXPLOSIVES?

Jack Carter, of Barnard Castle, asks me. Explosives are roughly divided into "low" and "high" classes. A low explosive is exploded by the application of heat, and burns more or less uniformly and slowly. But it has a wider range of action. A high explosive explodes under a blow and creates a violent disturbance in a more or less limited area. Gunpowder, for instance, is a low explosive, but picric acid and T.N.T. are high explosives.

The same reader asks how gunpowder is made. It is a mixture of 74 to 75 parts of saltpetre, 9 to 14 parts of sulphur, and 12 to 16 parts of charcoal, and, of course, is much used in the manufacture of fireworks.

NOW for a word or two about our splendid free gifts which have taken readers everywhere by storm. There are 13 more superb coloured pictures for your album in this issue of the MAGNET which brings your total up to 60 pictures all told. But there are plenty more of these handsome coloured pictures to come yet, chums. Next week's set really is "the pick of the bunch." Don't spoil your album through failing to order your MAGNET in good time. The wise reader has already arranged with his newsagent to reserve a copy regularly each week.

If you have not yet done so, take my tip and do it now!

By the way,

OTHER THINGS WORTH HAVING

are those magnificent Annuals which are now on sale—"The Holiday Annual" and "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories." At 5s. and 2s. 6d. respectively, they provide the finest value of all boys' books.

You will revel in the budget of ripping school yarns and thrilling adventure stories of the "Holiday Annual." Each tale will hold you enthralled. Here you can meet all the jolly schoolboy characters of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood Schools whose many pranks cannot fail to entertain. There are lots of other interesting features, too, and four beautiful colour plates.

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Ask your newsagent to let you have a peep at these tip-top books, he'll be only too pleased to oblige.

Meanwhile, here is next week's splendid programme:

"THE GHOST OF WHARTON LODGE!"

By Frank Richards,

is the title of the grand long yarn of the chums of Greyfriars. You all know what to expect when Frank Richards gets going, don't you? So the title is sufficient to tell you that you are in for a rattling fine yarn that will hold your interest to the very end.

There will be more thrills and exciting situations in our grand adventure story: "When the Great Apes Came!" and a full-of-fun issue of the ever-popular "Greyfriars Herald." "Linesman" will be solving more Soccer problems, and to complete a very fine programme there will be another set of stunning coloured pictures to add to your album. You'll feel like kicking yourself if you miss this bumper free gift issue!

Cheerio,

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,349.

THE MYSTERY OF WHARTON LODGE!

(Continued from page 24.)

say! The colonel hurried round to the back of the house with the two juniors at his heels.

Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh touched his chum on the arm.

"My esteemed Wharton—" he murmured.

Wharton smiled.

"It was that blighter all the time, Inky!" he said.

"It appearfully looks so," agreed the nabob. "You will rememberfully recollect that I suggestively remarked that there must be a third party in the ridiculous affair! That esteemed pincher was the ridiculous third party. I cannot sufficiently express my regretfulness—"

"You were rather an ass!" said Harry.

"The ratherfulness was terrific and preposterous!" said the nabob in distress. "I distrustfully doubted you, my esteemed and absurd chum—"

"All serene!" said Harry. "Wash it all out, old chap! Let's get that blighter and make him own up!"

But it was not easy to get the "blighter!"

A fresh fall of snow had hidden his footprints; and he had vanished without leaving a trace behind.

Colonel Wharton, after vainly scanning the snow round the building, gave an angry snort. He came to a stop, with a frowning brow, while the two juniors went on hunting for traces.

From a high attic window, a fat face, with a pair of large spectacles on the podgy nose, blinked down at them.

Billy Bunter blinked at the three heads far below, and glared through his spectacles with a glare that almost cracked them.

Outside the attic window was a ledge, thickly carpeted with snow. The fat Owl of the Remove would have been glad to knead a snowball and drop it on the heads below. He thought it over. What the three were rooting about in the snow for, Bunter did not know, or care. But he was wondering whether that stuffy, old, unspeakable beast, the colonel, was in a good temper that morning! If he looked good-tempered, Bunter was inclined to risk showing up, and making his presence known.

So—resisting the desire to snowball the trio below—Bunter blinked at the colonel, anxious to catch a sight of his face, and judge by its expression whether the beast was in a good temper or not.

He sighted that face at last, as the colonel stood looking round him—and its expression was far from encouraging.

The brows were knitted in an angry frown, and the eyes glinted like steel. The burglar's escape had made the colonel angry and deeply annoyed, and those feelings were fully expressed in his stern old face!

Bunter's faint hope died away at once. Evidently, from the colonel's look, this was not a propitious time for revealing himself!

"Beast!" murmured Bunter.

The colonel lit a cigar. He did not see the two juniors, who were stooping to scan the snow for possible footmarks.

Bunter's eyes gleamed.

He gathered up a double handful of snow, and rapidly kneaded a snowball. Bunter's aim was not generally good; but it was fairly easy for even the fat Owl to toss a snowball on a head below! And it was pretty certain that Colonel Wharton would think that one of the two juniors had done it, as there was nobody else in sight! Which would

serve them right all round, for keeping a nice fellow like Bunter a dismal prisoner in a dismal attic!

Whiz!

Crash!

Bunter popped back and closed the window the moment he had hurled the snowball.

Colonel Wharton jumped as his hat flew from his head. He staggered, slipped in the snow, and sat down.

"Good gad!" he roared. "What—"

Wharton and Hurreo Singh turned round to him at once. The colonel scrambled to his feet and glared at them.

"Which of you threw that snowball?" he roared.

"Snowball!" repeated Wharton blankly. "I certainly did not!"

"Certainly I did not, esteemed sahib!" gasped Hurreo Singh.

Colonel Wharton glared at them. He stared round—no one was in sight! He picked up his hat, jammed it on his head, snorted, and strode away. The two juniors stared after him, and then at one another.

"Who the deuce—" exclaimed Wharton.

"Who the esteemed dickens—"

It was really mysterious! Wharton Lodge seemed to be haunted by mysteries that Christmaside! And the mysteries were not yet at an end—and were not likely to be, so long as Wharton Lodge still sheltered hidden Bunter!

THE END.

(Now look out for the second grand yarn in this new series, entitled: "THE GHOST OF WHARTON LODGE!" which will appear in next week's bumper issue of the MAGNET. You'll find more handsome coloured pictures in this issue, too, chums!)



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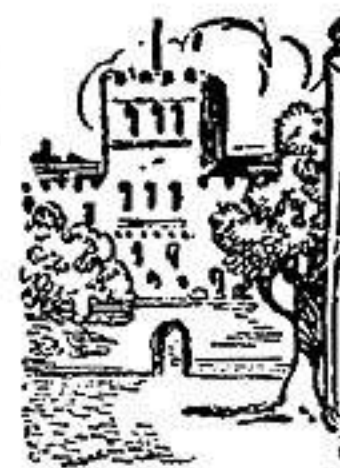
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EVERY MAN HAS A DOUBLE

If mine will kindly look me up, I shall be delighted to present him with a Christmas Box consisting of One Bag of Oof—on condition that he does my entertaining stuff while I have a good long snooze!—"LANGUID LORD," c/o "GREYFRIARS HERALD."



THE NEW Greyfriars Herald



No. 64 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

December 23rd, 1933.

SURPLUS TUCK

Sufficient quantity to feed 100 starving men urgently required by Christmas Day.

Bunter has threatened to have his Christmas dinner with us!

Donations to the FAMOUS FIVE, c/o "GREYFRIARS HERALD."

Masked Mummies Impress Temple

"Remove Nowhere in Comparison!"

In the theatrical line it takes a lot to impress Cecil Reginald Temple. Temple, as you may or may not know, is producer and stage manager for the Upper Fourth Dramatic Society, so his critical faculties are on a rather high plane. If a stage show meets with Temple's approval, it's as good as hall-marked and stamped in every link.

Naturally, Remove standards in theatrical production fall very short of the mark where Temple is concerned. All through the last term Temple has been going to great pains to demonstrate to Greyfriars at large that the Remove are hopeless duds at acting. The notion that Wibley is in any way a born theatrical genius particularly gets Temple's goat.

Temple's views, of course, have not found unqualified acceptance in the Remove—in fact several members of the Dramatic Society have gone so far as to say: "If you know a better set of actors of our weight and age, trot 'em out!" To which pointed remark Temple has hitherto made no response.

But now, ye budding Thespians of the Remove, you'll have to prepare for a shock. Something has come along to impress Temple at last!

On the day after he arrived home for the hols, Temple had a visit from a masked band of strolling players. And these masked mummies could act.

"You Remove kids talk about acting!" said Temple scornfully to our representative, after the show had ended and the mummies were being regaled with supper in the kitchen. "Why, these masked players could act you off your feet—and there's not one of them over fifteen years of age, judging by their build!"

"As to your much-vaunted Wibley, I don't mind telling you he couldn't hold a candle to the leader of this troupe! This kid, whoever he was, was simply marvellous—an actor to the finger-tips! My hat! You should just have seen him!"

May we confide a little secret to you, Temple, old bean?

The masked mummies who acted in your house were all members of the Remove Dramatic Society.

And the leader was William Wibley! We're having this copy of the "Herald" delivered to you specially, accompanied by a small bottle of smelling-salts, which we trust will enable you to remain conscious after the shock!

Merry Christmas, old sport!

DIDN'T MINCE HIS WORDS!

Hazeldene's pater bought a prize turkey, which was accidentally swallowed up by a mincing machine and came out as saveloys. Hazel says he never "sausage" a sad sight in all his life!



You'd imagine that that "do or die" look that comes into Coker's face about a hundred times a day would fade out round about Christmas-time, wouldn't you?

Well, it doesn't!

When Coker suddenly decided to dress up as Santa Claus and distribute gifts to the deserving poor in the village hall, determination was writ in block capitals all over his physiognomy. A steely expression was in his eyes and his jaw protruded at least half-an-inch more than usual!

To Potter and Greene he said: "I'll jolly well see that everybody in the village has a real good Christmas!"

He said it in the same tones as he might have said "I'll jolly well see that everybody in the village gets a punch on the nose this Christmas!"

When Coker does a thing he does it in style. He ordered enough tuck to supply a regiment of troops for a month and arranged for the big stores from which he obtained it to send it to his home.

Not content with that, he hired a Santa Claus costume and white whiskers and—not without difficulty—a sleigh and a pair of dashing horses!

To say that there was a sensation when Coker turned out would be to make a serious

understatement. If he'd flown straight out of the clouds in a chariot drawn by a brace of pheasants, the excitement couldn't have been much more intense!

Santa Claus Coker drove down the village street at a gallop and drew up outside the village hall.

Unhappily, the gallop was so furious that he experienced a slight difficulty in drawing up in time, the result being that the horses charged through the front entrance and jammed the entire outfit in the main doorway! The villagers, rather to Coker's surprise, weren't a bit pleased about it.

When the horses and the cargo had been extricated from the wreck, Coker got to work on the gift distribution. Here again, there was a slight hitch. By some strange means the stores had sent Coker the wrong articles. It looked like real tuck, but it was only imitation tuck, intended apparently for a wholesale practical joker or some kind of a stage scene!

The villagers beamed with great cheerfulness when they were handed massive-looking hams and turkeys and plum puddings. But you should have seen their faces when they found that the hams were made of cardboard, and the turkeys of canvas, and that the plum

puddings bounced suspiciously like footballs.

It's marvellous to think that a cheerful concourse, exuding happiness and gratitude, can be changed in the space of a few minutes into a howling mob, thirsting for gore. One wouldn't have thought it possible unless it had been demonstrated to him. But it was demonstrated to him so unmistakably that he was very glad to be able to make his exit out of one of the windows!

If you think that Coker was it up after that you're dead wrong. Behind the white whiskers he still wore Coker's expression was even more unconquerably determined than it had been before.

What he did was to hire a car to run him into the town.

There he called at the stores, obtained the parcel which he had been intended for him, and also purchased a small supply of second-hand police truncheons.

Having divided the truncheons between himself and the heroic Potter and Greene, he returned to the village hall in triumph and kept back the aggressive villagers, while he explained that he had jolly well made up his mind to give them a happy Christmas and give them a happy Christmas he would.

And after that there was no more trouble. The villagers beamed again and Santa Claus Coker did his stuff according to programme.

So far as we know it's the first time on record that Santa Claus has ever distributed his with one hand while threateningly flourishing a police truncheon in the other. But Coker always is breaking records, anyway!

A "SOLELESS" TASK!

Stott asks if anyone has any old footwear to give away.

Bunter invited him to Bunter Court for Christmas and not, as has worn out all his boots trying to find it!

BROKE DOWN WHILE BREAKING UP

Skinner's Tearful Farewell

It was quite a shock to us to find Skinner of the Remove quietly weeping in a corner of the quad on breaking-up day.

"Skinner, old chap—" we said, gently.

"Don't—don't!" moaned Skinner. "Words only make it worse!"

"But what's wrong, old fellow?" Skinner gulped.

"It's—it's the thought of leaving the dear old school behind," he said huskily. "The grey old pile of buildings—the noble elms—the grassy playing fields. It seems hard to break with them, doesn't it? Latin, for instance. I can hardly bear the thought that I shall do no more Latin for a time!"

"Oh crumbs!" we exclaimed, involuntarily.

"And no more impots, either!" went on Skinner, with a deep sigh. "Life will scarcely seem worth the living without impots! No prefects to send us up to bed at nine-thirty! Can you wonder that I weep?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Worst of all," groaned Skinner, "there'll be no masters to cane us and no Head to dust our pants with the jolly old birch. Won't it be awful?"

"Look here, you silly ass—"

"Last, but not least, we shan't have the chance of partaking of doorsteps and scrape in Hall for tea. Somehow or other we'll have to put up with mince pies and Christmas cake and pastries! Oh, I can't bear to think of it!"

And Skinner burst into a flood of bitter tears.

We picked up a handful of snow and stuffed it down the collar of the weeping Removeite.

For a man so broken by emotion, Skinner hit out in a surprisingly effective manner!

CHRISTMAS DUFF REPLACED REBUFF

Loder Welcomes Remove Waits

Bulstrode thought it would be a great idea to serenade Loder with a few Christmas carols.

Bulstrode's homo is near Loder's. Brown and Penfold are staying with Bulstrode, and Carne and Walker with Loder. And Bulstrode and Brown and Penfold have a few old scores to settle with Loder and Carne and Walker.

"It'll just serve him right to have to listen to 'em," Bulstrode said, with quite un-Christmas vengefulness. "I can play my cornet. I know Loder doesn't like it."

"My hat! I should think not, either!" grinned Brown.

"You can bring your tin-whistle, Penfold; that's



"Here, what the thump!" protested Penfold.

"And Brown can sing," chuckled Bulstrode. "If that doesn't spoil their Christmas dinner for 'em, nothing will!"

"You silly ass!" was Brown's indignant comment.

But Brown was willing to agree that in combination

with Bulstrode's cornet and Penfold's tin-whistle his voice might sound reasonably painful, so he fell in with the wheeze.

Confidently anticipating that Loder and Carne and Walker would greet their musical efforts with a salvo of such missiles as happened to be in the immediate vicinity, Bulstrode & Co. took with them a healthy supply of ripe tomatoes, over-ripe eggs, and paper bags filled with soot, so that they might effectively respond.

But a surprise was in store for the Greyfriars waits.

There was no question whatever about their musical efforts being painful. We are positively assured that after the first two bars Loder's cat had a fit, and the village fire brigade turned out under the impression that an earthquake had happened.

But Loder & Co., far from disliking it, showed every sign of enthusiastic appreciation!

They appeared at the window before the Remove waits

had finished the first verse of "Good King Wenceslas," and the Remove waits surreptitiously held their missiles at the "ready." But much to Bulstrode & Co.'s surprise, Loder & Co. didn't hurl abuse and flower-pots. They invited the waits into the house instead!

Bulstrode & Co. accepted the invitation principally for the reason that they were well-armed.

It wouldn't have made the slightest difference, anyway, for they had no occasion to use their armory.

Loder & Co. were perfect hosts! Instead of looking, as they usually do look, like demon kings in a pantomime, they were seraphic smiles and simply oozed peace and goodwill. They dished out ginger wine and Christmas pudding, complimented the "kids" on their musical prowess, and wished them a very merry Christmas before bidding them farewell.

Bulstrode and Penfold and Brown almost tottered away from Loder's dwelling. The unexpectedness of their experience was almost paralyzing!

As Bulstrode remarked afterwards, Christmas is liable to affect people like that; but who on earth would have thought of Loder & Co. becoming infected?

SNOOP'S FIRST SNOWBALL

Snoop has never been fond of snowballing.

It's not that he has any moral objection to hurling a snowball at another person. It's the prospect of getting a snowball back that deters Snoop!

Recently Stott has been patiently pointing out to Snoop that by barring the hilarious sport of snowballing, he is missing half the fun of the winter season. Snoop has been listening, learning, and inwardly digesting.

By the time Snoop arrived home for the vac he was almost convinced that it was necessary for his salvation that he should throw a snowball at somebody.

On the first day of the holiday, while on a shopping expedition in the town, he found just the target he could have wished for—an elderly gentleman wearing a toppler, who was walking twenty yards ahead of him.

Snoop dived into the snow, collected up a fine double-handful and welded it together. Taking careful aim, he buzzed the snowball at the elderly gent's napper.

Snoop scored a bullseye first time—and for the first time in his life experienced the delicious ecstasy which comes from knocking a shining toppler off its wearer's head. It was a truly delightful experience and Snoop simply howled with mirth.

Unfortunately his mirth was of short duration.

You see, the wearer of the toppler turned out to be the Head!

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!



Smithy and Skinner had a wager as to who was the fatter—Bunter or his sister, Bessie, of Cliff House school. The result was a tie—there is nothing to choose between them!

William Wibley's impersonations are very popular in the Remove. His burlesque of Mr. Front ended in a licking, though, when Frouty came up unexpectedly behind him!

Horace Coker called on Wingate the other day to demand a place in the First XI. Wingate said this was the 37th time this term and that he has had to show Coker the door!

Tozer proudly announced that Friarale was entirely free from gangsters. He changed his mind, however, when Dicky August and Co. said in wait for him with peashooters!

Cherry and Bolsover major had a real set-to when Bob caught Bolsover bullying a tag. Bolsover was man enough, though, after being licked, to offer Bob his hand, admitting his fault!

At compulsory footie practice Bunter took 25 shots at goal; 5 of them went over the bar and 19 went wide! Only one shot hit the goalkeeper—Squid—who nearly dropped the ball in surprise!