

Grand Christmas Number

The Magnet 2^d



"Hi! Wait for Me!"

GRAND YULETIDE YARN OF EXCITING SCHOOLBOY ADVENTURE!

BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!

By FRANK RICHARDS



Featuring HARRY WHARTON & CO., the World-Famous Chums of GREYFRIARS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Whole Hog!

"ABOU! Christmas—" said Billy Bunter, of the Remove Form, at Greyfriars.

And Harry Wharton & Co. answered, with one voice:

"Go it, Bunter!"

Which was remarkable.

Generally, at the end of term, there was little encouragement for Billy Bunter when he desired to discuss the "Lols."

Polite fellows, like Lord Mauleverer, would disappear round corners when Bunter came along. Less polite fellows would request Bunter to go and eat coke. Smithy had heaved a cushion at him, when the fat Owl of the Remove proposed to accompany Smithy on his trip abroad that Christmas. Up to a day or two ago, the Famous Five had been equally shy of the subject.

Now they were all smiles—encouraging smiles. When Billy Bunter rolled up to them in the quad, they remembered no pressing engagement elsewhere. They did not attempt to elude the topic. With one voice, they encouraged Bunter to proceed, in the most hearty manner.

Up to a day or two ago, Bob Cherry had lifted one of the two largest feet in the Greyfriars Remove, if Bunter referred to the subject. Now, so far from showing any desire to boot Bunter, Bob grinned his most amiable grin. Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Johnny Bull gave Bunter their politest and most genial attention. Hurree Jamsel Ram Singh's face was wreathed in dusky smiles. Nothing could have been more pleasant, agreeable, and encouraging; yet Bunter did

not look bucked. On the other hand, he looked worried.

"About Christmas—" he repeated.

"Carry on, old chap!" said Bob.

"About—about Christmas—" stammered Bunter.

"We've had that!" Nugent remarked. "You're repeating yourself, old fat bean!"

"I—I mean—"

"Cough it up!" said Harry Wharton.

"I—I mean about—about Christmas—"

Evidently Bunter found a little difficulty in getting it out. However, it had to be got out.

"You—you see, I've asked you fellows to Bunter Court for the Christmas holidays—" gasped the fat Owl.

"We've accepted!" said Harry Wharton gravely. "That's all right, Bunter!"

"The acceptfulness of the esteemed invitation was terrifically unanimous!" said Hurree Jamsel Ram Singh, with a smiling nod.

"Mind, I meant it—" said Bunter, blinking anxiously at the Famous Five through his big spectacles.

"Of course!" agreed Nugent.

"I wasn't pulling your leg, or anything," continued Bunter. "My idea was that, being such pals, we should be together for these hols—"

"Splendid idea!" said Johnny Bull. "We're not letting you down, Bunter!"

"You surely didn't think we'd let you down, old fat fruit!" said Bob Cherry reproachfully.

"Oh! No!" gasped Bunter. "But—but— Mind, I meant it! I—I wanted you fellows to come to Bunter Court. I never expected you to refuse, or—or anything of that sort, you know. As I said, if you fellows couldn't come with me, I'd come with you, but I—I never expected you to

decline my invitation. I—I was jolly glad when you accepted it!"

"You looked glad!" assented Bob.

"As glad as you look now!" remarked Nugent.

Billy Bunter grinned feebly.

"But—but as it turns out," he said, "we—we shall have to wash it out, after all. It—it turns out to be—be impossible for me to take a party home to Bunter Court. But—but you won't lose me for Christmas. You can take my word for that! I'll come with you fellows instead! See?"

The Famous Five, apparently, did not "see." In fact, they were determined not to "see."

Billy Bunter had asked the Co. home for Christmas, with the deeply artful intention of wangling it in reverse order.

Once it was established that they were to pass the Christmas holidays together, it was—or should have been—easy enough for something to happen at Bunter Court to bar off that Christmas party, leaving the chums of the Remove landed with Bunter.

But it hadn't worked out like that!

Greatly to Billy's surprise and dismay, the Famous Five had not only accepted the invitation, but seemed fearfully keen on it—so keen on it, that they turned deaf ears to hints and excuses.

To a statement that Mr. Bunter was going to have the decorators in over Christmas, they had replied that they would help with the decorating. To a statement that there was measles at Bunter Court, they generously offered to lend aid in the nursing, regardless of the risk of infection.

Bunter had dropped the decorators and the measles as chickens that would not fight. Now, evidently, he had thought of another dodge. The Famous Five were quite interested to hear

what it was. But it was not going to produce any effect on them. Bunter, at holiday-time, was a stickler. Now he was going to learn what it was like to be stuck!

Five heads were solemnly shaken.

"I'm afraid it's rather too late to make new arrangements now, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

"Much too late!" said Nugent.

"The lateness is too terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The stickfulness to the esteemed programme is the proper caper."

"But I—I say, you fellows—" stuttered Bunter.

"My dear chap," said Johnny Bull, "it's all right! We're coming! Have you let your pater know about sending the Rolls for us?"

"But I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter, "I—I'm fearfully sorry, and all that, but—but—there's been a fire—"

"A what?" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"A fire!" stuttered Bunter. "A fire at Bunter Court! So you see—"

"But, my dear chap, fires are all right in December!" said Bob Cherry. "We shall expect to find a fire there—Yuletide logs crackling and blazing on the old hearth in the ancient oak hall of Bunter Court—"

"I—I mean, the house has been burned down!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh crikey!"

The Famous Five fairly gasped. This was really going it strong! Decorators and measles having failed to work the oracle, Bunter had been driven to the desperate resource of burning down his ancestral home!

"So—so you see—" stammered Bunter.

He blinked at the Famous Five. Decorators they had heeded not; measles they took in their stride, as it were. But even these sticky beasts could not stick on for a Christmas party at a mansion that had been burned to the ground. Bunter was going the whole hog this time, and he had no doubt that it was a winner.

And, indeed, the playful five were rather at a loss, for a moment or two.

Not, of course, that they had the remotest idea of going with Bunter for the holidays. They were only keeping him up to it from a sense of humour, deriving entertainment from his dodges and wriggles. But they were going to keep him up to it to the very last day—only on break-up day was Bunter going to be allowed to escape without five visitors for Christmas!

"Not even a few rooms left?" asked Bob.

"Not a wall left standing!" said Bunter. "The whole mansion gutted, and—"

"What about the spacious garage? We might—"

"The garage went with the rest," said Bunter hastily. "Heaps of ashes—and cinders! Smoking ruins!"

"Well, that does seem rather to wash it out!" said Bob. He glanced at his friends. "As Mr. Bunter will miss us at Christmas, you chaps, it's up to us to express our sympathy for this terrible catastrophe. Let's go and ask Quelch to let us use his phone. I'll ring up Bunter's pater, and we'll tell him how fearfully sorry we are that his historic mansion has been burned down."

"We can't do less!" agreed Harry Wharton.

"A few words of sympathy at such a time will be grateful and comforting," said Johnny Bull. "Let's!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter, "you—you can't get my pater on the phone! You—you see, the telephone was burnt out with the mansion—"

"I suppose it would be!" said Bob. "Still, we'll try. If we can't get through, that will wash it out, of course. But we'll try."

"Oh, yes, we'll try!" said Nugent decidedly.

"I—I—I wouldn't, old chap—"

"Must!" said Bob. "Why, dash it all, your pater was going to give us a tremendous time—huge parties in a superb mansion, crowded by titled people—skating on the immense lake in the grounds—hunting and shooting and whatnot! Why, the very least we can do is to express our sympathy, now the whole bag of tricks has been burned to the ground. Come on, you men!"

The Famous Five walked off to the House.

Billy Bunter blinked after them in utter dismay.

What effect such a telephone-call would produce on Mr. William Samuel Bunter he could not imagine. Mr. Bunter would be surprised to hear that a party had been coming for Christmas, anyhow. He would be still more surprised at condolences on his immense mansion having been burned to the ground. The fat Owl was only too well aware that Bunter Villa still stood in its

Ever since Billy Bunter has been in the Greyfriars Remove he has landed himself on the Famous Five for the Christmas holidays. But this year the artful dodger issues invitations to the Famous Five. There's a catch in it somewhere!

accustomed place, and that the telephone was in working order!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

It dawned on his fat mind that that catastrophic conflagration, like the decorators and the measles, was a chicken that would not fight. He rushed after the juniors.

"I—I—I say, you fellows—" he squeaked.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry looked round. "What is it now?"

"I—I say, d-d-don't phone!" gasped Bunter. "It—it's all right! I—I hadn't finished telling you! What I meant to say was that—that the fire was—was got under—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"And—and—and it's all right! The—the place m-m-might have been burned down, only it—wasn't! That's what I meant to say! D-d-don't phone!"

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "All right, then! Rely on us for the hols, Bunter!"

"Beast! I—I mean, right-ho, old chap!" groaned Bunter, and he rolled away.

And not till he was gone did the chums of the Remove chortle.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bunter!

"I SAY, Smithy—"

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, gave no heed. It was early morning; the bell for school was almost due to ring

when Billy Bunter came on the Bounder under the frosty old elms after breakfast.

He blinked at him in surprise through his big spectacles, wondering what the dickens Smithy was up to.

Smithy was standing close to one of the old trees, at a short distance from the letter-box in the school wall. There was a snowball in his hand and a grin on his face.

"Waiting for somebody, Smithy?" asked Bunter.

"Yes; shut up!" said the Bounder over his shoulder.

"If it's that beast Wharton—"

"Fathead!"

The Bounder would not have been likely to take careful cover behind a tree if he had been going to snowball another Remove fellow. Smithy was watching for bigger game than a junior.

There had been a fall of snow over night, and Greyfriars gleamed white that morning. In the distance, nearer the House, dozens of fellows were engaged with snowballs—Remove and Fourth and Shell. They had been snowballing one another till Coker of the Fifth appeared in the offing—then, by common consent, they snowballed Coker, and old Horace was having quite a busy day.

But the Bounder was not looking in that direction. Neither was Billy Bunter interested.

Bunter was thinking out his problem of the five visitors for Bunter Court who were displaying sticking powers worthy of the fat Owl himself. Quite unaware that they were only pulling his fat leg, Bunter found this a worrying problem. Decorators, measles, and a fire having failed, Bunter had to think of a new dodge for making them come unstuck—and, coming on the Bounder, it occurred to him to try his luck again with Smithy.

Smithy's millionaire pater was taking him for a run abroad that Christmas—a trip that Bunter would have been very happy to share. A cushion landing on his fat waistcoat had discouraged him—but hope springs eternal in the human breast. If Bunter could fix it up with Smithy for the vac, that unfortunate invitation to Bunter Court would have to fall through—indeed, Bunter, in that case, was prepared to clear off with Smithy, leaving his Christmas party to wonder what had become of him!

"I say, Smithy, about the hols—" said Bunter hopefully.

"Shut up, ass!" breathed Vernon-Smith. "Carne will be along in a minute—I heard him tell Loder he was going to post a letter. Dry up, and clear!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "You're going to snowball a Sixth Form prefect! I say, Smithy—"

"Buzz off!"

"I say, I'll jolly well give him one, too, if you like!" said Bunter.

"You fat ass, you'd better cut!"

"Oh, I ain't afraid of Carne!" declared Bunter. "He whopped me the other day, and Compton of the Fifth stopped him and jolly well punched him, and he's let me alone since then. He finks that new chap in the Fifth! I'll back you up, old chap!"

"Get out!" answered the Bounder ungratefully.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Hook it!" snapped the Bounder impatiently.

"About the hols, old chap!" said Bunter. "I've been looking for you, old fellow. I was going to say—Beast!"

Vernon-Smith turned on Bunter and tapped the snowball on his fat little

nose. The fat junior tottered back, slipped on the snowy ground, and sat down.

"Urrgh!" gasped Bunter. "Boast! Ow!"

Smithy turned his back on him again. Peering from behind the frosty trunk of the elm, he spotted a Sixth Form senior coming down to the letter-box. It was Arthur Carne of the Sixth, the fellow for whom Smithy was waiting and watching.

Smithy's hand went up, and the snowball flew, with a deadly accuracy of aim. There was a sudden spluttering yell from Carne as he received it on his ear and went staggering.

Almost as swiftly as the snowball the Bounder shot away in the opposite direction. Arthur Carne was a very unpopular prefect, and it was quite a lark to catch him behind the ear with a snowball, but it was an extremely risky game.

A junior who got a Sixth Form prefect with a snowball could not depart from the spot too quickly. Like the guests in Macbeth, Smithy stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once—and he vanished like a ghost at cock-crow—while Carne of the Sixth was still staggering and clawing snow from his ear. A moment more, and Smithy mingled with the merry crowd snowballing Coker of the Fifth.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Carne, as he clawed snow, and he glared round with an infuriated glare for the fellow who had "got" him.

There was no doubting the direction from which the snowball had come. Carne of the Sixth rushed in that direction, and came round the frosty elm at such a rush that he stumbled over a fat junior who was just beginning to scramble to his feet and gather up fallen school books.

"Ow!" howled Bunter. "Gerroff!"

Carne sprawled over him. Bunter, squashed into the snow, gurgled wildly. Carne scrambled up.

"You!" he gasped. "You cheeky young rotter!"

Smithy had vanished. Bunter was on the spot. It was rather natural that Carne should take it for granted that it was Bunter who had buzzed that snowball at his ear. Bunter had reason, the next moment, to repent him that he had not taken Smithy's advice and "cut." Carne's left hand grasped his collar and yanked him to his feet. His right hand rose and fell.

Carne had left his official ashplant in his study. But he had a heavy hand. It landed on Bunter rather like a flail.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Ow! Oh! Yow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter. "I say—Yaroo! It wasn't—whooop—me! I say, Carne—Yooop! I—I say, leago! Stoppit! I'll tell Compton!"

If Billy Bunter hoped that that would induce Carne of the Sixth to "leago" it showed that Bunter had a hopeful nature.

The name of Compton, the new fellow in the Fifth, was like a red rag to a bull to Arthur Carne. Not only had Compton taken the place in the first eleven to which Carne considered himself entitled, but he had actually handled the prefect and got away with it, so to speak. Billy Bunter could hardly have made a more unfortunate break. Carne's face, already red with rage, grew crimson, his eyes glinted, and his hands descended on Bunter harder and faster.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Yaroo! Help! Yoo-hoop!" roared the hapless Owl. "Oh crikey! Oh

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crumbs! Oh lor! I say—Yaroooh! Stoppit! Yoo-hoop!"

Bang, bang! Thump! Bang!

In frantic desperation Bunter wrenched and tore himself loose. He darted away at top speed. After him rushed Carne.

But for that unfortunate mention of Compton, Carne might have considered that Bunter had had enough—as, indeed, he had! Now he wanted to give him some more! Bunter gave a terrified blink over his shoulder, saw the exasperated prefect in pursuit, and fairly flew. His fat little legs twinkled as he sprinted.

Carne, no doubt, would have captured him and administered some more of the same, but the bell rang, and he remembered that he had not yet posted his letter. So, giving up the chase, the bully of the Sixth walked back to the letter-box.

Bunter, unaware that he had given up the chase, flew on. Panting for breath, puffing and blowing, the fat junior covered the ground, and flew into the House rather like a runaway lorry.

"Urrgh!" gurgled Bunter, as he joined the Remove fellows in the Form-room passage, where they were heading for the Remove-room, as the bell ceased to clang. "Grooogh! I say, you fellows—Urrrrgh!"

"Shaking down your brekker, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Urrgh! That beast Carne—Urrgh!" gasped Bunter. "He thought I'd snowballed him, and it was that beast Smithy—Urrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I told you to cut!" grinned the Bounder. "If you ask for these things, old fat slug, you must expect to get them!"

"Beast! I've dropped my books!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I've left my books—"

"Here comes Quelch!"

Mr. Quelch came up the passage, to let his Form into the Form-room. Billy Bunter rolled in with the rest—minus his books! He could only hope that Quelch's eyes would pass him over in first and second lessons, and that he would not want his books! Bunter, as mentioned, had a hopeful nature!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bend Over!

"BUNTER!"

"Oh lor!" groaned Billy Bunter.

First lesson was safely over. Billy Bunter had not been called on to construe Quelch's gimlet eye had passed him over, and Billy Bunter breathed more freely when Latin was shut down and done with.

Second lesson that morning was English literature. For literature, English or foreign, Billy Bunter cared about as much as he did for the classic tongue of Virgil and Horace. Still, it came easier; and, on the whole, Bunter felt that he could stand English literature. Compared with Latin or maths, indeed, it might be called almost agreeable! It was work, and, therefore, rotten; but not quite so rotten as other forms of work!

But for English literature a fellow had to have a book. Billy Bunter's volume of "Selected Verse" was lying, along with his Virgil and his Latin grammar, somewhere under the frosty elms near the letter-box.

The Remove were doing "Gray's Elegy in a Country Churchyard," of which Bunter remembered nothing

except that the curfew tolled the knell of parting day.

It was like Quelch, of course, to call on Bunter! Wibley, who was great on elocution, could have spouted verse in great style; and any fellow in the Remove could have delivered it better than Bunter. But Mr. Quelch was one of those dutiful schoolmasters who give special attention to backward pupils—for which William George Bunter was not in the least grateful. Bunter could have done quite well with a much less dutiful Form-master.

"I say, lend me your book, Toddy!" said Bunter, in an anguished whisper.

"Bunter!"

Quelch's ears were as keen as his gimlet eyes.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"You are perfectly aware, Bunter, that I do not allow borrowing books in this Form! Where is your own book?"

"I—I dropped it, sir!" stammered Bunter.

"You dropped it!" repeated Mr. Quelch staring at the fat Owl. "And why did you not pick it up again, Bunter?"

"I—I was in a—a—a hurry, sir! I—I was afraid of being late for class, sir!" stuttered Bunter.

At which there was a general grin in the Remove and a grim frown from the Remove master. Punctuality—especially for class—was not included in the list of Bunter's virtues. Very often he was late—though not so often as he would have liked to be. It was true that he had been in a hurry that morning, but certainly his hurry had not been due to any desire to be punctual for class.

"I presume, Bunter, that you have forgotten your book!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "You will go and fetch it at once, and you will take fifty lines!"

"Oh lor!" I mean, yes, sir!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the Form-room, leaving the rest of the Remove to the delights of English literature.

He rolled out into the quad.

It was frosty and cold, and there was snow on the ground, and a keen wind blew from the sea. But there was a glimmer of winter sunshine; and Bunter, though no whale on fresh air, preferred it to the Form-room.

In a few minutes he reached the spot where his books had been dropped, and recovered them. A few more minutes would have sufficed to return to the Remove-room and English literature.

But Bunter, on the present occasion, was in no hurry. Carne was in the Sixth Form Room at class; and there was no danger of running into him. Having been awarded fifty lines for not bringing in his books, Bunter felt that he was entitled to have his money's-worth, as it were.

English literature was less offensive than other forms of exertion—still, the less a fellow had of it the better! Instead, therefore, of heading for the House, Billy Bunter allowed himself the luxury of a stroll round the quad—all the more enjoyable from the reflection that the other fellows were mugging up English literature while he was loafing about in happy laziness!

Having a hopeful nature, Bunter hoped that Mr. Quelch would believe that it had taken him a long time to find those books. After all, some fellows might have kicked them out of sight, and Bunter might have had to hunt for them. It hadn't happened—but it might have! It would do for Quelch, anyhow—and it was as near the truth as Bunter was accustomed to get.

When half an hour had elapsed, however, even Billy Bunter had a feeling that he had better turn up in the Form-

room again. He had no more yearning for English literature than before; but he realised that it would be prudent not to put Quelch's credulity to too severe a strain.

Quelch was not one of those trustful masters—the kind that Bunter liked. He was quite capable of doubting a fellow's word when he was telling "whoppers."

So Bunter rolled, at last, back to the House.

But he paused on his way to the Form-room. By that time the letters would be in the rack, which the fellows were accustomed to take in break, which followed second lesson. It would not take more than a minute to glance over the letters and ascertain whether there was one for him. Bunter was expecting a postal order!

He blinked over the letters. There were a good many, and he blinked inquisitively at every one of them. None was addressed to Bunter; there was still, it seemed, delay in the long-expected arrival of his celebrated postal order! His eyes, and his spectacles, fixed rather curiously on a letter addressed to V. Compton.

Valentine Compton, the new fellow in the Fifth Form, did not have many letters. But Bunter knew that he was expecting one; for on every occasion for the past few days when Bunter had rolled up to see whether his postal order had come, Compton had also turned up to look for letters.

Now there was one for Compton; and Bunter had no doubt that it was from that uncle of his who had sent him to Greyfriars—Captain Compton, the owner of the handsome steam-yacht Firefly.

Something about the hols, no doubt. It was known that Compton of the Fifth was going on a cruise that Christmas vacation, in his uncle's yacht.

Billy Bunter had thought several times of giving the new man in the Fifth a hint that a Christmas cruise would suit him down to the ground. But even Billy Bunter's cheek, extensive as it was, had its limit, and he had not ventured to give Compton of the Fifth that hint.

Bunter was blinking at that letter, noting that the postmark was Dover, when a footstep startled him.

Carne of the Sixth came down the corridor from the Sixth Form Room.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, in alarm.

Arthur Carne was the very last fellow at Greyfriars that he wanted to meet. He was surprised to see him out of Form, and certainly had not expected to see him.

Carne stared at him.

"What the dickens—" he exclaimed, evidently as surprised to see Bunter out of Form as Bunter was to see him. He made a movement towards the fat Owl, his hand half raised.

Bunter did not linger.

He flew.

In about three seconds the fat junior arrived at the door of the Remove-room as breathless as when he had arrived for first lesson that morning. He was gasping as he rolled in.

"Bunter!" came Mr. Quelch's voice. English literature was going strong;

but it was suspended as Billy Bunter rolled in. Quelch's gimlet eyes fixed on him, with a glint in them that Bunter did not like at all.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"You have been absent more than half an hour, Bunter!"

"I—I—I had to hunt for those books, sir!" stammered Bunter. "Some—some fellow had kicked them about, sir, and they were all over the shop, sir; and—and as soon as I—I found them, I—I ran all the way back, sir!"

Mr. Quelch gazed at him. Bunter's gasping, breathless state seemed to bear out his statement that he had hurried. It was clear that he had, at all events, done the last lap at top speed.

"Whoop!"

"—is for telling untruths, Bunter."

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"You may go to your place, Bunter."

"Ow!"

Billy Bunter went to his place. He wriggled painfully as he sat there till the bell went for break.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Missing Letter!

"SMITHY, old fellow!"

"Scat!"

"But, I say, Smithy—"

"You fat, frowsy frog!" said the Bounder. "If you say 'hols' just once, I'll boot you!"

"Beast! I wasn't going to say hols!" hooted Bunter. "I was going to tell you there's a letter for you in the rack, you beast!"

"Oh!" said Smithy, and he chuckled.

Coming out in break, some of the Remove fellows were going to look for letters, others going out into the quad. Among the latter was Vernon-Smith, when Billy Bunter clutched him by the sleeve.

"You see, I looked at the rack when I came in," explained Bunter. "There wasn't one for me, but I noticed one for you, old chap."

"Thanks!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith changed his direction and headed for the letters. The fat Owl rolled after him. Often and often there was a remittance in letters for the Bounder—and Billy Bunter was deeply interested in letters that contained remittances. Not for the first time, he had been disappointed about a postal order. The Bounder certainly was not an easy man to "touch" for a loan; still, there was a sporting chance of picking up some of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

The fat Owl kept his eyes and his spectacles fixed on Smithy as the latter took his letter from Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire financier, no doubt referring to the arrangements for the Bounder's holiday abroad that Christmas.

Smithy read it with interest, apparently unaware that Bunter was equally interested, if not more so.

Other fellows came along for letters, among them some of the Fifth. Compton, the new fellow in that Form, came up with Blundell and Potter and Greene. For all three of his companions there were letters, but a shade of disappointment came over Valentine Compton's handsome face as he glanced over the rack.

"Expecting one, old bean?" asked Blundell.

"Well, yes," answered Compton. "I rather thought I should hear from my uncle. Next post, perhaps."

Billy Bunter blinked round at him, forgetting even his interest in the Bounder's letter in his surprise.

"I say, Compton!" he squeaked.

The Fifth Form man glanced at him. "I say, there's one for you,

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Billy Bunter's Christmas Card.



It was Bunter's misfortune that he never could leave well alone. He had, at least, a sporting chance of getting by, so far. But a plain, unvarnished tale was never good enough for Bunter.

"I never went for a walk, sir, in the quad after I got the books!" went on Bunter, by way of a convincing detail. "I was hunting for those books all the time, and I never even stopped to look for letters when I came in, and—"

Mr. Quelch picked up the cane from his desk.

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir?"

"Bend over that chair, Bunter."

"Oh lor'!"

It was clear that the Remove master did not believe Bunter; Bunter did not know why. He bent sorrowfully over the chair.

Whack!

"Wow!"

"That is for remaining out of class, Bunter. And that—"

Whack!

Compton!" said Bunter. "Getting blind, old chap?"

"What do you mean, you young ass?" asked Compton curtly. "There's no letter for me here!"

"I jolly well saw it when I was out before break," declared Bunter. "There it is—sticking next to Temple's letter."

Compton smiled. There was a letter next to Temple's letter, but it was addressed to Coker.

"You want some new specs, I should think, you young ass!" he said good-humouredly, and he walked out into the frosty quad with his friends.

Bunter blinked after him in astonishment.

"Doesn't Compton want his letter?" he ejaculated. "Why, I've seen him rooting over the rack every day, looking for one, and now—"

"There isn't one for Compton, fat-head!" said Harry Wharton.

"There jolly well is!" said Bunter.

"Ass!"

The Famous Five went out. Other fellows took their letters and cleared off.

Billy Bunter jammed his big spectacles a little more firmly on his fat little nose and blinked at the rack, where half a dozen letters still remained.

"I say, Smithy, you look!" said Bunter. "I'm a bit short-sighted, you know. I say, isn't Compton's letter there?"

"No, ass!"

"Then somebody's taken it by mistake," said Bunter. "I jolly well know it was there when I looked in second lesson. Perhaps Carne may have thought it was his; his name begins with a C."

Herbert Vernon-Smith had not finished reading the epistle from his millionaire pater, but he put it into his pocket and fixed his eyes very curiously on the fat Owl of the Remove.

Any other fellow would have fancied that the short-sighted Owl had made a mistake, as often he did; but the mention of Carne struck Smithy at once.

"What do you mean about Carne, Bunter?" he asked quietly. "Carne hasn't been along for letters at all."

"He came when I was here in second lesson," explained Bunter. "The Head must have let him out of the Sixth."

"Sure there was a letter for Compton?"

"I saw it, fathead! It was post-marked Dover" answered Bunter. "I wondered if there was something in it about that Christmas cruise that Compton's going to have. Not that I looked at it, you know. I'm not the chap to look at other fellows' letters, I hope."

"You saw the postmark without looking at it?"

"Yes—I mean no! Anyhow, I jolly well know there was one for Compton when I was out in second lesson!" said Bunter. "If I were Compton I'd ask Carne whether he took it by mistake. I've made mistakes like that, you know. I say, Smithy, what's in your letter?" Billy Bunter's fat mind came back to the really important subject. "I suppose your pater's sent you a tip just before break-up?"

"No," grinned the Bounder; "just a letter."

"Oh crikey! I say, Smithy, my postal order hasn't come," said Bunter. "It's rather rum, but it hasn't! Lot of delay in the post at Christmas-time, you know; I suppose that's it. I say, old chap, what about letting me have the five bob, and taking the postal order when it comes? I say, you beast, don't walk off while a chap's talking to you!"

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The Bounder, however, did walk off.

"Beast!" snorted Bunter.

And he rolled away in search of Lord Mauleverer.

Vernon-Smith went out into the quad with a deeply thoughtful shade on his brow. The Famous Five and some other Remove fellows had started a snowball scrap with Hobson & Co. of the Shell, but the Bounder did not join in the game; he tramped away by himself, his hands driven deep into his pockets, thinking.

Smithy had noticed—as, no doubt, other fellows had—that Compton of the Fifth had not missed looking for letters for some days past—and Smithy had a deep and peculiar interest in the new fellow in the Fifth, which Valentine Compton never dreamed of suspecting.

Compton seemed, in fact, quite an unsuspicious fellow in every way, considering the strange game he was playing at Greyfriars School—a game known to no other Greyfriars man, but Vernon-Smith of the Remove.

But Smithy knew that that handsome and expensive steam-yacht, the Firefly, was in reality a smuggling craft. He knew that Captain Compton—old boy of Greyfriars, as he was—was the leader of a smuggling gang. And he knew—what the police and the Customs authorities certainly never dreamed of—that the smuggling game was carried on through Greyfriars School.

He knew that contraband goods were run secretly into the sea-cave under the Shoulder at Pegg, and that Compton of the Fifth conveyed them away by the secret passage that ran from the sea-cave to the school.

That underground passage was strictly out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows, as was the sea-cave itself. But there was one Greyfriars man who disregarded the Head's severe order on that subject—and that fellow was Valentine Compton of the Fifth Form, as Smithy knew only too well.

Smithy had not the slightest doubt that the letter Compton was expecting referred to some consignment of smuggled goods in the sea-cave. And as Smithy had set himself to defeat the smuggling game at the school he was keenly interested in the matter.

And so, it seemed, was Carne of the Sixth, the new fellow's enemy. That Carne suspected Compton of something, Smithy was aware, as he had seen the spying prefect searching the new fellow's study at midnight. He could hardly suspect the strange truth, but he suspected something.

Carne was not a scrupulous fellow in his enmities. Had he carried his unscrupulousness to the extent of "pinching" a letter addressed to another fellow? It looked like it, from what Bunter declared. It was easy enough for a senior to make some excuse for getting out of the Form-room before break, and seeing the letters before the other fellows came out. But for the fact that Bunter had been out of his Form-room in second school, there could have been no suspicion.

It was impossible for a Lower Fourth junior to question Sixth Form men, but Vernon-Smith was determined to make sure whether Arthur Carne had been out of his Form-room that morning. According to Bunter, he had, but the Bounder wanted to know from a rather more reliable source than Bunter. He stopped to speak to Wingate of the Sixth in the quad. All the Sixth, of course, would know whether a member of that Form had gone out of the Sixth Form Room during class.

"I say, Wingate, did you drop some

stamps when you looked for letters in second school?" asked Smithy.

He held up a strip of half a dozen stamps—taken from his own pocket-book.

The Greyfriars captain stared at him.

"Eli? I wasn't out in second school," he said.

"Somebody must have been," said Vernon-Smith. "The stamps weren't lying there when we went into class."

"Better ask Carne," said Wingate. "He had to go out to get a book he'd forgotten."

"Oh, all right!"

Vernon-Smith walked back to the House. He knew now what he wanted to know. Carne of the Sixth had left his Form-room during second school, and there was no doubt now that Bunter had seen him looking for letters. The fat Owl had wondered whether Carne might have taken Compton's letter by "mistake," as both the names began with a "C." Smithy had no doubt now that Carne had taken the letter, though not by mistake.

He wrinkled his brows in deep thought.

Smithy hardly knew whether he was friend or foe to the school boy smuggler. He liked Compton, as everybody did. He admired him and respected him. The fellow was a splendid footballer, and helped to win matches for Greyfriars. He was kind and good-natured, generous to a fault; brave as a lion. Nobody had forgotten how he had swum out on the tide to rescue Billy and Bessie Bunter in a drifting boat. Yet, with all his splendid qualities, he was mixed up in so shady a business as smuggling. It was fixed in Smithy's mind that no act or word of his should bring that handsome head low in disgrace and shame. But whatever might be Smithy's feelings or intentions, there was no doubt about Carne's. If Carne discovered what Smithy already knew, he would shout it from the house-tops.

The letter would be in code. Smithy had seen one of Captain Compton's missives, and deciphered the code. Would Carne decipher it? Given time, he probably would. And then—

Nobody had a right to screen a breaker of the law. On the other hand, nobody had a right to steal a letter and pry into it. Carne of the Sixth was doing wrong, and knew that he was doing wrong. His motive was malice, and his action would have caused the headmaster to expel him from the school had Dr. Locke known of it.

Vernon-Smith made up his mind at last what to do.

Compton of the Fifth had left his companions, and was strolling under the frosty old elms, with a thoughtful shade on his brow. Smithy could guess the subject of his thoughts. He cut across and intercepted the Fifth Form man.

Valentine Compton glanced at him inquiringly. Never by so much as a look had Smithy hinted at what he knew. The schoolboy smuggler knew that someone at Greyfriars had spotted his game, for twice a hidden hand had intervened, and caused contraband goods to reach official hands. But who it was, he could not begin to guess, and he certainly never thought of a junior in the Remove.

"I say, Compton, you never got your letter this morning. I think!" said Vernon-Smith casually. "A chap in my Form saw one for you when he was out in second school. Must have



"About the hols, old chap!" said Bunter. "I've been looking for you, old fellow. I was going to say— Beast!" Vernon-Smith turned on the Owl of the Remove and tapped the snowball on his fat little nose. "Urrrh!" gasped the fat junior, tottering backwards. "Beast! Ow!"

been taken by mistake. I thought I'd mention it."

Compton looked at him very hard. "No bizney of mine, of course," said Smithy carelessly. "But I hear that Carne of the Sixth came out before break to look for letters, and if he made a mistake, he's the fellow to ask."

He walked away before the Fifth Form man could answer.

Valentine Compton stared after him blankly. Then, with a darkening brow, he walked to the House.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

ARTHUR CARNE of the Sixth Form sat in his study in break, with the door locked.

Loder of the Sixth had looked for him, but, finding that Carne was "sporting his oak," had passed on. Carne was not likely to let Loder, or any other fellow, into his study just then.

On Carne's study fire was a steaming kettle. Carne was holding an envelope over the steaming spout to loosen the flap of an envelope.

Carne's face was pale and set, and there was a bead or two of perspiration on his forehead. To do him justice, he was thoroughly ashamed of what he was doing. The bare thought of an eye falling on him and his occupation at that moment made him shudder.

But he did not hesitate.

Carne, like some other fellows, had noticed that Compton of the Fifth had been looking for letters of late. That

was why he had forgotten a necessary book that morning, and left the Sixth Form Room to fetch it in second school. Several times Carne had contrived to look at the letters before the other fellows. This time he had had luck.

That Billy Bunter, prowling out of his Form, had noticed that letter in the rack, addressed to Compton, did not even cross his mind. Had he thought of it, it would not have concerned him. A Remove fag had nothing to do with the Fifth or their correspondence.

Carne had gone back to the Sixth Form Room with Compton's letter in his pocket. Immediately the bell rang for break he had hurried to his study, and set the kettle on the fire, with the door locked, and the curtain across the window.

He was pale, uneasy, ashamed, but determined. He tried to think that he was doing a prefect's duty in spotting the secrets of a fellow who, he had no doubt whatever, had shady secrets to keep. But he could not quite succeed in that. He knew that he was doing a mean and rotten thing, and he shivered at the thought of any Greyfriars fellow seeing him at it.

The flap came open.

With an unsteady hand, he drew a single folded sheet from the envelope. He opened it, and fixed his eyes on it.

What was the fellow's secret?

It was beyond Carne's power of guessing. He had fancied at first that it was something in his own line—backing horses, corresponding with bookmakers. But he was sure now that it was not that. He had discovered the secret recess under the

floor of Compton's study in his midnight search, and from that secret recess he had taken a sealed packet. That sealed packet had been snatched away in the dark, by whose hand he did not know; for he, no more than Compton, had the slightest knowledge of the Bounder's part in this strange game.

Twice since then he had found opportunities of peering into that recess under the floor of the Fifth Form study; but he had found it empty. Compton used it no longer. If he had anything to hide, as no doubt he had, he hid it elsewhere.

What had been in that sealed packet? What was the secret that his rival and enemy kept so carefully guarded?

Carne could not begin to guess. But he was going to know. And he hoped that a surreptitious "sneak" at Compton's correspondence might let in some light on the mystery. With gleaming eyes he read the letter. It ran:

"You had better get a suitcase or bag for the trip. Wednesday is a holiday, and you had better take that day, as it may need time to do shopping at Lantham."

Carne shut his teeth hard, almost snarling over that letter. It was a single sheet, unsigned. What did it mean?

The writing was rather large and sprawling, and filled the sheet, brief as the epistle was. Anyone seeing it might have supposed that it was a detached sheet from a longer letter.

Certainly no one, seeing it, would have supposed that there was anything suspicious in it.

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Captain Compton—if this was from the captain—advised his nephew to get a suitcase for the trip, and to get it on Wednesday, which was a half-holiday at Greyfriars School, as it might need time to do shopping at Lantham. Nothing could have been more utterly ordinary and commonplace.

But Carne felt, and knew, that there was more to it than that. He was assured that that innocent-looking letter was in some sort of code.

Had he not, when spying on Compton in the Cloisters, seen him change colour reading a letter which, on the face of it, referred to so simple a matter as getting a watch repaired?

That letter had been in code; so was this. But what was the code? How was he to penetrate it?

And from whom did it come? There was no signature.

Fellows who had seen Compton of the Fifth looking for letters supposed that he was expecting a letter from his uncle, who was his guardian, and who had sent him to school. But if this letter was in code, it did not seem possible to Carne that it could come from Compton's uncle. A letter written in code implied a secret—a shady secret—a secret that the fellow dared not have known. Was it, after all, a letter from some racing man—as Carne had at first suspected? What could the fellow possibly be mixed up in, unless it was that? Something—something shady. But what?

Arthur Carne felt, in his very bones, that he was on the verge of a discovery—of a revelation that would give him the upper hand of his rival; perhaps enable him to drive the fellow from the school.

Yet he could make nothing of it. He

tried reading the letter backwards, with hopeless results. What was the code?

"Wednesday" was mentioned in the letter. Was it a code word, or did it refer to the day of the week? He could not guess. To-morrow was Wednesday, and he could, at all events, keep an eye on Compton that day. Most likely the fellow would be playing football. There was a Fifth Form pick-up fixed for the afternoon, weather permitting. If he stood out of it Carne's eye would be on him. But it was the vaguest of clues—if it was a clue at all.

The spying senior gritted his teeth over that puzzling letter. Break did not last long—and he had to seal the letter up again and replace it in the rack unseen. He dared not keep it in his possession. Compton might learn from Mr Prout that a letter had arrived for him, and miss it, if he did not find it sooner or later. There was nothing in the letter—on the face of it, at least—that a prefect could use against a fellow. He had to have his letter. It would be easy enough to slip it into the rack after all the fellows had gone in for third school, by being a few minutes late himself. But he wanted to elucidate the meaning before he parted with it.

Or was he in error, and did that wretched letter mean exactly what it said. He was sure it did not. But what—

Knock!

Carne fairly bounded at that knock at his study door. There was nothing surprising in someone knocking at his door—Loder, or Walker, or some fellow who wanted to speak to him. But it startled him horribly—with a stolen letter in his hand.

Knock!

"Who's there?" Carne's voice shook. "I'm busy, Loder—"

"It's Compton!" came a cool, quiet voice.

Carne's heart almost died within him. Compton was at his door! Did he know—could he know? He had been in Form with Prout when Carne purloined the letter. He could not know!

But what did he want? He had no business in a Sixth Form study—least of all in Carne's, his enemy's!

"What the dooce do you want?" Carne steadied his voice. "I don't remember asking you here, Compton."

"I want my letter, please."

The voice was still calm, cool, quiet; but a thunderclap could not have startled the spy of Greyfriars more.

"What?" stammered Carne. "What did you say?"

"My letter. Will you open your door, Carne? I see it's locked!"

There was a faint, mocking inflexion in the calm voice.

Carne trembled from head to foot. The fellow knew! How did he know? He might have heard from Prout that there was a letter—it was possible. In that case, he must have expected to find it in the rack—and had not found it! But why did he think of Carne? Clearly, he had thought of him, and come to Carne for his letter.

For a moment Carne thought of tossing the letter into the fire and denying all knowledge of it. But he dared not. Compton had not come there without a reason. Someone must have seen him take the letter.

"Will you let me in, Carne?" came the cool voice. "I really must have my letter, you know."

Swiftly Carne slipped the letter back into the envelope and stuck down the flap. He shoved the kettle out of sight in the study cupboard. Then, with a shaking hand, he lighted a cigarette and blew out a whiff of smoke. That would account for the door being locked!

He threw the cigarette into the fire, stepped to the door, and unlocked it. The letter was left lying on the table.

Carne had pulled himself together. His manner was normal enough as he jerked the door open.

Valentine Compton stood there. His keen, grey eyes flashed at Carne for a moment. But his manner was cool and nonchalant.

"My letter!" he said quite politely. "I think you must have taken it by mistake, Carne!"

Did the fellow really think so, Carne wondered. At all events, there was no evidence—at least, no proof—that the Sixth Form spy had opened it.

"Sorry!" Carne spoke quite casually. "I picked the letter up in a hurry. I was going to put it back in the rack when I went to class, as I found I'd taken the wrong letter. There it is!"

Compton gave a faint sniff. He had noticed the whiff of cigarette-smoke. That was an unspoken explanation of the locked door.

"Hand it over, will you?" he said. Carne picked up the letter and tossed it to him.

"Thanks!"

Compton slipped it into his pocket and walked away.

Carne shut the door after him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Taken In!

"I SAY, you fellows——"
"Say on!" grinned Bob Cherry

It was tea-time, a time when Billy Bunter, howsoever forgetful at

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other times, was sure to remember his old pals.

He had remembered the Famous Five, however, at an inauspicious moment. Funds were short in the famous Co., and they were booked for tea in Hall—the last resort of the stony. They were about to proceed in that direction, to claim their whack in the “doorsteps and dishwater,” as the juniors described the school tea, when the Owl of the Remove appeared in the offing.

Whether Bunter was bent on scrounging a tea, or whether he had thought out some new dodge to bar off the visitors from Bunter Court, it was equally entertaining to the Famous Five. They gave him encouraging smiles.

“I say, I’ve had rather good news, you chaps!” said Bunter, blinking at them through his big spectacles. “Everything’s going to be tip-top at Bunter Court, and the pater is simply delighted to hear that you’re coming.”

“Oh!” gasped five fellows together.

This was unexpected.

For one awful moment they wondered whether Bunter was in deadly earnest, having made up his fat mind to it, and whether they were booked for the hols with Bunter.

That would have been an unexpected and extremely dismaying outcome to the joke on the fat Owl!

But their anxiety was relieved the next moment. Bunter rattled on:

“O.K., you chaps! There’s going to be some rather big affairs—fancy-dress dances, and so on. One of the princes has promised to come. I’ll tell you all about it—over tea! Come on!”

“Oh!” repeated Harry Wharton.

He understood now. Bunter was going to scrounge a tea on the strength of that accepted invitation. Later, the next dodge for barring off the party would come to light.

“Tea in your study, Harry, old chap—what?” asked Bunter breezily. “If there’s anything to cook, I’m your man!”

“Oh! No. Not in my study, this time!” said Harry.

“Bob’s?” asked Bunter. “Come on, then!”

“No; not in my study, this time!” grinned Bob Cherry.

“Well, you’re rather asses to tea in Bull’s study, with that tick Fishy there,” said Bunter. “He’s sure to barge in. He’s always looking out for a chance to scrounge a feed on the cheap. Mean, you know, and greedy! Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Come on, I’ve a lot to tell you fellows over tea! If it’s in Bull’s study—”

“But it isn’t,” grinned Johnny Bull.

“Eh? Where is it, then?” asked Bunter. “It must be in one of your studies, I suppose—Wharton’s, or Bob’s, or Bull’s.”

“We’re teeing out to-day,” explained Bob.

“Oh! I suppose you can take a friend in?” asked Bunter.

As the Famous Five were going to tea in Hall, there was no doubt that they could take a friend—or as many friends as they liked. They could, indeed, have taken the whole school!

But Bob Cherry gave his chums a look of grave inquiry.

“What about it, you men?” he asked. “Think we could take Bunter in?”

“Look here, of course you jolly well can!” exclaimed Bunter warmly. “I may as well say that I expect it of you.

I’ve been disappointed about a postal order, and, to tell you fellows the truth, I’m short of cash. Toddy’s teeing out, and you know what Peter Todd’s like when he tees out—there’s nothing for me in Study No. 7. Selfish, you know. I’ll come with you fellows. You can take me in.”

Bob Cherry winked at his chums.

“You fellows think we can take Bunter in?” he asked.

“Well,” said Harry, “if he asks us—”

“The askfulness is terrific!” remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin. “Let us take the esteemed and absurd Bunter in.”



The curly headed member of the Famous Five cannot resist a spot of leg-pulling—even at Christmas-time.

One reason why Santa Claus never visits Bunter is that the poor old bean doesn’t know how Bunter snores. I mean to say, would you drop down a chimney into a room with a roaring lion?

When Loder stepped upon our slide
His flight was simply splendid.
We laughed until we nearly cried,
‘pepuet it moq sem stu! roJ

Billy Bunter is very anxious to know what he’s going to get for his Christmas presents. He is dreaming of vast tuck-hampers and fat cheques. But I’m afraid he’ll find they are only “presents of mind.”

Coker of the Fifth has missed his Aunt Judy’s special Christmas hamper. He doesn’t even know what was in it. Bunter could give him some inside information!

The Greyfriars Ghost hasn’t been seen these last two nights. I expect he’s busy on the 500 lines Quelch gave him for waking him up at midnight last Monday!

Fisher T. Fish is anxious to know who’s going to invite him for the vac. The answer should rejoice his heart—he’ll be left a-lean!

Sir Hilton Popper has invited Mr. Prout to Popper Court for Christmas. It serves him right!

Robert Donald Oglivy is going back to his Scottish lair for the festive season. (He’ll have a piping time!) Cecil Reginald Temple is “winterin’ on the Riviera.” (That ought to be Nice.) Bolsover major has booked seven fights to see him through the first week of the vac. (A happy Boxing Day, Bolsy!)

I hear that Mauly has so much money that he never dreams of putting threepenny-bits in the Christmas pud. He always uses five-pound notes!

Here’s luck and tuck to all at Christmas, and oceans of ginger-pop to make us merry. And never forget the good old motto, “Thirst come, thirst served!”

“How can we?” asked Johnny Bull. “Of course you jolly well can!” exclaimed Bunter. “I’ve asked you fellows home for Christmas, haven’t I? You’re going to have a tremendous time—simply tremendous! Bunter Court will seem like the ‘Arabian Nights’ to you after your own humble homes—”

“Oh crikey!”

“Everything first-class and tip-top, regardless of expense!” said Bunter. “I think the least you can do is to see a fellow through at tea-time, when he’s been disappointed about a postal order! If you’re teeing out to-day, of course, you can take a pal! I expect it of you!

Take me in!”

“Let’s!” said Bob. “If Bunter really likes to be taken in—”

“Of course I would!” said Bunter. “It’s the very least you can do, I think!”

“Well, if it’s the least we can do, we’ll do it!” said the captain of the Remove. “We’ll take you in, Bunter.”

“That’s right, old chap!” said Bunter approvingly.

“You can shut up, Bull. These fellows are going to take me in.”

“We are—we is!” said Bob. “Come on!”

“I say, you fellows, is it tea in Mauly’s study?” asked Bunter eagerly.

“Oh, no, not in the Remove at all!” answered Bob. “This way!”

He led the way downstairs.

“Tea in the Sixth?” asked Bunter, as he rolled after the smiling juniors. “I say, has old Wingate asked you to tea?”

“Wingate! Oh, no!”

“Well, it must be a Sixth Form man, I suppose, as you’re going downstairs,” said the puzzled Owl. “I say, which Sixth Form man is it?”

“Not a Sixth Form man at all, old fat bean!”

“Oh! Tea with a beak? Has Quelch asked you—”

“Not Quelch!”

“Well, Prout only asks Fifth Form men. I say, are you going to tea with the Head?” Bunter’s eyes glistened behind his big spectacles. “I say, that’s all right! Mrs. Locke always says that a fellow has enough to eat when a chap tees with the Head! I say, is the Head standing you fellows this?”

“Exactly—the Head’s standing it!” agreed Bob Cherry, which was undoubtedly correct, as the headmaster was responsible for tea in Hall.

“Oh, good!” Bunter rolled on joyously. “I say, there’s always a decent cake when a man tees with the Head! I—I suppose the Head won’t mind you fellows taking me in?”

“We’ll chance it!” said Bob gravely. “Anyway, we’re jolly well taking you in, Bunter! Come on!”

“Good!” said Bunter.

And he came on, his fat face wreathed by a happy grin.

Bunter was not yet aware that it was going to be tea in Hall—and had not the slightest suspicion—so far—how he was being “taken in.”

But as the juniors headed for Hall—in which direction other hard-up fellows were heading—Bunter halted and blinked at them.

“I say, you fellows, where are you going?” asked the fat Owl in surprise.

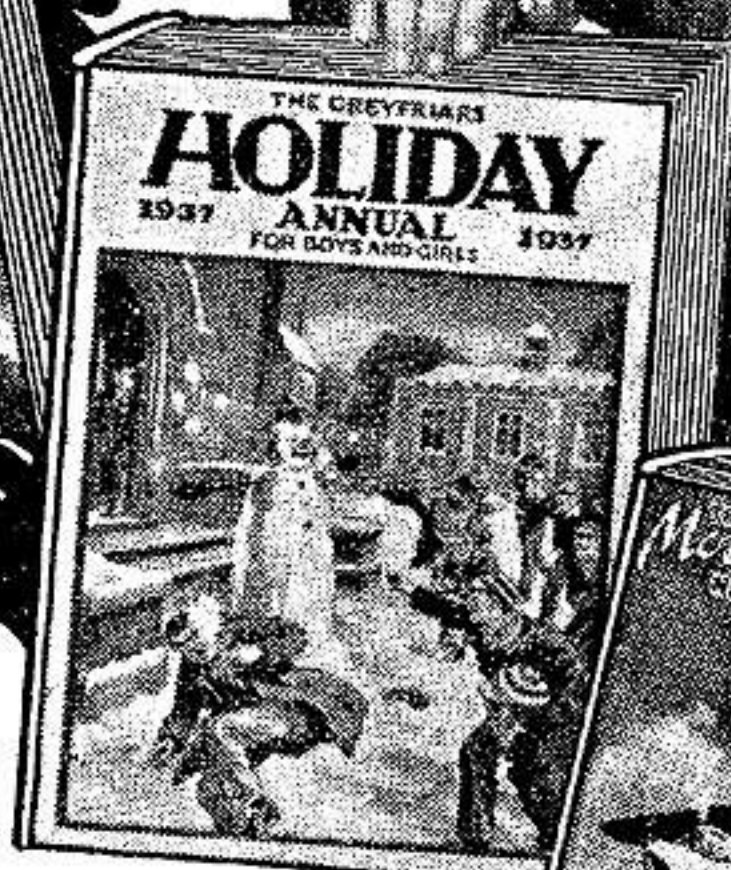
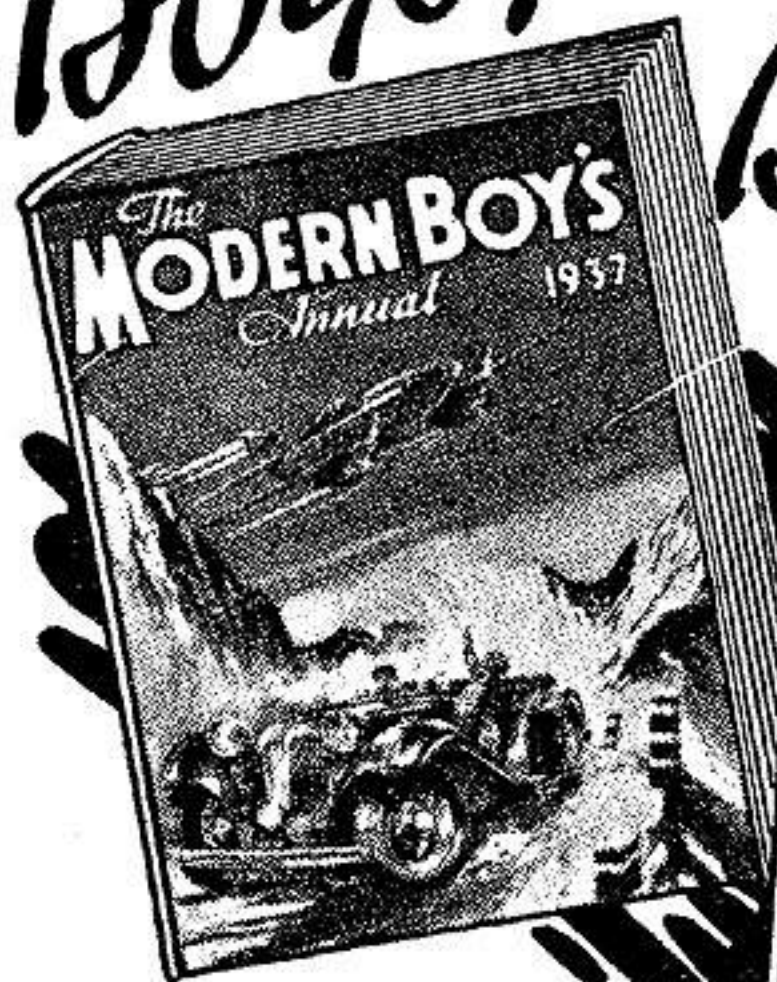
“Eh? We’re going to tea,” answered Bob.

“Well, that’s not the way, you ass?” said Bunter. “The Head asks fellows to

(Continued on page 11.)

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tea in his house. He hasn't asked you to tea in Hall, I suppose?"

"Not specially!" admitted Bob. "It's a sort of standing invitation."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co. Billy Bunter blinked at them. The happy grin faded from his fat face. He glared.

"You silly idiot!" yelled Bunter. "Mean to say you're going to tea in Hall?"

"Just that!" agreed Bob. "You—you beast! You said the Head was standing the tea!"

"So he is! He always does!" "You—you—you sniggering idiot, I thought you meant tea with the Head!" shrieked Bunter. "I didn't know you meant tea in the Hall, you fathead! I could go to tea in Hall, if I liked, without you fellows taking me in."

"Of course you could!" agreed Bob cheerfully. "Still, it's a pleasure to take you in! You see, you've taken us in so often—"

"Wha-a-t?" "And one good turn deserves another—"

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

"You—you—you—" gasped Bunter.

"Come on, old fat man! What's the row?" asked Bob. "You asked to be taken in, didn't you? We've taken you in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"It's quite a pleasure to take you in, old fat bean—you're not often taken in, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

He rolled away, snorting.

The Famous Five, grinning, went into Hall.

Bunter did not follow them there. The school tea was their resource in hard times; but Billy Bunter had—other resources. Not till he had drawn every study in the Remove blank, was Billy Bunter likely to fall back on the "doorsteps and dishwater" in Hall.

The fat Owl rolled back to the Remove studies, like a lion seeking what he might devour.

Harry Wharton & Co. went to the "doorsteps and dishwater," grinning cheerfully over the way Billy Bunter had been "taken in."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Not a Winner!

MR. QUELCH glanced at Billy Bunter, the next morning, in class, with an approving eye.

Seldom indeed did Quelch regard that particular member of his Form with an eye of approval.

William George Bunter was not only the most backward and obtuse fellow in the Lower Fourth, he was also the laziest, the most careless, and the most inattentive—qualities that, naturally, did not endear him to a hard-working Form-master.

But this morning the fat Owl seemed to be quite turning over a new leaf. The Remove were dealing with Latin papers. When Bunter had a Latin paper to do, his usual system was to attempt to get a "squint" at another fellow's paper—he did not whisper—answers.

If the master's eye was off him, he would extract surreptitious toffee from a sticky pocket, and chew the same. He would whisper in class—he would lounge and he would laze—he would, in fact, do anything but work, if he could help it. There were fellows who had

an idea that they were at school to acquire knowledge; but Billy Bunter's idea seemed to be that knowledge was a fearfully disagreeable thing, to be barred off at any cost.

So it was a pleasant surprise to Mr. Quelch to see the fat junior wrinkling his podgy brows in deep thought over his Latin paper.

Looking neither to the right nor to the left, Billy Bunter fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, on the paper on his desk, as if wholly absorbed in the same.

He did not "squint" at another fellow's paper—he did not whisper—he did not chew toffee—he concentrated his fat mind in deep thought—and Quelch eyed him with unaccustomed approval.

Obviously, Bunter was thinking hard—and the Remove-master, in the innocence of his heart, took it for granted that the Latin paper was the subject of deep cogitations.

As a matter of fact, the fat Owl hardly saw the Latin paper, though his eyes and his spectacles were fixed on it. He had a problem on his fat mind, of which Quelch knew nothing. He was thinking out that problem.

Break-up was close at hand now. Not only was Bunter still at a loose end for the holidays. Worse than that—he was landed with a Christmas party!

It had seemed, to the artful dodger of the Remove, the artfullest of dodges to ask the Famous Five home for Christmas. He had no doubt that they would decline; but it put matters on

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a pleasant, pally footing. It showed that what Bunter really wanted was his old pals' company at Christmas-tide! It made it easier for him to land himself on his intended victims. They could come with him, or he would go with them—and the more they were together, the happier they would be, as it were!

Instead of which, they had accepted the invitation.

That was a surprise—still, Bunter was equal to that! All he had to do was to invent some excuse for washing it out—some circumstance beyond a fellow's control. The fact would remain that he had asked them, and established the friendly, ohummy footing that was necessary for asking himself to Wharton Lodge, to Cherry Place, or Moor Fell.

Then came another surprise—and a most awkward one! The Famous Five turned out to be as sticky as Bunter himself!

Hints were futile. They were not to be hinted off. Decorators in the house did not deter them—measles seemed rather an attraction than otherwise. Even burning Bunter Court to the ground had failed.

They were sticking on—just as Bunter was accustomed to stick at such times. How to make them come unstuck was Bunter's pressing problem.

To own up that he couldn't, and mustn't, take five fellows home with him for Christmas was hardly possible.

It was, at any rate, a very last resource. But something had to be done!

It looked as if, when Greyfriars broke up, those five sticky beasts would travel home with Bunter whether he liked it or not.

What Mr. Bunter would say, and do, if they arrived for the Christmas vacation Billy Bunter did not know—and hardly dared to think!

They had to be barred off somehow; but how? If burning his ancestral home to the ground would not do it, how was it to be done?

With such a problem on his mind, Bunter had no time to waste on Latin. He was not even giving it a single thought. Mr. Quelch's approving glances were bestowed on him under an entire misapprehension.

Quite interested in Bunter's unusual concentration, Mr. Quelch walked round behind the forms, to glance at his paper and see how he was getting on. He naturally expected to see something unusually good.

Bunter, deep in his problem, did not observe him. With quite a genial expression on his face, Quelch glanced over a fat shoulder at the paper on Bunter's desk.

Then he started and stared.

There were two blots on the paper, and a smear! That was all! That was the total outcome of half an hour's concentration on Bunter's part!

It dawned upon Mr. Quelch's mind that, whatever Bunter was thinking of, it was not Latin. The genial expression faded from his face.

Rap!

Billy Bunter came out of deep thought, with a jump, as a pointer rapped on his fat knuckles.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Wow! Beast! Ow!"

"Bunter—"

"Oh! I—I didn't see you, sir! Oh! I thought it was some other beast!" gasped Bunter.

"You have not touched your paper, Bunter!"

"Oh, yes, sir! I—I've nearly finished it—"

"What!" hooted Mr. Quelch. "You have written nothing!"

"Oh! I—I—I mean—"

"If you have not completed your paper at the end of the lesson, Bunter, you will be detained this afternoon to finish it."

"Oh lor'!"

Billy Bunter had to dismiss his problem from his fat mind. He made an attempt to get going on that Latin paper.

But it was hardly half done when the bell went for break. Billy Bunter rolled out with the Remove, with the happy prospect of detention in the afternoon till that putrid paper was completed.

He had one consolation, however. That deep concentration in Form had not been without results! He had thought of a dodge!

He hooked on to the Famous Five as they went out into the quad.

"I say, you fellows!" he squeaked.

Five fellows exchanged a cheery grin. They guessed that another dodge was coming, and were interested to hear what it was.

"About Christmas—" said Bunter.

"Carry on, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly.

"I've had a letter from my pater," said Bunter. "He says that he would be awfully pleased if you fellows came for Christmas—"

"Oh!"

"But—" said Bunter sadly.

"Is the butfulness terrific?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

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"Well, it turns out that the pater has decided to take the whole family for a Christmas cruise!" explained Bunter. "In the—the circumstances Bunter Court will be shut up over Christmas."

The Famous Five smiled cheerily. Evidently the fact that Compton of the Fifth was going for a Christmas cruise had put this wheeze into the fat Owl's podgy brain.

"See?" said Bunter.

"Quite!" agreed Wharton. "What do you fellows say? Like the idea of a Christmas cruise with the Bunter family?"

"Fine!" said Bob.

"Topping!" said Nugent heartily.

"The topfulness is terrific!"

"Just the thing!" agreed Johnny Bull. "Tell your pater it's all right, Bunter. We'll come."

Billy Bunter blinked at them. He had fancied that this was a winner. It looked like a loser, however.

"I—I say, you fellows," he stammered. "I—I mean, I—I'm afraid there won't be a lot of room on my pater's yacht—"

"Oh, we can pack in!" said Bob.

"Don't mind us!" said Nugent. "We shall be all right!"

"What—what I mean is, the—the pater isn't taking the yacht!" gasped Bunter. "He—he's going on one—one of those cruises, you know—a steamer—just an ordinary steamer—see?"

"Oh!" said Harry. "That's all right, then! Lots of accommodation on a steamer for a cruise. All your pater has to do is to book the tickets."

"That's all!" agreed Bob. "Easy!"

"I—I—I mean, all—all the accommodation has been—been taken!" gasped Bunter. "Every cabin booked—every single cabin—"

"We could manage with double cabins!" said Bob solemnly.

"I—I mean, every cabin—every solitary one! No room on the steamer for a single extra passenger!" said Bunter. "It's rotten, I know! A disappointment to me, as well as to you fellows. But—but there it is! But it's all right! As you—you can't come with me I'll come with you fellows, and—and we shall be all together just the same—and—and that's what we want, isn't it?"

The Famous Five, with difficulty, kept their faces serious.

"Then," said Bob, "it comes to this—we're to come home with you and stay till your people start on that cruise?"

"Oh! Yes! No! I—I mean, they're starting on break-up day! Same day that we break up here!" explained Bunter.

"Then all we can do is to see them off!" said Bob Cherry. "What do you fellows say? We break up fairly early in the day, and we can get off early if we like. Shall we go and see Mr. Bunter and his family off on that cruise?"

"Let's!" said Wharton at once.

"Jolly good idea!" said Johnny Bull.

"Where do they start from, Bunter?"

"S-S-S-Southampton—"

"I believe there's a quick train to Southampton—from Lantham—"

"I—I mean, from—from Liverpool!"

"Oh, Liverpool!" said Bob thoughtfully. "That's rather a step from here! But, dash it all, we'll manage it. Mr. Bunter was going to give us a tremendous time at Bunter Court if it had come off, and the least we can do is to see him off on his cruise! We'll run up to Liverpool."

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"I—I— Did I say Liverpool?"

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stuttered Bunter. "I—I—I meant Glasgow!"

"Oh!" said Bob. "You meant Glasgow?"

"Yes! That's—that's much too far, you know—"

"Well, it's rather a trip!" admitted Bob. "But where's there a will there's a way. We'll go!"

"Wha-a-at?" stuttered Bunter.

"Jolly good idea!" declared Johnny Bull. "We'll make a real trip of it and see the Bunters off at Glasgow, and look round the place a bit. Big ship-building works and all that—jolly well worth seeing."

"Fine!" agreed Wharton. "We'll travel up with the Bunters, of course."

Billy Bunter gazed at them.

"And you never know," went on Bob. "Some of that crowd of passengers may not turn up at the last minute. Cabins are often left vacant, you know, when people aren't able to turn up for a cruise. Mr. Bunter may be able to pack us in, after all. We'll take our bags and hope for the best."

"Yes, rather."

"Rely on us, Bunter!" said Bob. "Let your pater know we shall be coming to Southampton—I mean Liverpool—that is, Glasgow—to see him off. He may think it is up to him to stand our railway tickets. If so we shan't refuse. Mention that we're hoping he may be able to pack us in for the cruise, after all. Anyhow, we'll certainly travel up with him."

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

"It's all right, old bean! We're not letting you down," said Bob reassuringly. "We'll all join Mr. Bunter, and take our bags, and if he can't cram us into the steamer I'm sure he will fix up something else for us! Leave it at that!"

And the Famous Five went to join in punting a footer, leaving Billy Bunter blinking after them with an infuriated blink. Evidently his latest dodge was as inefficacious as his earlier dodges.

Those sticky beasts were not going to come unstuck if they could help it. Decorators, measles, fires at Bunter Court, and cruises starting from Glasgow seemed equally futile. It really began to look as if Billy Bunter would be driven to his last and most desperate resource—telling the truth!

Anyhow, his concentration on the problem that morning had not solved his knotty problem. Its only outcome had been a Latin paper to write in detention in the afternoon. The hapless Owl was still landed with his Christmas party.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

On Watch!

CARNE of the Sixth had an eye on the changing-room that afternoon.

The weather, after all, was propitious; the Fifth Form pick-up was coming off. Carne was interested to know whether Valentine Compton was going to be in the game.

He was not to be seen with Blundell and the rest when they went to change. Carne, lounging by the doorway, watched the footballers leave—without Compton.

Evidently he was standing out.

There was a Sixth Form practice that afternoon, but Carne did not think of joining it. He had been assiduous all that term; giving Loder and Walker and their sporting pursuits the go-by, in the hope of figuring in the first eleven. But for Compton's coming, late in the term, he would have realised his am-

bition. But he had been disappointed; and since then he had slacked down, falling a good deal into his old ways. But it was not only slackness that kept him away from the football field now. He was going to know how Compton of the Fifth was occupied that afternoon.

True, the fellow might be "swotting." Compton worked as hard in class as he played on the Soccer ground. He had "library leave," and it was quite a joke in the Fifth that he "sapped" at Priscianus—an ancient author of whom other Greyfriars fellows hardly knew the name, let alone the works. A "swot" who was nothing but a swot would hardly have been popular, but a fellow who played Soccer as Compton did could swot as much as he liked, with no fellow thinking the worse of him!

He might be swotting in his study, or in the library—where reposed the only volume of Priscianus Greyfriars possessed. On the other hand, he might have made swotting the excuse for cutting the pick-up, having other business on hand.

The spy of the Sixth was going to know, at all events.

Ever since reading that letter surreptitiously, Carne had been puzzling over it in his mind. That it was in code, he was assured; and he had little doubt that, given time, he would have deciphered the code, and read the real meaning. But, owing to Compton having claimed the letter so promptly, he had had no time to take a copy of it, and he could not recall it word for word. So it had to remain a puzzle to him.

If its apparent meaning was its real meaning, no doubt Compton would be going to Lantham that afternoon, shopping. That, at all events, would be easy enough to ascertain.

But that that was not Compton's intention Carne very soon learned, for a few minutes after coming away from the changing-room he came on Compton and Coker of the Fifth. Compton had a large notebook under his arm.

"What rot, old man!" Coker was saying. "Mean to say you're going to swot on an afternoon like this? I say, you're an ass! Catch me!"

"Tastes differ, you know!" said Compton, with a smile.

"If that ass Blundell wanted me, I'd jump at it!" grunted Coker. "But he doesn't—he don't know anything about a man's form at footer! But look here, Compton, if you're not playing footer, come out of gates. What about a run on the jiggers? Our spin was mucked up last time, owing to your taking the wrong turning and losing me on the road. But—"

"I'd like to, old bean, but—"

"Well, if you'd like to, do!"

"Another time, old fellow."

"Oh, you're an ass, old chap!" said Coker, and he walked away to get out his jigger on his own.

Compton, with a notebook under his arm, turned into the corridor that led to the library.

Carne lounged away to his study, his hands in his pockets, a scowl on his face. It looked as if the fellow was going to swot, after all—as he had gone to the library with his notebook.

And yet— Easy enough for a fellow to sit in the library, swotting, till everybody else was occupied in one way or another, and then cut quietly!

Carne smoked a cigarette in his study, and then loafed away to the library corridor. As a prefect, he could go to the library whenever he liked, without asking leave like lesser mortals. He was going to look for a book—and ascertain whether Compton was still there.



Mr. Quelch glanced over a fat shoulder at the paper on Bunter's desk. Then he started and stared. All that was on the paper were two blots and a smear. Rap! Billy Bunter came out of a deep thought, with a jump, as a pointer rapped on his fat knuckles. "Wow! Beast! Ow!" he roared, turning round. "Oh! I—I thought it was some other beast!"

Easy enough for him to slip out unnoticed if he liked—except for Carne. There was hardly a fellow in the House that fine afternoon. Moreover, the library corridor was forbidden to all but prefects and fellows who had "library leave"—on account of the secret panel in the old oak wall, which gave admittance to the underground passage to the sea-cave. Nobody was about as Carne walked down that corridor.

His eyes gleamed as he looked into the library. Valentine Compton was not there! The librarian was there, alone.

Evidently Compton was not swotting. That big notebook under his arm was pure camouflage.

Carne breathed hard.

What that mysterious letter meant he did not know and could not guess; but he felt sure now that the "Wednesday" mentioned in it was this Wednesday. What was Compton up to?

Swotting had been his pretext for cutting the Fifth Form pick-up and for not going out with Coker. But he was not swotting. What was he doing?

Carne was going to know, if he could. It was not more than ten minutes since he had seen the fellow walk into the library corridor. Wherever he had gone, he was not far away—yet!

The Head's librarian glanced round at Carne. He had the right of entry there as a prefect; but he was a very unaccustomed visitor to that quarter. Mr. Woose would not have been surprised to see Compton of the Fifth; but he was surprised to see Carne of the Sixth. He blinked at him through his horn-rimmed spectacles inquiringly.

"Can I help you?" he asked, taking it for granted that Carne had come for a book.

"Oh, I just looked in to speak to Compton!" said Carne carelessly. "Has he been gone long?"

Mr. Woose blinked again.

"Compton! I have not seen him," he answered.

"He came here about ten minutes ago, Mr. Woose," said Carne, staring at the librarian. "Perhaps you weren't here then."

"I have been here since lunch," answered Mr. Woose. "Compton has not been here. Perhaps he is coming later."

"Oh!"

Carne stepped out of the library and shut the door.

Compton had not been to the library at all. The chance that the librarian happened to be there made that clear.

He had seen the fellow turn into the library corridor. Yet he had not gone on to the library. Where the dickens had he vanished to?

Arthur Carne walked slowly back down the corridor. Midway he stopped. He fixed his eyes on the oak panel in the wall, which, since it had been discovered, all the school knew gave admittance to the secret passage.

Had the fellow gone through? Was that what he was up to?

He had certainly entered that corridor at one end, and had not arrived at the other. True, he might have turned into a side passage—but why should he?

Once before Carne had suspected him of breaking bounds in the direction of the forbidden sea-cave, and had bolted the door after him—as he supposed. But the fellow had turned up for call-over, and he had concluded that he had been mistaken.

But now—

It seemed unlikely. What interest could the fellow have in going to the sea-cave—breaking bounds, in disregard of the Head's severe order? He was not a thoughtless fag, or an ass like Coker. Judging by appearances, he was the last fellow at Greyfriars to risk the headmaster's stern displeasure for the sake of such a "lark" as exploring a secret passage. It was really unlikely.

But it was easy to make sure!

Carne pressed the spring in the panel, and opened it. He stepped through the cavity in the thick, old wall, and groped at the bolts on the oaken door beyond.

They were unfastened!

Had some fag been there and withdrawn the bolts? It was possible. But Carne did not think so. He had concluded that it was so on the previous occasion. He did not think so now.

Anyhow, he knew what he was going to do. He shot the bolts carefully. Then he stepped out into the library corridor, and closed the panel. Then he sat down in the window-seat at a little distance.

If Compton of the Fifth was on the wrong side of that bolted door, he had him! No pal was going to have a chance of coming and letting him through. That might have happened last time, for all Carne knew. It was not going to happen now—he was going to make sure of that.

If Compton of the Fifth was out of bounds, he was booked for a row with the Head—and that dutiful prefect was going to make sure that he did not crawl out of it.

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Sitting on the settee in the corridor, Carne of the Sixth waited and watched, rather like a cat watching for a mouse.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Pulling Bunter's Leg!

"SEEN Wharton, Smithy?"
 "No; and don't want to!"
 "Seen him, Reddy?"
 "Sorry, no!"

One answer was polite, the other wasn't; but they came to the same thing. Neither the Bunder nor Tom Redwing could give Billy Bunter the information he sought.

Bunter snorted.

His Latin paper had occupied him for an hour that afternoon. Now it was done; not, perhaps, to his Form-master's satisfaction, but done, anyhow. The fat Owl was free for the rest of that half-holiday.

He was aware that Harry Wharton & Co. were going out that afternoon—a last ramble before the end of the term, with tea out somewhere. Naturally, he had intended to roll along.

His invited guests for Christmas could hardly decline his company, Bunter considered. But he knew, perhaps, just how much they yearned for it—and he was not surprised that they had cleared off while he was in the Form-room with that putrid Latin paper.

Decent fellows, of course, would have left word for Bunter, so that he could follow on. They hadn't!

Billy Bunter stood at the gates, blinking round him morosely through his big spectacles.

Vernon-Smith and Redwing passed him, going out. Two or three fellows passed him, coming in, but to questions as to whether they had seen Wharton, only shook their heads.

Then Skinner and Snoop came up the lane from Friardale, and Bunter propounded his query over again.

"I say, you fellows, seen Wharton and his lot?"

"Lots of times!" answered Skinner.

"Oh, really, Skinner! I say, I know they've gone out—tell a chap if you've seen them!" yapped Bunter. "You see, they started first, and forgot to tell me which way they were going—"

"You mean they remembered not to tell you?" grinned Snoop.

"Beast! Look here, if you've seen them—"

"Saw them in Uncle Clegg's at Friardale," answered Skinner cheerfully. "You won't catch them there, though. They went along the cliffs with the stuff in a bag."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter. "All right!"

He rolled out, and rolled down the lane towards the village; and, like Iser in the poem, he rolled rapidly.

Skinner looked after him, and then looked at the grinning Snoop.

"Do you think Bunter fancies, from what I said, that I saw Wharton and his gang this afternoon, Snoopsey?" he asked.

"Sort of!" chuckled Snoop.

"Well, I never said so!" argued Skinner. "I saw the mob at Uncle Clegg's in Friardale and they took the stuff along the cliffs in a bag. So they did—last term! Does that fat idiot really think they've gone picnicking on the cliffs in December? Bit parky, I should think! I saw them—just as I said—one day last term—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Snoop.

"Bunter seems to have misunderstood me!" said Skinner regretfully. "From the way he's bolted off, I really

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think he must have fancied that I meant that I saw them this afternoon! Still, if I see him when he comes in, I'll explain that I meant one day last term—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Unaware that he was the victim of Harold Skinner's misdirected sense of humour, the Owl of the Remove rolled rapidly down Friardale Lane, and through the village. Less rapidly—for he was getting short of breath—he rolled on to the path over the cliffs.

If the Famous Five had laid in provender at Uncle Clegg's, and taken it along the cliffs, it could only mean a picnic. Certainly it was, as Skinner remarked to Snoop, rather "parky" for picnicking. Still, the weather was fine, though windy and cold, and Bunter already knew that they intended to tea out that afternoon.

So he rolled on hopefully.

In frosty weather, it was quite a healthy walk along the cliffs to Pegg—but it was undoubtedly rather rough going. On Bunter's left, as he plugged along, the sea boomed and roared. The tide was in, washing right up to the line of chalk cliffs, and round the mighty mass of the Shoulder, the waves roared and foamed and raced. Those strenuous beasts, the Famous Five, were just the fellows to enjoy such a walk—but Billy Bunter was not enjoying it. He had started at quite a good speed—but he slowed more and more, and at length, he dropped to a mere crawl.

His eyes, and his spectacles, were on the watch for the chums of the Remove. But eyes and spectacles failed to spot them.

That, really, was not surprising, for, in point of fact, Harry Wharton & Co. had gone over to Highcliffe that afternoon to say good-bye to Courtenay and the Caterpillar. Their ramble had led them in precisely the opposite direction from that taken by Bunter. Had the fat junior been blessed with the vision of an eagle, instead of that of an owl, he could hardly have spotted the elusive five, when they were nowhere in the offing.

Unaware, however, that it was on a half-holiday the previous term that the playful Skinner had seen them start for the cliffs with a bag of provender, the fat Owl plugged on hopefully. He began to fear that he was too late to catch the beasts—though it did not occur to his fat brain that he was three or four months too late!

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter, at last, coming to a halt. He sat down on a chunk of rock to rest his weary fat legs.

The elusive five were not in sight. Nobody was in sight. Few people walked on the cliff path in the winter. Bunter had it to himself. The view was magnificent, if that was any comfort—the sea stretching away to the horizon, tossing and tumbling—waves breaking under the cliffs with a rush and a roar in masses of white foam and spray. But scenery did not appeal to Billy Bunter. A well-spread table, or a well-packed picnic basket, was a view on which he could have feasted his eyes with pleasure. Sea and sky he passed by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

He rested—and plugged on again. He was drawing near to Pegg now, and surely, if they were going to picnic at all, they would stop short of Pegg. But they were not to be seen.

Billy Bunter stopped again. He sat down, gasping for breath. Cold as it was, he mopped perspiration from his fat brow. His fat little legs were aching with exertion. His hopes of

sharing in that picnic were reduced to zero. Indeed, a suspicion was creeping into his mind, that that unutterable beast, Skinner, had pulled his leg, and that there wasn't any picnic at all. After his exertions, that idea was simply overwhelming!

"Beast!" moaned Bunter.

And he sat and gasped and panted.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Trapped!

VALENTINE COMPTON drew a long, deep breath.

He stood in the little stone room at the head of the spiral stair that wound away in the darkness to the underground passage.

He felt over the oaken door with his hand.

It did not yield to his touch.

For a moment or two, he stood, breathing hard and deep. Then he turned on the light of a flash-lamp.

Coolly, though his heart was beating unpleasantly, the schoolboy smuggler groped over the oaken door.

It was fast, and he knew that it was bolted on the other side. He was shut out of Greyfriars.

He remained cool and calm. The boy who was playing so strange a game at Greyfriars School had plenty of nerve. Somehow, he had to get out of this. But how?

There were two outlets to that underground passage: one by the oaken door into Greyfriars School, now shut and bolted against him—the other, by the sea-cave, under the rocks of the Shoulder. But the sea-cave could only be left by boat.

He was trapped.

Many times, in the weeks he had been at Greyfriars, he had trodden that spiral stair and the tunnel below to the cave. Once or twice at night—but generally in the day-time. With "library leave" he could pick his moment for passing the secret panel in the corridor; he could linger in that corridor, with a book in his hand, till he was sure the coast was clear. It was less risky than leaving his dormitory at night.

Even if someone chanced to open the panel in the corridor wall, which was unlikely, it was so dark in the deep cavity within, that no eye was likely to note that the door was unbolted.

But—it had happened! The risk of it had seemed so remote that he had never given it more than a passing thought. Now it had happened!

He was shut out!

Someone must have discovered the hidden door unbolted and shot the bolts. Who—how—why—mattered little. He was shut out of the school.

To get in, he had to knock, and knock, and knock, till someone chancing to be in the library corridor should hear. That could only be a master or a prefect. And that meant an interview with the Head.

Compton set his lips, hard. It would have been bad enough for a senior man to be taken to the Head on the charge of recklessly breaking bounds like an unthinking fag.

But that was not all—to the Schoolboy Smuggler!

He dared not let it be known that he used the secret passage to the sea-cave. There was too much at stake for that.

For several long minutes he stood in deep and painful thought, the flash-lamp glimmering in his hand, on the old oak of the door.

There was no escape that way—without letting it become known to all the

school that Compton of the Fifth had gone down the secret passage to the smugglers' cave!

Whoever had bolted the door could not know that he was on the other side of it. He had not been seen at the panel in the corridor, he knew that. If he was able to escape by way of the sea-cave, nothing would be known.

Could he?

He was going to try, at all events. The sea-cave could only be entered and left by boat, and that only in fair weather. Splendid swimmer as he was, he doubted whether he could pull through the wild waters that dashed and roared and raved round the base of the Shoulder, where the cave opened to the sea. But it might be possible.

In earlier days, on board the Firefly, the smuggling game had seemed to him more an adventure than anything else. His uncle had been a good friend to him—the only one he had—and he had looked at most things through Captain Compton's eyes. Since he had been at Greyfriars School, there had been a change.

Somehow or other the trickery of it came home to his mind, as it had never come before. What had once seemed like risky adventure, now seemed, somehow, more like sordid law-breaking—as, indeed, it was.

What would any Greyfriars fellow think if he knew that he received letters in a secret code? Old Wingate—or Blundell—or even young Wharton, of the Re-

dated. It was not likely to occur to any fellow, seeing a letter, to read every fourth word, and thus derive a meaning from it different from the one on the surface. With a clue to the code, Carne would have read in that letter: "Get bag Wednesday and take it to Lantham." As it was, it was certain that, if he had spied into it, he could not have made head or tail of it.

But the wretched trickery of it all weighed on Compton's mind and heart. Captain Compton was waiting at Lantham Station that afternoon. He was to hand over the "bag." It was a locked bag—now hidden carefully under his jacket—containing he did not know what, and did not want to know—con-

Gosling Goes Gay!



We've often wondered how Gosling, the porter, spends Christmas at the deserted school, so we sent Tom Brown to ask him. And here's how—

"MERRY Christmas, Gossy!" I said, giving the porter a tip—which I shall expect the Editor to refund.

"Thank you kindly, Master Brown, I'm sure!" returned Gossy, his leathery face wrinkling into a grin.

"Now, tell me, Gossy—what do you do with yourself at Christmas-time?"

"I does wot I does all the rest of the year," snorted Gossy, "and that is—works like a bloomin' nigger!" I coughed, and he eyed me suspiciously. "You young rips—beg yer pardon; gents, I mean—don't know wot a lot of 'ard work has to be done at this 'ere school."

"That's true enough," I admitted. "But I suppose you take it a bit easier at Christmas, Gossy?"

"Well, Master Brown, not to deceive

nerly goes a bit gay. Well, arter that, I walks home agen—"

"How?" I asked; and Gosling glared.

"Perfickly sober, that's how! Wot d'ye mean? Well, I was sayin', I usually 'as a bit of supper in the 'ouse-keeper's room, and then I call it a day and go to bed."

"You hang up your stocking, of course?"

"You will 'ave your little joke," said Gosling sourly. "On Christmas morning I always works like a nigger—"

"The same nigger, or another one?"

"Like a nigger!" bawled Gosling. "And I 'as dinner in Mrs. Kebble's parlour with Mr and Mrs. Mumble. We jenniferly 'ave a turkey and pudden and mince pies, and then we give Mrs. Kebble a 'and with the 'ousework, as

yer, I does. On Christmas Eve, f'rinstance, I jenniferly goes down to the Station Hotel for a bit of a do."

"What's a bit of a do?"

"Well, it's like this 'ere. We 'ave a few songs and jokes and so on, and the landlord always sends in a dozen wine and a box of cigars, with 'is compliments. Then we dross the numbers of our Christmas dror, and jenniferly goes a bit gay. Well, arter that, I walks home agen—"

"How?" I asked; and Gosling glared.

"Perfickly sober, that's how! Wot d'ye mean? Well, I was sayin', I usually 'as a bit of supper in the 'ouse-keeper's room, and then I call it a day and go to bed."

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Trotter and the maids all go 'ome. In the evening I usually—"

"Go to the Three Fishers for a bit of a do?"

"Which the 'Ead would sack me for going there, and well you know it," snorted Gosling. "The Station Hotel's a respectable place. I jenniferly pop in there for a bit of—for a minnit or two."

"I suppose you have a party?"

"We 'ave," he said haughtily, "a little merriment, being as it's Christmas night."

"I bet you do! I'd like to see you playing ring-a-ring-a-roses with old Tozer, Gossy. Do you put on paper hats and kiss the landlord under the mistletoe?"

"When you've finished being 'umorous," said Gosling bitterly, "I'll go on. We all mannidge to enjoy ourselves in a quiet, thortful kind of way—"

"Oh crikey!"

"And then we go 'ome. Well, on Boxing Day I've always—"

"Don't tell me; let me guess! Worked like a nigger!"

"I wasn't going to say nothing o' the kind. I've always spent the day with a friend o' mine at Margate, which I go there by train in the morning."

"I suppose you have two bits of a do there?"

"Me and my friend," said Gosling crushingly, "sometimes goes to the pickshers—"

"Do you hold her hand in the dark?"

"My friend is a man!" bawled Gosling, eying me fiercely. "Look 'ere, I've had enough o' your nonsense! You 'op orf before I report yer!"

And he stepped back into his cottage, slamming the door. A little later I saw him walking indignantly out of gates. No doubt he was going somewhere for a bit of a do!

He turned from the oaken door and crossed the little stone room to the spiral stair. With the flashlamp turned on to light his way, he descended.

He reached the tunnel below. With a dark brow, he tramped away. It was a long tramp by that deep, murky tunnel, back to the sea-cave. But he had plenty of time.

It was still early in the afternoon. He would not be missed till calling-over. If he could escape by the sea-cave at all, he could get through before that.

But he would not be able to get to Lantham. Captain Compton, waiting for him at Lantham, would wait in vain.

That could not be helped. It mattered little in comparison with getting out of his present scrape undetected.

But his brow was dark, and his heart heavy, as he tramped by the shadowy underground tunnel.

move—what would any of them think of such a thing? Or an honest fathead like Coker—or even a spying cad, like Carne? His nature was open and frank—but he was committed to this miserable trickery.

Indeed, it was only that secret code that saved him from discovery. Once a letter had been lost—and only to-day Carne had taken his letter, and might have opened it.

That fellow suspected him of something—though certainly not of being what he was. He had not taken that letter by "mistake"—he had taken it to pry into; there as very little doubt that it had been opened by steam in Carne's study before he recovered it. But for the tip from young Vernon-Smith, it might have remained in Carne's hands long enough for him to puzzle out what it meant.

Luckily the code was not easily eluci-

traband goods of some sort, carefully packed in a locked oilskin bag.

Something, whatever it was, that Captain Compton could not risk having in his possession when he stepped on shore from the Firefly! Something that had been run into the sea-cave, and left hidden there, for him to fetch away when he received word. Well, the yachtsman-smuggler would wait for it in vain to-day. Probably he was at Lantham Station now—pacing the platform, watching the trains come in from Courtfield; while his nephew was wearily tramping back down the long tunnel to the sea-cave!

Compton reached the end of the tunnel at last, and clambered up into the cave.

There he shut off his flashlamp and

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(Continued from page 15.)

tramped through the vast cavern towards its outlet on the sea.

Daylight glimmered far ahead of him; growing clearer as he neared the cavern's mouth.

But he was unable to walk as far as the opening of the great arch of rock. Even at low tide, the sea flowed into the cave. Now it was high tide, and the waves rushed and roared in at the cave-mouth.

Compton stood at the water's edge, looking out at the foaming waters, and the rugged rocks on either hand. Beyond, the open sea stretched wide, grey, and tumbling in the winter wind. The wind-tossed waters gleamed and sparkled in the frosty December sunshine.

The dark cloud left Valentine Compton's brow. The keen sea-wind blew into his face, fresh and invigorating, after the close, clammy air of the tunnel. He loved the sea, and he had spent a great deal of his boyhood on the wide waters. One of the attractions of Greyfriars School, to him, was that it was near the sea. As he breathed in the salt air, the cloud left his brow, and the weight rolled from his heart. He was no longer Compton of the Fifth, a Greyfriars fellow with a sinister secret to keep—he was the cool, hardy, reckless smuggler, depending on his courage, his coolness, and the strength of his limbs, to escape from a dangerous snare.

Few men, even the hardy fishermen of Pegg, would have cared to trust themselves to the wild waters, dashing and foaming among the rocks. But the Schoolboy Smuggler felt that he had no choice.

He had to keep his secret from the remotest breath of suspicion. He had to get away from that trap without looking at the hidden door at the school to be let in. And there was only one way!

He made his preparations coolly. The bag under his jacket was safely tied in place. He took off his shoes, and tied them on him by the laces. He stepped into the water—waited for a receding wave, and went out on it, swimming strongly in a whirl and swirl of foam and spray.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Saw!

"BEASTS!" groaned Billy Bunter. Often and often it had seemed to Billy Bunter that the world was populated chiefly by beasts; himself almost the only really decent fellow in it.

But never had everything and everybody seemed quite so beastly as now.

Nothing seemed to be coming Bunter's way!

Close on break-up, he had not landed himself for the holidays. Instead of that, he had got landed—with five sticky beasts, who refused to come unstuck.

That was bad enough; but, as Shake-

peare had remarked, thus bad begins but worse remains behind!

In the belief that he was tracking down a picnic, Bunter had tramped quite a long distance. He was tired. He was hungry. He was peeved! He was on one of the loneliest spots in the vicinity, with absolutely no chance of getting a lift of any sort or kind. He had walked miles to get where he was—and he had to walk more miles to get away again!

Harry Wharton & Co. were beasts for not waiting for him before they started out for that picnic. Or, alternatively, as the lawyers say, Skinner was a beast for having sent him on a wild-goose chase. In fact, they were all beasts—and everything was utterly beastly.

Bunter doubted now whether there was a picnic at all. Undoubtedly it was "parky" weather, and a "parky" spot, for picnicking. It was just like that utter beast, Skinner, to pull his fat leg.

Sitting on a chalk rock on the rugged path over the cliffs, Billy Bunter groaned dismally, and told the sea and sky what he thought of the beasts.

He had a long walk ahead of him; but he was in no hurry to begin on it. He wanted a rest and a feed—and as a feed was not available, he took it out in resting.

Thus it was that his eyes, and his spectacles, fell on a speck in the sea, and he blinked at it in amazement as he made out the form of a swimmer.

Why any fellow should go swimming, in December, was a mystery to Bunter. That fellow must be a howling ass to be swimming in the sea on a cold and frosty day—an absolute idiot!

All the same, he must be a jolly good swimmer to be keeping afloat, indeed, to be keeping alive, in the wind-tossed waters under the cliffs. As good a swimmer as that chap Compton, who had swum out on a running tide to rescue Bunter and his sister Bessie from a drifting boat, weeks ago. As the thought of Compton came into his mind, Bunter blinked curiously at the swimmer far below. The distance was too great for his limited vision; but he had an idea that the fellow looked like Compton of the Fifth.

"The silly ass!" grunted Bunter.

The chap must be fearfully keen on swimming to be out in the sea on a frosty day in December! It looked to Bunter as if he had his clothes on, too. What the dickens was he doing it for?

Below the cliffs the sea came in with a rush and a roar, boom on boom of the tide against the rugged chalk. It looked to Bunter as if the swimmer must have come round the Shoulder—the direction of the sea-cave. Had he swum out from Pegg? But no swimmer could have swum round the mighty, jutting mass of the Shoulder except on a very calm day. He must have got into the water on the nearer side of that great cliff. If he didn't take jolly good care the silly ass would get himself drowned, Bunter considered.

The beach, under the cliffs, was covered by deep water. There was nowhere to land for miles. Sharp from the foaming waters rose the steep cliffs. At low tide the swimmer might have scrambled on the beach and hunted for some gully in the cliffs. Now there was at least ten feet of water all the way.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter suddenly.

He almost forgot that he was hungry at the new thought that came into his mind—which would have entered any mind but Bunter's immediately, but which did not occur to the fat Owl till

he had been watching the swimmer for several minutes.

That fellow had not gone out swimming in a wintry sea from choice. He was in deadly danger and was struggling for his life.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

He started to his feet, eyes and spectacles fixed on the struggling figure in the waters far below.

The chap must have tumbled in—fallen from slippery chalk on the cliffs, perhaps. Certainly it did not occur to Bunter that he had been trapped in the sea-cave and was risking his life to escape by the outlet on the sea.

And he was almost sure that it was Compton of the Fifth! Every now and then there came a glint of wintry sunlight on a pale, set face as Bunter blinked down at him in horror.

Bunter could see now that the swimmer was making desperate efforts to get ashore. Twice, thrice, the tide washed him up to the cliffs, and he vanished from Bunter's sight under the verge. But each time he reappeared, swept out again by the receding water.

On the steep, slippery chalk there was no hold—if he had clutched and grasped, he had been torn away again.

He was still swimming strongly, but even the short-sighted Owl of the Remove could see the signs of coming exhaustion. And he was sure now that it was Compton of the Fifth.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Bunter, and he quite forgot that he was hungry and that he was tired, realising that it was a tragedy that was being enacted under his eyes.

He blinked wildly up and down the cliff path. But there was no one in sight—no hope or chance of help. More than a mile by rugged ways, if he ran on to Pegg—twice as far, the other way, to Friardale. Long before help could come, long before he could have covered a quarter of the distance, the tragedy would be over.

And he could not help! He could do nothing but stare in horror and dismay, losing sight of the swimmer when he passed below the verge of the line of cliffs—for Bunter dared not approach that dangerous edge and look over. For his fat life he dared not.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter, as he watched and watched, when the swimmer passed out of his vision once more and failed to appear.

He watched and watched, his eyes bulging behind his spectacles. Again and again the swimmer had been swept in, and swept out again. Now he had been swept in once more—but not out again!

Had he crashed helplessly on the rugged chalk and done down? Had his body been sucked away, unseen, in an under-tow? Or had he, by some lucky chance, succeeded in grasping some jutting point of rock and holding on?

Only by crawling to the edge of the cliff and looking over could Bunter ascertain whether that was the case. And he dared not.

He stood with chattering teeth.

Even if the desperate swimmer was clinging to the rocks far below there was no hope. No boat was in sight—even if a boat could have approached the rocks without being dashed to pieces on the foaming tide. And the wet, slippery chalk rose almost like a wall—inaccessible, hardly to be climbed by a monkey. There was no chance—no hope.

Minute followed minute—long, long minutes. Bunter stood with fat knees knocking together, his teeth chattering. Still there was no sign of the swimmer reappearing on the sea. Either he had gone down, or he was clinging to some

rock—clinging there till he dropped off exhausted! Or perhaps he was trying to climb where there was hardly a perch for a seagull!

Suddenly, from empty space, came a voice. Bunter jumped.

It was a faint but clear cry from under the verge of the cliff.

"Help!"

It was Compton's voice.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He had clambered up the chalk cliff, then—he was holding on, below the verge that Bunter dared not approach. Did he know that somebody was there, or was he calling on the bare chance that someone might be passing along the lonely path above?

"Help!"

Bunter shuddered from head to foot. He dared not—dared not—go near that dizzy verge. The thought of the boundless space beyond made his fat heart quake. But the fellow was there, clinging on between life and death—and there was no help for him, unless Bunter could help him!

There must have been a little bit of British pluck hidden somewhere under Billy Bunter's layers of fat, for the Owl of the Remove dropped on his hands and knees and, trembling in every fat limb, crawled to the dizzy edge of the cliff and blinked over.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Play Up, Bunter!

COMPTON hung to the cliff, clamped to it with hands and feet.

Fatigued, aching in every limb, he clung, with death yawning beneath him, and knowing that there was no hope. Coolly, intrepidly, confident in his strength, he had taken the chance, and he knew now that he had taken a chance too many.

Powerful swimmer as he was, he had been little more than a plaything to the roaring tide under the chalk cliffs, in the waters tossed and torn by the fierce winter wind. He had planned to reach a gully in the mighty mass of the Shoulder, by which he could have climbed, but he had been swept away from it and swept down the line of cliffs. Now, by luck and pluck, he had got hold and found that, steep as the cliff looked, he could climb; and, exerting the last ounce of his strength, he dragged himself up the almost perpendicular chalk. Up and up and up, inch by inch, foot by foot, till he was almost at the summit—only, after that desperate climb, to see the cup of hope dashed from his lips. He was clinging to the last jut of uneven rock, and above was smooth chalk on which a fly could hardly have crawled.

Holding with one hand, with one foot jammed in a tiny crevice, he clung on, sticking to the cliff like a fly to a wall; and with the other hand he reached up and groped—over slippery, glassy surface.

Six inches farther up was a jut that would have given him a grasp—but even his outstretched finger-tips could not touch it. Six inches—but it might as well have been six feet, or six yards, as it was hopelessly out of reach. And only six inches farther, over that jutting point, was the edge of the cliff path—and safety!

Desperately he strove. But it was in vain—there was no hold for a finger,

and he could not draw himself up another inch. All his desperate efforts had gone for nothing.

It was without hope that he called for help. A helping hand from the path above would have saved him. But the path over the cliffs was lonely in the winter—there was no chance—no hope! But he called! It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and by some happy chance some of the fellows might have come along the cliffs. Faintly, for he was at the point of exhaustion, the schoolboy smuggler called, and called again and again.

Above him the edge was clear cut, almost as sharp as the edge of a roof.

One pull from a helping hand, and his grasp would be on that edge—and it would be life instead of death. If only there were ears to hear!

There were two fat ears that heard!

A sound came to him of something that stirred and moved out of his sight above the cliff-edge. Was somebody there? Was it the wind?

"Help!"

Something projected over the verge above him. He stared blankly at a fat face white with terror, at wildly blinking eyes behind a big pair of spectacles!

He stared up at Billy Bunter—and Billy Bunter blinked down at him! Their eyes met!

Compton felt a bitter pang. Anyone—anyone but that fat, clumsy, funky ass could have saved him. Harry Wharton or Bob Cherry—Smithy or Redwing—any kid in the Remove almost—except Bunter! Old Coker, if he had been there, would and could have reached down and grasped him and had him up in a jiffy. It was bitter enough! His despairing cry had been heard—by Bunter, too fat and helpless and frightened to give him aid!

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

Compton did not speak. He shut his teeth hard. It was the end of the schoolboy smuggler's wild life. He had risked it, and he had the courage to face it now that it was inevitable.

"I—I—I say, Kik-Kik-Compton!" stuttered Bunter, through his chattering teeth. "I—I—I say—Oh lor'!"

A faint smile glided over Valentine Compton's pale face. He was cool, steady—unshaken, even—as he heard the rustle of the wings of the Angel of Death. Bunter, in safety, was trembling like an aspen; his chattering teeth clicked like castanets.

"I—I—I s-s-say—" gurgled Bunter. "Oh crikey!"

Compton spoke quietly. "You're alone there, Bunter?"

"Oh crikey! Yes, old chap! Oh jiminy!"



*"A friend that is new may be all that is true,
But there's never a friend like the old.
The former is held by a silver thread.
But the latter by anchors of gold."*

May your Christmas be right merry
Is the wish of,—Yours, BOB CHERRY.

And no worries ever shorten
Your delight,—from HARRY WHARTON.

And I guess I'll join that wish,
(It costs nixes!)—F. T. FISH.

I can think of nothin' cleverer,
So I'll say the same,—MAULEVERER.

Here's the best of luck to you, gents!
(That last greeting was FRANK NUGENT'S).

May your cup of joy be full
Is the bellow of JOHN BULL.

May the seasonfulness bring
Gladful hours,—from HURREE SINGH.

May you skorn to be a hunter
After grubb,—says BILLY BUNTER.

Or you'll finish up in quod,
So will Bunter,—PETER TODD.

Unless, of course, that greedy glutton
Bursts before he's caught,—TOM DUTTON.

May a lot of Christmas dinner
Be "your lot,"—from HAROLD SKINNER.

An appetite to eat it with
As big as Bunter's,—VERNON-SMITH.

Here's all the luck the time can yield,
FROM SAMSON QUINCEY IFFLEY FIELD.

May fortune never let you down,
And all your dreams come true,—TOM BROWN

And may no beestly growsing croaker
Upsett yore party,—HORACE COKER.

May rich uncles send you tips
As fat as Bunter,—OLIVER KIPPS.

Have a Christmas cake, not Stumma-cake,
It's nicer really,—says DICK RAKE.

May boys be taken to the water
And drowned,—GOSLING, Greyfriars Porter.

"Anybody in sight?"

"Oh crumbs! No n-n-n-nobody! Oh scissors!"

"You can't help me! Get back, kid!" Compton's voice was breathless, but cool, and there was a kind note in it. "Keep out of danger; you can't help."

He knew that it was the end. His strength was spent; and when he dropped into the roaring tide below, it would be only to be dashed helplessly on the rocks till what was left of him drifted out on the wild North Sea. The end of the schoolboy smuggler—the end of Compton of the Greyfriars Fifth. And even in those wild moments his uncle, the yachtsman smuggler, was pacing the platform at Lantham Station, waiting for the bag of contraband that was going down with him when he went down to his death.

Billy Bunter gazed down at him in silent horror.

His instinct was to pop his head back from that dreadful gulf of illimitable space, like a tortoise popping back into its shell. But he did not.

Flat on his fat waistcoat on the cliff-top, his fat chin over the verge, Bunter gazed down at Compton with bulging eyes and swimming head.

"I—I—I s-s-say—" he stuttered. "I—I say, I—I—I'm going to help you up, old ch-ch-chap!"

How he did it Bunter never knew.

It had happened before in Billy Bunter's fat career that some sudden crisis had called up unsuspected pluck in his fat carcass. Now it happened again. Every nerve in Bunter's podgy body shrank from that yawning gulf of space; his fat limbs almost crawled back with him of their own accord—but he remained where he was, and his fat right arm came trembling over the verge.

His fat hand was in easy reach of Compton's. To grasp and hold for a fleeting second, while Compton with his other hand grasped at the jut of chalk. That was what was needed.

But in that fleeting second Billy Bunter would be in danger—in dire danger—of being dragged headlong over the edge of the cliff, to go down to death in the roaring tide with Compton.

And he knew it as well as Compton knew it.

Compton's slim, strong fingers touched the fat, grubby paw, but he did not grasp it.

"Go back!" he said. He would not risk dragging the fat junior down to death.

"I—I—I won't!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, tut-tut-take hold, and I'll pip-pip-pull! I—I say, bub-bub-buck up, or—or—or—" He shuddered. "I—I say, I—I'm a good weight, you know; I—I think I can stand it!"

Compton drew a deep, hard breath. It was life—the only chance of life! And it was true that Bunter's tremendous weight was in his favour. He was a foot shorter than Compton, but he was a good deal heavier. Weight might make up for the strength that was wanting.

"You're a good kid, Bunter!" said Compton quietly. "I shan't forget this, kid! Keep your weight well back—and here goes!"

He grasped the fat hand.

Bunter clamped himself down, holding on with one hand, with both feet, and clamping down his weight on the cliff.

For a fearful fraction of a second it seemed to him that his right arm was being torn away.

But it was only a fraction of a second. Then Compton's other hand was reaching at the jut of rock; he needed only

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a jerk upwards, and Bunter's extended arm gave him what he needed.

Almost before Bunter felt the strain, the strain was gone, and Compton's weight was on his other arm. He released Bunter's hand and grasped with both—one on the jut of chalk, the other on the cliff-edge.

"Get back!"

Bunter squirmed back.

Compton clambered over the edge. Even then, with a good hold, it was not easy; but in a few moments he was up, and over the verge and lying panting on the cliff-top.

Spent, exhausted, he lay there, breathing in deep gulps. Billy Bunter, a dozen feet from the edge, sank down on a chunk of rock and gurgled.

"Oh crikey! Oh er! Oh crumbs! Ow!"

Compton sat up; he gave Bunter a rather whimsical look.

"You've saved my life, Bunter!" he said.

"Have I?" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! Oh crumbs! Oh lor! I say—Ow! Oh dear!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Smithy!

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Quelch glanced up.

"What is it, Vernon-Smith?"

Mr. Quelch was spending a happy hour that frosty afternoon on his celebrated "History of Greyfriars." He was not pleased to be interrupted, and he rather barked at Smithy when the Bounder tapped at his study door and entered.

"If you please, may I have leave to go to the library?" asked Vernon-Smith meekly.

Mr. Quelch gave him a sharp look. His first thought was that that rather reckless member of his Form was more interested in the panel in the library corridor than in any literary treasures to be found in the library itself. Still, it was improbable that a fellow who planned going out of bounds would come to his Form-master's study and apprise him of the fact.

"For what reason, Vernon-Smith?" asked the Remove master.

"I'd like to look at Priscianus, if I may, sir," said Smithy.

"Wha-a-at?"

That the Bounder of Greyfriars was interested in an ancient and arid author whom Mr. Quelch himself had never read was altogether too surprising.

"I mean, sir," Vernon-Smith hastened to explain, "that new chap in the Fifth—Compton—has library leave, and the fellows say that he has Priscianus out when he goes there. I'd never heard of him before Compton came, and I'd like to see what it's like, sir."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

If Vernon-Smith, instead of getting into some scrape as usual on a half-holiday, had a desire to sample an ancient Latin author, his Form-master was not the man to say him nay. He had no doubt that one glance at the solid pages of the excellent Priscianus would be sufficient for Smithy.

"Very well, Vernon-Smith, you may have leave," said Mr. Quelch. "I will give you a note for Mr. Woose."

"Thank you, sir."

Herbert Vernon-Smith left the study, in possession of a note for the Head's librarian. He walked away to the library corridor, and as he turned the corner Wingate of the Sixth spotted him and called to him.

"Here, you young sweep, where are you going?"

Under the Head's instructions, all the Greyfriars prefects had a sharp eye open for adventurous juniors wandering in the vicinity of the secret panel.

"Library leave, Wingate," said the Bounder, and he showed Mr. Quelch's note.

"Oh, all right! Don't hang about in the corridor!" said the Greyfriars captain significantly.

Smithy turned the corner and walked down the long, oak-panelled corridor towards the big door of the library. He started a little at the sight of Arthur Carne of the Sixth Form sitting on the settee by the window, half-way down the corridor.

Carne gave him a stare.

"What are you doing here, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder showed his note again. Carne gave a nod and a grunt, and he passed on.

Mr. Woose, as it happened, was not there when the Bounder entered the library; neither—and not wholly to his surprise—was Compton of the Fifth.

Smithy's new interest in that ancient author Priscianus was entirely due to his desire to ascertain whether Compton was there.

He strongly suspected that Compton was not—and now he knew it for a fact.

The letter which Carne had taken from the rack the previous day had told Carne little or nothing, although he had read it; it had told the Bounder a good deal, though he had not read it.

Smithy had no doubt that it was another letter in code from Captain Compton, and that it contained, in all probability, instructions for the schoolboy smuggler.

For that reason Smithy was interested in Compton's movements on the half-holiday following the receipt of the letter.

Smithy was in the peculiar position of being both friend and foe to the schoolboy smuggler. He was his friend so far as keeping his secret went; his foe in an inflexible determination to defeat the smuggling game carried on through Greyfriars School.

Having, like Carne, kept an eye on the Fifth Form footballers, he knew that Compton was "cutting" the pick-up.

A few inquiries easily elicited the fact that Compton was making use of his library leave—"swotting" in the library.

That, to Smithy's mind, meant one thing, and one thing only—that the schoolboy smuggler was going down to the sea-cave by the secret tunnel.

Which, in turn, meant that another consignment of smuggled goods was to be brought up from the cave and taken out of the school.

And that was where the Bounder came in.

He had taken a walk with his chum Redwing, but he had cut that walk short. Now he was in the library—first of all to ascertain whether Compton was there; second to keep an eye open for his return, if he was gone.

And that eye was going to remain very wide open, until he had a chance of relieving the schoolboy smuggler of the smuggled goods, to be passed on to official quarters.

But the sight of Carne of the Sixth on the settee in the corridor, almost opposite the secret panel, gave a new turn to his thoughts.

Carne was Valentine Compton's rival and bitter enemy. He was not passing his half-holiday yawning over a book in that corridor, without a motive.

The Bounder whistled softly.

Compton had gone down the secret way. Carne either knew it, or suspected it, and he was sitting there on the watch.

Compton must have left the hidden door unbolted when he went. Carne, no doubt, had bolted it, to force him to knock when he returned—to make it unmistakable, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that he had been out of bounds, and land him in a serious row with the Head.

"By gum!" murmured the Bounder.

He knitted his brows. Quite determined as Smithy was to defeat the smuggling game carried on through the school, he was concerned for Compton of the Fifth—a fellow he could not help liking, and who, as he easily guessed, was hardly more than a tool in the hands of a hard and unscrupulous man.

But there was nothing that he could do, so long as Carne of the Sixth remained there; and it was clear that Arthur Carne was a fixture. The truth he could not know; but he either knew, or suspected, that his enemy was out of bounds, and he was not likely to lose this chance of scoring over him.

Vernon-Smith left the library, and passed Carne again in the corridor.

The prefect hardly glanced at him as he passed. He was quite unaware of that particular junior's interest in his proceedings that afternoon.

Smithy strolled out into the quad, with his hands in his pockets and a thoughtful frown on his brow. His chum, Redwing, was still out of gates.

Twice, during the next couple of hours, Vernon-Smith strolled into the House and glanced down the library corridor.

Had Carne lost patience and gone, Smithy would have taken the chance of cutting along to the secret panel and unbolting the hidden door in the wall behind it.

But Carne, though he was certainly fed-up with his vigil, had not lost patience. Once before he had, as he thought, bolted Compton out of the House at the hidden door, but the fellow had turned up for calling-over, and he had had to conclude that he was mistaken.

Now it seemed to Carne more probable that he had not been mistaken that time, but that some pal of Compton's had found out how matters stood, and let him out in time. If that had happened last time, it was not going to happen this time! Tired and impatient and irritable, but viciously determined, Carne sat and yawned over his novel, prepared to sit there till the bell rang for call-over, if necessary.

There was no chance for a friendly hand to intervene. The Bounder gave it up. It was getting near lock-up now—early, in the dark winter days. Smithy strolled down to the gates, to see Redwing when he came in.

Five fellows came down the road from Courtfield Common. The Bounder glanced at them and grinned.

"Did Bunter get you?" he asked.

"Bunter!" repeated Harry Wharton. "No! Haven't seen the old fat bean!"

"He was inquiring all over the shop for you, after he got out of the Form-room!" grinned Smithy.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Then we've been in luck!" he said. "He never found us!"

"The luckfulness was terrific!" remarked Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

Skinner, who was in the gateway, chortled.

"I fancy Bunter went looking for you fellows along the cliffs!" he remarked. "I told him I'd seen you



Billy Bunter gazed down at Compton, with bulging eyes and swimming head. "I—I say, tut-tut—take hold of my hand, and I'll pip-pip-pull!" he gasped. "I say, bub-bub-buck up or—or—" He shuddered. "I—I say, I—I'm a good weight, you know. I—I think I can manage it!" "You're a good kid, Bunter!" said Compton quietly. "I shan't forget this! Keep your weight back—and here goes!"

lay in grub at Uncle Clegg's, and start for the cliffs; but somehow I forgot to mention that it happened last term, and Bunter seems to have fancied it was to-day—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've been in gates, Smithy," said Bob Cherry. "How many goals did that man Compton bag in the Fifth Form pick-up?"

"None; he didn't play in the pick-up."

"Oh! Swotting?" asked Bob. "Jolly old Priscianus in the jolly old library, what? Rather Compton than this infant!"

The chums of the Remove went in.

Smithy tapped Harry Wharton on the arm, and the captain of the Remove paused and looked round.

The Bounder did not speak till the others were out of hearing.

"Compton's out of bounds, in the secret passage!" he said, in a low voice. "Carne's spotted him, and he's watching in the library corridor, like a cat! Think of anything a fellow can do?"

Harry Wharton looked at him hard.

"Last time, you cut along and unbolted the door," said Smithy. "This time, that spying worm is sitting on the spot."

"I don't know that it was Compton last time, and I don't see why you or Carne should suppose it is Compton this time!" answered the captain of the Remove. "Might be anybody—or nobody!"

"I know it's Compton! It means a row with the Head for him—and, in his case, goodness knows what else it

might mean. Can you think of anything that could be done?" muttered the Bounder.

"Nothing—if it's a prefect sitting on the spot watching. But I don't believe for a minute that Compton—"

"Oh, you're a fool!" snapped the Bounder.

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh. Looking past the Bounder, his eyes fell on a handsome, athletic figure coming in at the gate.

Vernon-Smith stared at him angrily, and then glanced round at the gateway, and fairly tottered at the sight of Compton of the Fifth coming in!

Absolutely certain as he was that Valentine Compton was on the wrong side of a bolted door, the ghost of the handsome Fifth Former could hardly have startled him more, walking in at the gates.

Compton of the Fifth passed the two juniors without even noticing them, and walked on to the House.

Harry Wharton chuckled.

"What about it now, Smithy?" he asked.

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The Bounder did not answer. He stared at Compton of the Fifth, almost stupefied.

Wharton, laughing, cut after his friends, leaving the astounded Bounder still staring.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Latest!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Oh, Willy, we have missed you!" sighed Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Did you spot a picnic on the cliffs, old fat man!" called out Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

The December dusk was falling thickly on Greyfriars School, with a few whirling flakes of snow. A crowd of juniors had gathered round the fire in the Rag, while they waited for the bell for calling-over.

said Bunter. "But as it turned out, it was jolly lucky, you fellows!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "Otherwise, you might have tracked us down at Highcliffe. Blessed if I expected you to see how lucky it was, though."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I mean, it was lucky, as it turned out, for if I hadn't been there, I shouldn't have saved Compton's life!" explained Bunter.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Which?"

There was a general howl of astonishment from the Remove fellows.

"You—you saved Compton's life!" babbled Bob Cherry.

"Yes, old chap."

"My only summer bonnet! My only winter toque! My only hat, umbrella, and sunshade!" gasped Bob.

"I say, you fellows, it's true—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's really true—"

risks!" remarked Skinner. "Any fellow here can see him doing it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

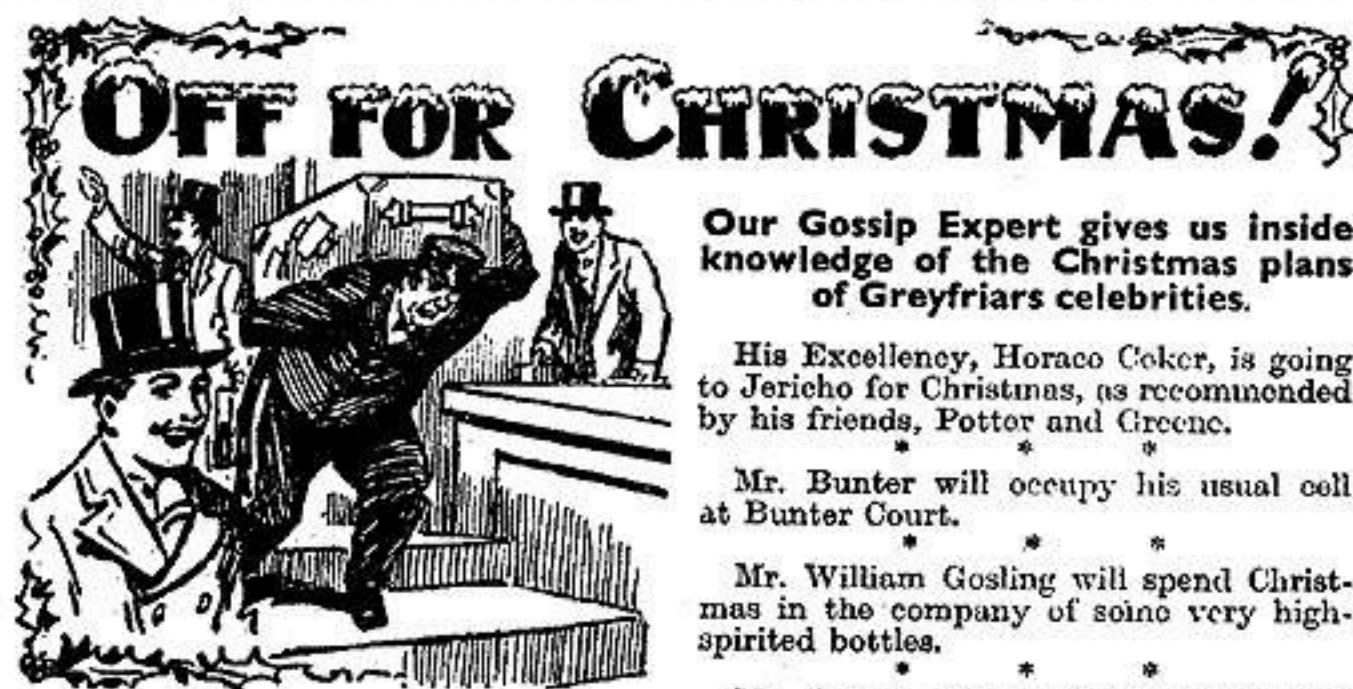
"I tell you the risk was awful—fearful—in fact, frightful!" roared Bunter. "And I shaved—saved his life! He's no end grateful. He's asked me to go on that Christmas cruise with him. What about that? You fellows needn't think that I asked him. I wouldn't! He asked me. He said 'Bunter, old chap, you're the pal a fellow wants at sea, with your pluck!' His very words!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled all the Remove.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! You can ask Compton!" howled the indignant Owl. "He jolly well knows I saved his life!"

"How did it happen?" asked Skinner. "Did a mad bull get after him, and you rushed at the bull, seized him by the tail, swung him round your head and hurled him over a hedge?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"



Mr. Fisher T. Fish will spend Christmas (but nothing else) at Greyfriars, in the delightful company of Mr. Fisher T. Fish.

Mr. Wun Lung, of China, is going home for the week-end.

Lord Mauleverer has not broken up at all. He is still in bed—very still. Nobody troubled to wake him.

Billy Bunter rolled into that apartment, and was greeted by a general grin.

Skinner had told his little joke up and down the Remove, and the idea of Billy Bunter, plugging over the rugged cliff-path, in a wild winter wind, in search of a picnic that wasn't there, struck most of the fellows as funny.

The Bounder was not smiling. He stood staring at the fire, with a puzzled, thoughtful face.

He had been assured, quite certain, that Compton of the Fifth had gone down the secret passage. He was sure that Carne of the Sixth believed so. Yet the fellow had walked in at the gates as if he had merely been out for a stroll. Carne was still doing his cat-and-mouse act in the library corridor—the Bounder had given him another glance and seen that he had not shifted. Unaware that Compton had come in, he was likely to keep it up till the bell rang. Vernon-Smith was deeply puzzled and perplexed, and he gave the fat Owl no heed.

"That beast Skinner pulled my leg,"

Our Gossip Expert gives us inside knowledge of the Christmas plans of Greyfriars celebrities.

His Excellency, Horace Coker, is going to Jericho for Christmas, as recommended by his friends, Potter and Greene.

Mr. Bunter will occupy his usual cell at Bunter Court.

Mr. William Gosling will spend Christmas in the company of some very high-spirited bottles.

Mr. Ogilvy intends to shoot the wild haggis in the Highlands. Scottish Highlands, of course; not Channel Highlands.

The reason why Mr. Temple, of the Upper Fourth, is going to the Riviera is that he doesn't think it likely that the Riviera will come to him. It ought to, of course.

Mr. Peter Todd, our legal expert, hopes to arrest Santa Claus for unlawful breaking

and entering. He has a clear case against him.

Mr. Harold Skinner is going into a wood to look for Yule logs. He will, of course, keep his hat on while woodpeckers are about.

Mr. Henry Quelch is going to take exercises to strengthen his body. At present his right arm is much stronger than the rest of him. It gets more exercise.

Mr. Gerald Loder is going to a party with no fewer than four kings—Hearts, Spades, Clubs and Diamonds. They will, no doubt, be up his sleeve.

Mr. William Wibley has written a complete pantomime which he intends to send to Drury Lane. The cost of the spoilt paper is borne by the school.

Mr. Claude Hoskins is spending Christmas at the North Pole, where he hopes to be able to play his D. Major Fantasia undisturbed, except by an occasional polar bear.

And yours truly, the present writer, will spend his Christmas dodging all the gentlemen mentioned above.

"No!" roared Bunter. "Nothing of the sort! It happened near Pegg—"

"Oh, I can guess it!" declared Skinner. "It happened at the level crossing. The express train was rushing down on Compton when you seized it by the tail-light, swung it round your head, and hurled it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass, Skinner! Shut up! It was nothing of the sort! I say, you fellows, you might be a bit serious, when a chap's been through fearful dangers, saving fellows' lives!" said Bunter warmly.

"Well, old fat bean, you're a bit hard to take seriously!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But if you've been life-saving, how did it happen?"

"You see, Compton fell into the sea and—"

"Yes, he's the chap to fall into the sea!" grinned Bob. "Fathead!"

"Well, he was in the sea, anyhow, so I suppose he fell in—"

"And Bunter plunged into the raging waves and swam ashore with Compton on his back!" said Skinner. "Is that how it was, Bunter?"

"True—when you're telling us!" chuckled Peter Todd. "My dear chap, the two things don't fit together!"

"The fitfulness is not terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"What on earth is the fat ass babbling about now?" asked Harry Wharton, in sheer wonder.

"Off his rocker!" suggested Hazel-dene.

"Mad as a hatter, I should think!" said Johnny Bull, staring blankly at the fat Owl.

"I say, you fellows, I did!" yelled Bunter. "I tell you he was in fearful danger, and I shaved his wife—I mean, saved his life—"

"Well, this beats Banagher!" remarked Micky Desmond.

"It do—it does!" agreed Bob. "But why Compton's life specially? Why not Wingate's, or Coker's. Or mine, if you come to that!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" howled Bunter. "I saved Compton's life because he was the fellow in danger! At awful risk to myself—"

"Bunter's the man to run awful

"No!" yelled Bunter. "He got out and climbed up the cliffs, but he couldn't get over the top. He called for help, and I rushed to the edge—"

"You mean you rushed away from it?"

"No, I don't!" howled Bunter. "I rushed to the edge and leaned over. Seizing Compton, I swung him up to safety—"

"Oh, scissors!"

"Any of you fellows fancy you can see Bunter swinging a Fifth Form man around?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I didn't exactly swing him up, perhaps!" admitted Bunter. "But I got hold of his hand, and he dragged himself up somehow. But if I hadn't been there he would have been lying in the sea—"

"While you're lying on shore?"

"He would have been lying at the bottom of the sea, you beast! After I saved his life he said: 'Brave chap! By gum, what pluck!' His very words."

"Has Compton been out of gates at all this afternoon?" asked Toddy.

"Yes, I saw him come in," said Harry Wharton. "Smithy saw him, too. Didn't you, Smithy?" he added, with a grin.

Vernon-Smith gave him a strange look. Billy Bunter's story, startling as it was, had given him a clue.

"Where did this happen, Bunter?" asked Smithy quietly.

"You ass!" said Johnny Bull. "Do you think it happened at all?"

"Let Bunter speak!" snapped the Bounder. "Where did you see Compton in the water, Bunter?"

"Up along the cliffs," asserted Bunter. "About a mile out of Pegg, you know—awfully dangerous spot, but, of course, that was nothing to me—"

"That wouldn't be far from the Shoulder, and the sea-cave!" said the Bounder; and Harry Wharton gave a start as he guessed what was in the Bounder's mind.

"Compton didn't look wet when we saw him come in," said Harry dryly.

"Of course he didn't!" yapped Bunter. "After I saved his life he walked along to Pegg with me and got his clothes dried at the Anchor. He left me there having tea when he cleared. I've only just got back. It was a jolly good tea—much better than I should have got with you fellows, I can jolly well tell you. Compton told me to order what I liked—and I jolly well did!"

"That part sounds true!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a jolly good feed," said Bunter. "And I'm going to Compton's study to supper to-night, too! I asked him—mean, he asked me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I suppose a fellow can stand a fellow a study supper, after a fellow's saved his life!" said Bunter warmly. "I can tell you, Compton was fearfully grateful. Precious few fellows would have hung over a terrific cliff and pulled him up—"

"And you're not one of the giddy few, old fat man!" grinned Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can jolly well ask Compton!" hooted Bunter indignantly. "Anybody might think I was an untruthful chap, to hear you fellows talk!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anybody might!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The mightfulness is terrific!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's the bell!"

And the juniors crowded away to Hall for calling-over, still chuckling over "Bunter's latest." But the Bounder was not chuckling. He knew now how Valentine Compton, shut out of the school, had escaped from the sea-cave—keeping his secret at the risk of his life.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Catch!

"C-C-C-COMPTON!"

Carne stuttered the name.

It was half an hour since calling over.

Sixth Form prefects had the right to cut roll, if it seemed good to them so to do. It seemed good to Arthur Carne.

After the bell had ceased to clang Carne of the Sixth still sat tight.

Absolutely assured that Valentine Compton was out of bounds in the secret passage, barred out of the House by the bolted door, Carne had only to wait and to watch—and he was waiting and watching.

He had no doubt that the fellow had got back, as far as the hidden door, long ago, of course. He could not escape

(Continued on page 24.)

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without knocking to be let out. He had not knocked yet. But it had to come!

Carne could picture him—trapped like a rabbit in a snare, putting off the inevitable till the latest possible moment. No doubt he hoped that some pal would have a chance of getting along and letting him in—as, Carne was now convinced, had happened before. No such chance was coming his way.

When the bell rang, Carne fully expected to hear that long-delayed knock. He heard nothing—and he waited.

The fellow was still putting it off—cutting call-over! Well, let him! Carne was prepared to sit there till dorm, if necessary. And he sat—till suddenly, half an hour after call-over, two figures turned into the library corridor from the end near masters' studies.

Carne glanced at them—and jumped. He stared, unable to believe his eyes. One of them was Prout, master of the Fifth. The other was Valentine Compton, the new man in Prout's Form. They were coming to the library together, Compton accommodating his pace to the slow and stately roll of his Form-master.

"Compton!" stuttered Carne.

He could not believe his eyes. For hours—long, weary hours—he had sat there, watching the secret panel, convinced that Compton of the Fifth was on the wrong side of the door hidden behind it. And here was Compton of the Fifth, walking along with Prout.

"I shall certainly be pleased to look at the passage in Priscianus that you mention, my dear Compton!" Prout was saying, in his deep, fruity voice. "I had an argument with Mr. Capper the other day, on the subject of the word 'proximior,' which he declared was to be found in Seneca. And you think you have found it in Ulpian in Priscianus—"

Prout broke off, staring at Carne. The petrified amazement in the Sixth Former's face would have drawn anyone's attention. Carne was staring at Compton with bulging eyes—fairly goggling at him.

Compton raised his eyebrows slightly.

A faint smile played, for a moment, over his handsome face.

A glance was enough to tell him how matters stood. Carne, on the watch in the library corridor, utterly astounded to see him coming along with Prout, explained the bolted door!

"Is anything the matter, Carne?" asked the surprised Prout.

"Oh!" gasped Carne. "No!"

He almost tottered away.

Mr. Prout stared after him, grunted, and walked on to the library with Compton.

Carne, still dizzy with astonishment, tottered off the scene. Had he been mistaken, after all? Mistaken last time, and mistaken this time? It looked as if he had—indeed, it seemed certain that he had! Amazement, chagrin, bitter disappointment, mingled in an unhappy variety of feelings, as the spy of the Sixth went to his study.

"Wingate!" He spoke to the Greyfriars captain in the Sixth Form passage. "Did Compton—I mean, did any fellow cut calling-over this evening?"

"Nobody!" answered Wingate.

"Everybody present?"

"Yes."

"Oh!"

Carne went into his study and slammed the door. He had spent his half-holiday watching like a cat for a mouse—and this was the happy result!

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THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Right as Rain!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

He grinned a happy grin.

After prep in the Remove, Bunter rolled out of Study No. 7, and his fat face wreathed with grins at the sight of the Famous Five in a group at the door of Wharton's study.

Bunter was bucked.

He was feeling like a mariner lost at sea, who sighted land at last.

For it was all right now.

It was right as rain.

That worrying problem of the "hols" was a problem no longer.

What had happened that afternoon had solved it! Those sticky beasts had refused to come unstuck! They were keeping Bunter up to his reckless invitation—they were not to be shaken off unless the fat Owl was driven to the last and desperate resource of telling the truth, and owning up that he couldn't, wouldn't and mustn't take a party of Greyfriars fellows home for Christmas. But it was all right now! If a fellow stood a Christmas cruise in an expensive yacht, they could hardly make out that a fellow wasn't making his invitation good! Bunter grinned all over his fat face, as he rolled down the passage to Study No. 1.

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned, too.

They were expecting a new "dodge."

At the moment they were, in point of fact, discussing Christmas. As Wharton's uncle and aunt were to be away from Wharton Lodge over the festive season, Harry was unable to make his usual arrangements for the holidays. But the arrangements the Famous Five made, were not founded on Bunter's invitation to Bunter Court. That was only a little joke they were keeping up till the last day of the term.

They judged, by the expansive grin on Bunter's fat face, that the fat Owl fancied that he had spotted a winner this time. But they were prepared to put "paid" to it, as they had put paid to the decorators, the measles, the fire at Bunter Court, and the trip from Glasgow. They could only wonder what the dodge was, and whether Bunter had decided, as a last resource, to swallow up Bunter Court in an earthquake!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry cheerily. "Just the man we want to see! Let's talk about Christmas!"

"Let's!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"That's what I was going to speak about, you fellows," said Bunter breezily. "I've asked you men for the hols! You're coming! That's settled!"

"The settlefulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"That trip I spoke of, from Glasgow, is washed out!" said Bunter carelessly.

"But—"

"But—" grinned Bob.

"The fact is," said Bunter. "If you fellows are agreeable—"

"We are!" said Bob Cherry. "Most agreeable chaps at Greyfriars!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you fellows are agreeable, I want you to join me in a cruise in a friend's yacht," explained Bunter. "Owing to the pater having the measles in—I mean, the decorators—there won't be a lot doing at Bunter Court. But you'd like a Christmas cruise all right, what?"

"Fine!" said Bob.

"Best of everything—trip to the Mediterranean—everything tip-top," said Bunter. "Like the idea?"

"Ripping!"

"The ripfulness is terrific!"

"Then it's a go!" said Bunter. "I'll have you at Bunter Court another time, when the decorators haven't had the measles—I mean, when the measles haven't had a fire—I—I mean, some other time, you know. Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Plenty of fellows in the Remove would jump at a chance of a Christmas cruise on a splendid yacht!"

"We'll jump all right!" assured Harry Wharton.

"The jumpfulness will be preposterous!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Then I'll make a list of the names to hand to my friend," said Bunter.

Withdrawing a grubby sheet of paper and a pencil from his pocket, the Owl of the Remove scribbled down the names of the Famous Five.

"It's a go, then?" said Bunter.

"It's a go!" agreed Harry Wharton, laughing. "Mind telling us where the jolly old yacht is parked?"

"If any!" murmured Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, yes—at Dover!" said Bunter.

"We'll cut across to Dover, see, when we break up, and go straight on board. You can write to your people and tell them about it."

Bob Cherry winked at his chums.

"I think we'll leave that till we're on the yacht," he said. "We'll wireless it from the magnificent yacht, old man!"

"Yes, better not write in a hurry," said Nugent gravely. "Something might happen to that yacht before we get on board."

"Might have the decorators in," suggested Johnny Bull.

"Or the esteemed measles."

"Or a fire," said Harry Wharton, with a nod. "I've got a sort of feeling that something may happen to that yacht before we actually step on board."

"By the way, what's it called?" asked Bob.

"The Firefly!" said Bunter.

"Eh? Same name as Compton's uncle's yacht?" asked Bob. "Sort of coincidence, what?"

"Eh? It's the same yacht," explained Bunter. "I'm asking you to join me in a Christmas cruise with Compton of the Fifth."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wharton.

"Does Compton know?" chortled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better mention it to him!" gurgled Johnny Bull. "Otherwise, he might be surprised, when we walk on his uncle's yacht, and tell him that we've come for a cruise!"

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

"Oh, don't be silly asses, you know!" said Bunter. "Of course, Compton's asked me. We're rather pally, you know. I asked him this afternoon—I mean, he asked me—and when I said I would be bringing a few friends, he said, 'Bring a dozen if you like, old fellow!' His very words."

"Oh scissors!"

"I suppose you fellows believe me?" said Bunter warmly.

"Believe you?" gasped Bob. "Oh crumbs!"

"I can see a Fifth Form man taking a mob of juniors cruising at Christmas," said Frank Nugent. "It's so probable!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

The Famous Five roared. Of all Billy Bunter's dodges, this seemed to them the most fatheaded.

That Compton of the Fifth had the remotest idea of asking Bunter to join

(Continued on page 26.)



A blazing fire, a crowd of chums, and a good song! What can beat it? Here's your chance to join the Greyfriars Breaking-Up Concert by singing the old tunes with new words by HAROLD SKINNER.

NOW, you fellows, draw a deep breath, and then let drive all together to the tune of "Come Lasses and Lads!" Here's your note! (Pong!)

Come, fellows and lads! Come, fatheads and cads!
And away to the station hie!
Forget your cares and your master's glares,
And forget your old school tie,
For Christmas is here again!
And Gosling has lost his frown,
So tip him, tip him, tip him, tip him,
Tip him half-a-crown!

We laugh and shout as we all go out
To get on the station bus,
And Temple and Fry must mind their eye
If they think of stopping us!
Old Coker is rushing up
With a face like a circus clown,
So trip him, trip him, trip him, trip him,
Trip him upside down!

Of course, the drawback of breaking-up day is that we're all stony—"hearts of oak," in other words. Well, let's sing about it! (Pong!)

Come, cheer up, my lads, for old Christmas is here,
And we're all going home for the rest of the year.
Though our pockets are empty of money to spend,
We'll laugh as we borrow a bob from a friend.
Hearts of oak we may be,
Stony broke, as you see!

Our pockets have no ready! Steady, boys, steady!
We'll go out singing carols till we fill them again!

Come, put on your coats, we'll go caroling now,
Let us give 'em an earful of "Mistletoe Bough!"
We'll make all the chimney-pots quiver and quake
To see what they say when the Christians Awake!

Hearts of oak we shall be,
Stony broke, you'll agree!
They'll give us no ready! Steady, boys, steady!
We'll make 'em pay us double to go farther away!

'Hem! I see Johnny Bull has just brought out his cornet. That's t'ornet! We'll have to sing this one loud enough to drown the row. Let's sing it humorously by making the "oo's" in the first verse and the "Grooh" in the second into long, drawn-out wails in imitation of Johnny's cornet. And the "BLOW" in the chorus must be a real earthquake.

D'yo ken John Bull and his cornet, too?
D'yo ken John Bull and his hullabaloo?
D'yo ken John Bull and his tootle-ootle-oo?
As he sounds his horn in the morning!
Oh, the sound of his horn brings me from my bed,
And Bolsover chucks a boot at his head,
For his cruel BLOW would awaken the dead,
Or old Quelch from his lair in the morning!

Yes, we ken John Bull and his cornet, too,
And we've often wondered what to do
To stop that gruesome groaning—Groooooh!—
When he sounds his horn in the morning!
Oh, the sound of his horn, etc.

Yes, we ken John Bull, and we're glad to say
The school is breaking up to-day.
And soon he'll be gone far, far away,
And we'll ne'er hear his horn in the morning!
Oh, the sound of his horn, etc.

Now Bunter's to the fore with a solo, and we're all going to roar out "Excelsior." Ready?

The shades of night were falling fast,
As out of Greyfriars College passed
A certain fat and flabby freak
With tear-drops dripping down his cheek.
Excelsior! Excelsior!

You can put the "Excelsiors" in the other verses.

His brow was sad, he shook his head.
"I know not where to go," he said.
"For many a weary month I've sought,
And sought in vain, for Bunter Court!"

"I've often seen it—in my mind—
Yet somehow I can never find
That palace built of gold and pearls,
Where Bunter dines with dukes and earls!"

At break of day that youth was found
Asleep upon the frosty ground.
A smile across his features passed,
For he'd found Bunter Court at last!

Which just proves that in Bunter's case there's no place like home. Now I see Johnny Bull is cranking up the cornet again, so we'll wind up with a real rip-shorter. The old favourite: "When Johnny Comes Marching Home!" Here goes!

When Johnny goes marching home to-day,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
He'll take his cornet far away,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
The Greyfriars men will cheer him then;
The school will be at peace agen,
And we'll all feel gay when—
Johnny goes marching home!

When Coker goes scorching home to-day,
My hat! My hat!
Upon his motor-bike he'll lay
You flat! Quite flat!
Beware, beware, and take good care,
For there's death and slaughter everywhere,
And a cloud of dust when—
Coker goes scorching home!

We're all going marching home to-day,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
To Greyfriars College we can say
Ta-ta! Ta-ta!

With no more frowns or Latin nouns,
Or dodging men in caps and gowns.
It's Christmas-time, and—
We're all going marching home!

that cruise for Christmas, and take a party of friends with him, seemed more improbable than the decorators, the measles, the fire, or the Glasgow trip. Obviously—to them—it was going to fall through, and Bunter was going to stick on to his old pals instead—if he could.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "I don't call that the way to treat a fellow who's standing you a splendid Christmas cruise!"

"Nunno!" gasped Bob. "All serene, old fat man! But—in case there's any mistake in the matter—we'll speak to Compton!"

"Yes—better have a word with him!" grinned Nugent. "The least we can do is to thank him for such a ripping invitation."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

To the surprise of the Famous Five, Bunter nodded assent. They fully expected, of course, that as soon as he found that they were going to speak to Compton about it, a new dodgo would be forthcoming.

Instead of which, Bunter seemed to think it was quite a good idea.

"Yes, that's all right!" said Bunter.

"He knows you're coming, as I've told him, you see, we fixed it up this afternoon at Pegg, after I saved his life, he was fearfully surprised—I mean he was fearfully pleased, and he said yes at once! Jumped at it, in fact! You see, as I had saved his life at awful risk, he couldn't very well do anything else, I mean he was so grateful that he jumped at the chance, never saw a man so surprised, I mean bucked! 'The very thing, old chap,' he said to me, his very words! Still, you may as well thank him for the invitation."

Bob bestowed another wink on his friends.

"Let's go and do it now," he said.

"Yes, let's!"

"Right-ho," said Bunter. "I'm going to supper in Compton's study now, and you can come along and speak to him. I can't land the lot of you on him for supper, there mayn't be enough to go round. I mean, it's hardly the thing, is it? But come along and speak to him."

Bunter rolled towards the stairs.

Harry Wharton & Co. stared after him.

The Owl of the Remove blinked round over a fat shoulder.

"I say, you fellows, come on!" he squeaked.

"Great pip!" said Bob. "I suppose it's not possible, you know, that Bunter's telling anything within a mile of the truth this time, is it?"

"Hardly!"

"Then what is the fat goat up to?"

"Keeping it to the last minute," said Johnny Bull. "I suppose Compton isn't in his study, and Bunter knows it."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That would be it, I suppose," he agreed. "Well, let's keep the fat villain up to it, if Compton isn't in his study we'll make him hunt the chap out, wherever he is, his face will be worth watching."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, are you coming?" yelled Bunter.

"Coming!" answered Bob.

And they came!

Bunter rolled down the Remove staircase, and across the landing to the Fifth Form passage.

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Coker of the Fifth, at the door of the games study, gave him a stare.

"What the thump do you want here, you fat frog?" he grunted.

"Compton's asked me to supper in his study!" answered Bunter with dignity.

"Gammon!" said Coker.

"Yah!" answered Bunter elegantly.

He rolled on. Harry Wharton & Co. followed him. He stopped at the door of Compton's study.

That door was open. The juniors could see that the table within was spread for supper. Compton of the Fifth was standing by the mantelpiece, leaning on his elbow, a thoughtful shade on his handsome, pleasant face.

As Billy Bunter had marched up to the study as bold as brass, the chums of the Remove had taken it for granted that Compton was not there. But there he was!

Now they expected Bunter to beat a prompt retreat! Instead of which, the fat Owl rolled cheerily into the study, just like a fellow who was expected to supper.

To the further amazement of the Removites, Valentine Compton gave him a pleasant nod and a smile.

"Not late, what?" asked Bunter.

"No: that's all right!" said Compton.

Harry Wharton & Co., at the doorway, gazed, dumb. Bunter evidently had been asked to supper in that Fifth Form study!

"These chaps are my pals!" said Bunter with a wave of a fat hand to the bunch of astonished juniors in the doorway. "They've come to thank you for your invitation, Compton!"

Compton glanced at the Famous Five.

They stood dumb, petrified! They wondered whether they were dreaming this!

The Fifth Former smiled at them pleasantly.

"That's all right," he said. "I've written to my uncle at Dover, and you'll be expected. I hope you'll enjoy your cruise on the Firefly. I'll try to make it agreeable to you."

The Famous Five could not speak. They could only gaze. Billy Bunter, anxious to get on in the supper scene, shut the door. Then they gazed at the door. They seemed rooted.

"Well!" said Bob Cherry at last.

And the Famous Five walked away down the passage, still wondering whether they were dreaming!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Shadowed!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH had a curious eye on Compton of the Fifth the following day.

He was not surprised when, after morning school, the handsome Fifth Former walked down to the gates in hat and coat. There was no bulge to be detected under the well-fitting overcoat: but the Bounder had not the slightest doubt that something was concealed there all the same. And Herbert Vernon-Smith sauntered in the same direction.

Compton was not likely to take any special notice of so inconsiderable a person as a Remove junior. But he had to take notice of Horace Coker, when that burly and beefy youth joined him on his way to the gates.

"Going for a trot before tiffin, old chap?" asked Coker.

"Oh! Yes!"

"I'll come."

The Bounder suppressed a grin. He guessed exactly how much Compton wanted company on that walk before dinner. But the new man in the Fifth nodded pleasantly, and walked out of gates with the beefy Horace.

The Bounder strolled after them.

Smithy had been thinking the matter out with his usual cool and keen sagacity. The schoolboy smuggler had gone down to the sea-cave the previous day for contraband goods. He had been unable to return by the way he had gone, and had resorted to the desperate expedient of swimming out of the cave and climbing the cliffs. Had he left the goods in the cave, or taken them with him when he set out on that desperate venture?

If the former, the contraband was still at the sea-cave. If the latter, Compton had it with him, and had to get rid of it at the earliest possible moment. In which case the Bounder expected him to go out of gates as soon as classes permitted him so to do.

Now he was going!

Sauntering down Friardale Lane after the two Fifth Formers, Smithy kept his eyes open for the proof he expected that he was on the right track. If the schoolboy smuggler had some packet or parcel to get rid of, he could not carry out his purpose in Coker's presence. He would have to drop Coker somewhere en route.

"Bit parky, what?" remarked Horace, as a sharp, wintry blast from the sea swept down the lane. "It's going to freeze, I fancy."

"Jolly cold!" agreed Compton. "Look here, let's trot! I'll give you ten yards start, and beat you to the village, old bean."

Horace Coker glared at him. He liked Compton—everybody did. But he was not taking this sort of thing.

"Why, you ass!" said Horace. "Give me a start? I'd run you off your legs without any start! My hat! I'll give you ten yards start!"

"Well, let's start level, then!" said Compton. "The fellow who loses stands tea in the study this afternoon, what?"

Coker grinned.

"Done!" he said. "Make it a decent spread, old chap, you'll lose!"

And, starting level, they ran!

Coker quickly forged ahead. Coker had a belief that he could beat any other Greyfriars man at anything, football, cricket, rowing, swimming, running, or any old thing! On this occasion, at all events, it looked as if Coker could! For he drew right ahead of Compton: and by the time the latter reached the stile, half-way, Coker was out of sight ahead down the winding lane.

Leaving the happy Horace to it, Compton stepped over the stile, and walked up the footpath through the frosty wood.

The Bounder grinned.

Coker of the Fifth, puffing and blowing, was going all out for Friardale. Coker's idea was that he was winning that race: and he certainly had not the faintest idea that Compton had turned off in a different direction as soon as he was out of sight.

But Compton had, and he was walking away swiftly in the direction of the ruined priory in Friardale Wood.

At a cautious distance behind him, the Bounder of Greyfriars threaded his way through the wood.

(Continued on page 28.)

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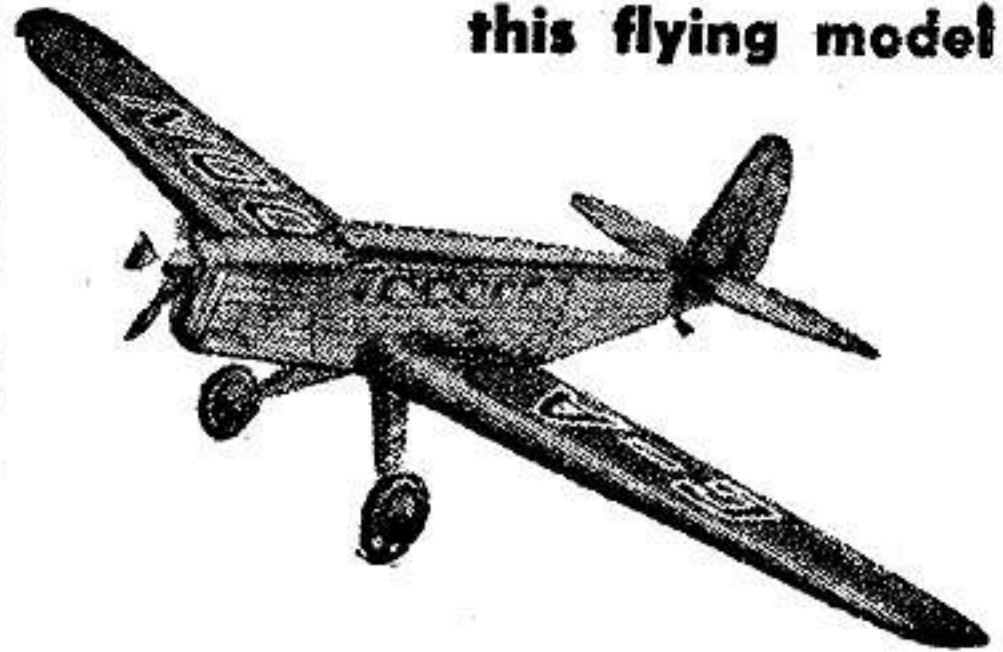
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Every now and then he had a glimpse of Compton's rather tall head, which was enough for him.

The Fifth Former had left the foot-path, and was making his way through the wood, among the frosty trunks and frozen brambles. That made it unlikely that any chance eye would fall on him. At the same time it made a shadower's task easier. If Compton glanced round he saw nothing of the wary Bounder.

From the direction he was taking, Vernon-Smith was able to guess his destination. A quarter of an hour after crossing the stile, the Fifth Former passed through the old shattered arch that gave admittance to the ruined priory.

He disappeared from Smithy's view; but a minute later the Bounder was peering through a gap in the old broken masonry, tangled with frosty ivy. Then he sighted Compton again.

The Fifth Former was standing still, glancing about him in the old ruin in the heart of the wood.

It was a solitary spot at all times, and especially so in the depth of winter. No one was to be seen there; but for five or six minutes Valentine Compton stood where he was, his keen eyes scanning the place, evidently to make assurance doubly sure that he was not observed.

Smithy, crouching low in the ivied gap in the old wall, watched in silence, a lurking grin on his face. If he had doubted before, he was sure now. He had only to wait!

Compton stirred at last.

His hand slid under the coat, and the Bounder had a glimpse of an oilskin bag for a second. Then the Fifth Former stooped, and the bag was thrust into a deep crevice between two of the cracked old stone flags.

The Fifth Former stepped to a heavy, rugged mass of masonry near at hand, grasped it, and rolled it over.

It came to rest over the spot where he had placed the oilskin bag.

Then, after another swift glance around, the schoolboy smuggler walked quickly away, and disappeared through the old arch. A rustle floated back to the Bounder's ears from the wood, died away, and he was gone.

Vernon-Smith chuckled softly.

He was in no hurry to stir. He gave Compton of the Fifth time to hurry back to Friardale Lane and follow Coker.

For ten minutes Smithy remained where he was. Then, assured that the coast was clear, he scrambled through the gap into the ruined priory.

He reached the mass of masonry that Compton had rolled over the hidden bag. He grinned as he looked at it.

It was large, heavy, and rugged—not easy to move. No one, entering the old priory, would have thought of giving it any special attention—certainly would not have thought of shifting it. The Bounder himself would not have had the faintest suspicion that anything was hidden beneath it, had not his wary eye been on Captain Compton's nephew. That hiding-place was as safe as any that Compton of the Fifth could have found in the county of Kent—had no eye been on him!

Likely enough, had all gone well the previous day, the schoolboy smuggler had planned to take that bag to a greater distance—very likely to hand it over to an associate. But that was only possible on a half-holiday. Certainly he could not venture to meet a confederate anywhere near the school. Neither could he keep such dangerous goods in

his possession longer than was unavoidable.

He had found a safe place of concealment for the bag. He had only to write, or telephone, to the yachtsman-smuggler. In a few hours, probably, one of the gang would be strolling into the ruined priory, knowing exactly where to look for the hidden bag—probably while Compton and the rest of the Greyfriars fellows were in class that afternoon!

Whoever came to look for that bag was not going to find it!

Herbert Vernon-Smith grasped the mass of masonry and exerted his strength. He had to exert it to the utmost.

But the rugged mass rolled aside, and the crevice between the old flags was revealed. The Bounder groped in it and drew out the oilskin bag. It was locked, but he did not need to look into it to know that it contained contraband.

A few minutes later it was safely hidden under Smithy's overcoat, and he was walking away through the wood.

He grinned cheerily as he went. He reached the lane and headed for the village. Before he reached Friardale he passed Coker and Compton in the lane, coming back. Horace Coker was grinning. Coker was feeling pleased with himself. Not only had he won that race, but he had had to wait a jolly long time for Compton to rejoin him.

"You must have crawled, old man," he was saying, as the Bounder passed. "Did you crawl on your hands and knees? Ha, ha, ha!"

Compton smiled, and they walked on together. The Bounder smiled, too, as he went into the village.

He stopped at Mr. Tozer's cottage. P.-c. Tozer was the whole police force of Friardale. When he was not on duty, he was generally to be found in his garden. He was in his garden now, plying a hoe.

In front of the cottage garden was a laurel hedge. Vernon-Smith stopped by the hedge and glanced over it at Mr. Tozer across the garden. Mr. Tozer's back was to him, and, anyhow, he was too busy to heed a schoolboy glancing over his hedge.

Standing close to the hedge, the Bounder drew the oilskin bag from under his coat and pushed it through the laurels. It dropped.

Smithy sauntered away up the village street.

Sooner or later—probably sooner rather than later—Mr. Tozer would pick up that locked oilskin bag under the laurel hedge, probably greatly to his astonishment. It would not be long in reaching official hands—which was all the Bounder cared about.

He walked cheerfully up the lane back to the school, and arrived in good time for dinner.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry, as he came in. "Somebody sent you a Christmas tip, Smithy? You're looking fearfully bucked!"

"I'm feeling bucked!" explained the Bounder. "I've been doing a good deed!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

The Bounder chuckled, and went into the House. When the fellows came out after dinner, Smithy noticed that Compton of the Fifth stopped to speak to his Form-master.

"If you'd give me leave to use your telephone, sir, to speak to my uncle about some arrangements I have to make—"

"Certainly, my dear Compton, certainly!" said Mr. Prout.

Compton went to the Fifth Form master's study. The Bounder strolled out into the quad, grinning. Compton's uncle, no doubt, would be glad to get that telephone call. But the Bounder rather thought that Captain Compton would not derive much benefit from it.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Clear!

"BLESSED if I understand it!" said Harry Wharton. "Same here!" admitted Frank Nugent.

"The samefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the all-rightfulness is also great."

"All right, so far as that goes!" said Bob Cherry. "But—"

"But—" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, we're landed!" said Bob. "We took that fat idiot at his word, to pull his silly leg, and now—"

"Might be landed worse!" said the captain of the Remove, laughing. "A Christmas cruise, dropping in at foreign parts, is rather a catch. We've seen the Firefly—she's a topping yacht. I can't say I took much of a fancy to Captain Compton from the little I saw of him, but I dare say he will be quite nice when a fellow comes to know him."

"Must be rather decent if he lets his nephew crowd his jolly old yacht with a party of schoolboys," said Bob. "Of course, we're specially nice schoolboys—best of the bunch, in fact—still, there's a lot of elderly gents who wouldn't enjoy our company, ripping as it is."

"But I can't understand it," said Harry. "Compton might have asked fellows in his own Form, but—Bunter's wangled it somehow!"

"The wanglefulness must have been—"

"Terrific!" chuckled Bob.

"Of course we like old Compton, and a Christmas cruise would suit us down to the ground," said Harry; "but—" He paused. "If Compton wants us, we'll be jolly glad to go, but—but—look here, if that fat ass has wangled it, we can't be landed on Compton for the hols. At the same time, we don't want to seem ungrateful for such a jolly ripping invitation. It's a bit awkward." It was—the Co. felt that!

Billy Bunter's Christmas party had been merely a jest—from the point of view of the Christmas party! The fat Owl's wriggles, to get out of the difficulty in which he had placed himself, had been extremely entertaining. Not for a moment had any member of the party supposed that he would really be going with William George Bunter for Christmas. They had been simply dumbfounded when Compton of the Fifth endorsed the invitation.

They were rather more particular in such matters than Billy Bunter. They had an objection, which Billy Bunter could never have understood, to going where they were not wanted!

If Bunter had placed the Fifth Form man under some obligation, and screwed an invitation out of him in consequence, it was all right—for Bunter! It was, so to speak, the nature of the beast!

But the Famous Five were not the fellows to accept that sort of invitation. At the same time, Compton had been quite pleasant about it, taking it for granted that they were coming, and Billy Bunter was holding them to the compact. Billy Bunter wanted them, whether Compton did or not!

After all his many and various wriggles to get out of having them



Bunter removed the lid from the cardboard box and lifted out the newspapers. Then he gave a jump as his eyes fell on a cake of soap! Even Bunter could not eat a cake of soap! "Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the other occupants of the carriage. "Beasts!" yelled Bunter.

for the holidays, circumstances had changed, and Bunter was keen on it.

That Christmas cruise had turned up, for Bunter, like corn in Egypt in one of the lean years. It solved his problem and let him out of his scrape. It placed him in the position of taking a party of Remove fellows for a tip-top holiday. It made his words good.

They had agreed to go with Bunter in the absolute certainty that they wouldn't be going, even if the fat spoofer had to dodge away on break-up day by himself to escape them! But they had agreed—and, as it turned out that Bunter held them to it, they could hardly let him down! They were, in fact, as Bob said, landed!

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled up to them as they were discussing the matter in the quad after dinner. "I say, I've phoned home for the Rolls to take us to Dover to join my pal Compton's yacht when we break up."

"And it's coming for us, of course?" asked Johnny Bull with deep sarcasm. "Of course," assented Bunter. "Unless—unless the pater thinks there's too much snow on the roads. In that case, we'll go by train."

"I shouldn't wonder if there turns out to be too much snow on the roads!" remarked Bob Cherry thoughtfully.

"If we go by train, I shall stand the fares, of course, as you're my guests for Christmas!" said Bunter. "From the minute we step outside the gates here, you leave everything to me. Everything, mind! If you spend a single sixpence, I shall be offended. If I happen to be short of ready cash, you can lend me a few pounds till we get on the yacht. I should not refuse that."

"The refusefulness would probably

not be terrific!" agreed Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"Oh, really, Inky!"

"Look here, Bunter," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "Why the thump has Compton asked you on his uncle's yacht for Christmas?"

"Eh? Because we're pals!" explained Bunter. "I've rather taken him up, you know—"

"You silly ass!" hooted the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"How did you wangle it, you fat frump?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"How did I what?" asked Bunter.

"Wangle it, you fat wangler," grunted Johnny.

Billy Bunter gazed at Johnny Bull through his big spectacles. He looked him up and he looked him down.

"I hope," said Bunter, with dignity, "that I'm not the sort of chap to wangle an invitation for the hols."

"Oh crikey!"

"Compton asked me," said Bunter. "He said 'Like to come cruising for Christmas, Bunter, old chap?' They were his words! I said 'Delighted, old bean, but as it happens, I'm taking a party home to Bunter Court, and I can't let them down!' He said 'Bring them, too!' I said 'Dashed if I don't!' That's how it happened."

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at Bunter. As Bunter stated that that was how it had happened, they knew, of course, that it hadn't happened like that. But how it had happened, they did not know.

"I think we'd better speak to Compton!" said Harry at last. "He's been jolly decent about it, but a fellow wants to be sure—"

"He's backed Bunter up in it," said

Bob. "But—if that fat frog has planted himself on Compton, and planted us along with him— Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Don't I keep on telling you that Compton asked me?" hooted Bunter. "I never asked him—never thought of it! And he never looked surprised when I asked him, either."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Bunter warmly. "The actual fact is that he came up to me, in—in the quad, and said 'Look here, Bunter, old son, I'm going on a cruise this Christmas, and I want to take a friend who'll do me credit! Will you come?' Those were Compton's exact words. Nothing surprising in that, I suppose! Going on a cruise, dropping in at foreign ports, and all that, naturally he wants to take a pal who'll be a credit to him. I said: 'My dear chap, I see exactly how it is, and I'll see you through! Say no more!' Just like that!"

"How did you wangle it?" shrieked Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"We can't go!" said Harry, shaking his head.

"Well, I like that!" gasped Bunter. "Mean to say you're letting me down! I say, you fellows, you must come! Haven't I told you, all along, that I want my old pals round me at Yuletide? The more we are together, the happier we'll be, and all that! I jolly well want my friends with me on that yacht. I don't suppose Compton's things would fit me, if you come to that—"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean—I don't mean—that is, I suppose a fellow can borrow a few

things from his pals, if he happens to be travelling light!" said Bunter. "If you're going to make a fuss about a pal borrowing a dinner-jacket or a pair of socks—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I want you fellows because you're dear old pals," said Bunter warmly. "You needn't be afraid that I shall borrow any tin on the cruise. I'm expecting a lot of Christmas tips from my titled relations, as well as some postal orders, and—"

"Bunter wants us!" grinned Bob. "I think we can rely on the genuineness of Bunter's wish to have his old pals around—when he runs short of collars and socks, anyhow. But Compton can't want to borrow our socks."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Blessed if I know what to do!" said Harry.

"My dear chap, it's all right!" assured Bunter. "Compton asked me specially to bring you. He said: 'Mind you bring Wharton—I like that chap!' They were his words! Then he said: 'And Nugent—and Cherry—and Inky, and dash it all, bring Bull, too!' I said: 'Say no more, old fellow—it's a go!'"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's old Compton!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the Fifth Former came out of the House. "Let's ask him, plain—"

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter. "I say, I keep on telling you it's all right! I say—"

Bunter was not heeded. If it was "all right," it was all right; but the chums of the Remove wanted to know that it was all right from Compton of the Fifth, not from William George Bunter.

They cut across to intercept the Fifth Form man, leaving Bunter squeaking.

Compton gave them a nod and a smile. Compton, probably, had been surprised, when Billy Bunter raised the subject of that Christmas cruise—losing no time in putting to the test his gratitude for services rendered. But he was, in point of fact, glad to be able to bestow some reward on the fat Owl. Anyhow, he had played up with his usual good temper and good humour.

"Oh, I was going to speak to you fellows," he said, before they could begin. "I've just been on the phone to my uncle. Everything's fixed up for you on the Firefly, and I hope you'll have a good time."

"You're awfully good!" said Harry. "But—"

"I say, Wharton, shut up!" squeaked Bunter.

"Don't you want to come?" asked Compton, with a smile.

"I say, you fellows—yow-ow-ow—leave off stamping on my foot, Bull, you beast!"

"We'd like to come, no end, if you want us!" said Harry Wharton frankly. "We'd like nothing better, Compton. But if that fat chump has wangled this—see?—we'd rather have it out plain."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Compton laughed.

"I quite understand," he said. "I'll put it plain, kid! Bunter gave me a helping hand yesterday, at some risk to himself, and it's a real pleasure to me to fix him up for Christmas—I'd gladly do more, if I could. As I understand that you fellows were going with Bunter for Christmas, I shall be glad if you'll come, too—"

"But we weren't!" said Johnny Bull bluntly. "That was only a joke on

Bunter! We were pulling his silly leg."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"That's how it stands, Compton!" said Harry Wharton.

"I see!" Compton laughed again. "Well, then, I'm asking you on my own account, leaving our plump friend out of the reckoning. I'll be jolly glad if you'll come on that cruise, and my uncle will be equally pleased. That all right?"

"Right as rain!"

"The rightfulness is terrific."

Compton nodded, and walked on.

Billy Bunter blinked reproachfully at the Famous Five through his big spectacles.

"Perhaps you believe it's all right now!" he snorted. "I told you it was all right! I say, you fellows, now that's settled, there's another matter I wanted to mention. Did I tell you fellows that I was expecting a postal order?"

"Did you?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Yes, I seem to remember something of the sort."

"Well, it hasn't come—"

"Go hon!"

"It hasn't!" said Bunter. "And if you fellows could lend me the ten bob, and take the postal order when it comes—I say, you fellows, don't walk off while a chap's talking to you! I say, where are you going?"

But Billy Bunter's Christmas party did not stay to explain where they were going. They just went!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Off for Christmas!

"WHAT about a cake?"

Billy Bunter propounded that query on the last morning of the term with a thoughtful seriousness such as befitted so important a subject.

He blinked at the Famous Five with owl-like seriousness as he propounded it.

Greyfriars School was breaking up for the holidays that day, and most of the Greyfriars fellows were thinking of railway trains, home, Christmas festivities, and so on. Bunter, it seemed, was thinking of cake! That was, indeed, a subject that was never far from Bunter's thoughts.

"Cake!" repeated Bob Cherry.

"Yes, old chap! I mean, in case we get hungry in the train!" explained Bunter. "That is, I mean in case you fellows get hungry in the train. I'm thinking of you, of course. It's not much I eat at any time, as you know."

"We know!" assented Harry Wharton gravely.

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"I was going to stand the cake!" went on Bunter. "I think it's rather a good idea, as you fellows might get hungry in the train. Mrs. Mumble's got some lovely Christmas cakes—absolutely scrumptious! I was going to get one before we started, only Compton's gone, and—"

"Eh?"

"Compton went off early," said Bunter. "We shan't see him again till we go on the Firefly."

"What's that got to do with a cake?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Oh! Nothing!" said Bunter hastily. "Of course, I shouldn't have thought of borrowing five bob from Compton."

"You fat villain!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! Look here, what about a cake?" asked Bunter.

"I'd stand it myself, only Compton's gone—I mean, I've been disappointed about a postal order! If you get hungry in the train—"

"We shan't get hungry in the train," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "How could we get hungry in the train when we're going by car? Has that Rolls rolled up yet, Bunter?"

"Eh? Oh, no! I'm rather sorry, you fellows, but it turns out that the chauffeur's ill, and the pater won't be able to send the Rolls, after all. We shall have to go by train."

"I was afraid something of that sort would happen!" said Bob regretfully. "I had a sort of feeling that we shouldn't see that Rolls. One of those premonitions, you know."

"Oh, really, Cherry! Well, what about that cake?" asked Bunter. "Owing to the delay in the post—Christmas-time, you know—my postal order hasn't come, and I'm a bit short of cash. As I'm taking you fellows on a first-class and expensive holiday I think it's up to you to stand the cake. Mrs. Mumble's got jolly good ones at five bob each. Which of you fellows is going to get one?"

"Echo answers that the whichfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"Now, look here, you fellows—"

"That's all right, Bunter!" said Bob reassuringly. "We shan't get hungry in the train. If we do we'll grin and bear it."

"Well, look here, I might!" yapped Bunter. "See? And I may as well say plainly that I expect you fellows to stand a cake. After all I've done for you I think it's the least you can do. Talk about ingratitude being a sharper tooth than a serpent's child!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Bunter puts it so nicely!" said Bob Cherry, glancing at his chums. "It's up to us, as he says. If Bunter wants a cake in the train—"

"Well, I jolly well do!" said Bunter.

"Then I'll jolly well go and get one!" said Bob.

"Silly ass!" commented Johnny Bull. "Catch me blowing five bob on the fat cormorant!"

"You shut up, Bull!" said Bunter warmly. "I say, Cherry, I'll come with you and get the cake—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Carne of the Sixth! I believe he's looking for you, Bunter—"

Billy Bunter vanished into the House. If Carne of the Sixth was looking for Billy Bunter, Billy Bunter was anxious not to be found by him.

"Why the dickens don't you want Bunter to come with you to get the cake, fathead?" asked Nugent.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Bunter's so jolly particular about his cakes!" he explained. "He mightn't be satisfied with the one I'm going to get. There are cakes and cakes!"

"Oh! Is it a jape?" asked Johnny Bull.

"My dear chap, it's a cake! Bunter thinks it's up to us to stand him a cake to take in the train! I'm going to stand him a cake!"

And, leaving his chums rather mystified, Bob Cherry cut across to the tuckshop and disappeared inside that establishment.

It was ten minutes before he emerged again. He carried in his hand a parcel wrapped in thick paper and carefully tied with string. It was a rather bulky parcel and seemed to weigh a good deal. "That's a jolly big cake!" said

Johnny Bull, staring at it. "You never got that for five bob."

"I never gave five bob for it, that's a cert!" admitted Bob. "Mrs. Mimble isn't selling these cakes at five bob, I can jolly well tell you. But it's not so big as it looks—there's some packing in the box."

"Merry Christmas, you fellows!" called out the Bounder. Smithy was stepping into the magnificent car sent by his millionaire pater to take him away.

His chum, Redwing, was already gone, and the Bounder was going. The Famous Five came up to say good-bye, and the Bounder greeted them with a cheery grin. There had been rows that term, and the Bounder and the captain of the Remove had got as far as punching noses. But little incidents like that were forgotten now.

"Good-bye, Smithy, old man!" said Harry. "Have a good time on the jolly old Continent."

"I'll watch it!" said the Bounder. "Might happen to meet you in the sunny south, as I hear you're going cruising with Compton. Just a word with you, Wharton, before I clear."

The Co. went into the House, Bob swinging his parcel by the string, leaving the captain of the Remove standing by the car with Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"What is it, Smithy?" asked Harry, in some surprise.

"Just a word, as I said." The Bounder spoke in a low voice. "That man Compton of the Fifth is one of the best—and I dare say you've forgotten what I confided to you on that subject, so—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Do you still fancy he's mixed up in smuggling?" he asked. "I've heard that Mr. Tozer found a bag of smuggled goods in his garden the other day. Do you think Compton put it there?"

"No!" The Bounder chuckled. "I don't think that! Hardly! I've nothing to say against Compton—I like him as much as you do. But I'm going to give you a tip! Compton's all right—but that uncle of his, the jolly old captain, is a hard nut to crack! Mind your step while you're cruising on the Firefly!"

Harry Wharton stared at him.

"What the dickens do you mean, Smithy?" he asked restively. "Tell me what you're driving at, if you're driving at anything."

"Verb sap!" drawled the Bounder. "A word to the wise is said to be sufficient. It may suit the jolly old captain's game to have a crowd of nice, innocent, unsuspecting schoolboys on his yacht. He might find a use to put them to! When you touch at a port, old bean, my tip to you is to carry nothing ashore without knowing exactly what it is. That's the lot!"

Vernon-Smith jumped into the car, and it glided away to the gates; the Bounder looking back, and waving his hand with a friendly, but rather mocking grin on his face.

Harry Wharton stood staring after him blankly. He knitted his brows as he realised what the Bounder's warning meant.

Of what Smithy had said to him before on the subject of Captain Compton and the Firefly, Harry Wharton had said nothing—but he had not forgotten! But not for a moment did the captain of the Remove believe as the Bounder believed—or, if he had known it, as the Bounder knew! Yet, somehow, the Bounder's parting words, evidently uttered as a friendly warning, struck him with a sense of misgiving.

(Continued on page 32.)

The STATELY HOMES of GREYFRIARS

A CHRISTMAS AT WHARTON LODGE

By
The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)
Now Greyfriars School is glad and gay,
And all her sons are jolly,
For we are breaking up to-day!
Away with melancholy!
When grand old Christmas-tide comes round
We say good-bye to worry!
And good-bye Greyfriars! We are bound
For Wharton Lodge in Surrey.

(2)
The snow is thick on trees and hills,
The frost is on the hedges!
But now's the time for winter thrills,
For snowballing and sledges!
Let fly your snowballs with a grin,
At all departing scholars.
There's one for Coker—on the chin!
Great Caesar! How he hollers!

(4)
The Lodge, which once in ages past,
Defied the Roundheads' banner,
Now stands secure, in peace at last,
An ancient English manor.
There Colonel Wharton's will is law,
To all the people present,
With white moustache and square-set jaw
He's strict, but kind and pleasant.

(6)
The Colonel's face is rather grim
When he sees Bunter sticking,
He seems inclined to start on him
And give that youth a kicking;
But then Aunt Amy, mild and kind,
Greets Bunter very sweetly,
Which changes Colonel Wharton's mind
And makes him act discreetly.

(8)
Hang high the holly where you please,
And set the Yule log blazing,
Begin the gay festivities,
With shouts of laughter raising.
Now Bob has fallen down the stairs,
With half a ton of holly,
But who (except Bob Cherry) cares?
We think it rather jolly!

THE FIRST OF A BRILLIANT NEW SERIES OF POEMS BY OUR LONG- HAired POET

(3)
Now for the station and the train,
We quickly rise and scamper,
While Bunter pleads with us in vain,
To buy a luncheon hamper.
The Owl is at his usual dodge,
Of sticking to our party,
And if he gets to Wharton Lodge,
His welcome won't be hearty!

(5)
There with his sister, Harry's aunt,
The Colonel's keeping Yuletide,
In good old-fashioned style which can't
Compare with beastly schooltime.
The house with joyful laughter rings
And even our old Barrel
Forgets his appetite and sings
A merry Christmas carol.

(7)
So Harry Wharton's home is full
Of schoolchums, gay and merry;
With Bunter, Nugent, Inky, Bull,
Tom Redwing and Bob Cherry,
And Smithy's there, though he has ways
That frequently are rotten,
But in the jolly Christmas days
Such things are all forgotten.

(9)
Then here's to us and everyone,
This good old Christmas season,
And may we all enjoy great fun,
With health and wealth and reason.
May greetings pass from friend to friend
In wishes true and hearty,
And may all happiness descend
On every Christmas party.

NEXT WEEK—HAWKSCLIFF COTTAGE, the Home of TOM REDWING.

But he shrugged his shoulders and turned away impatiently. Smithy was an ass—and that was that. He dismissed the matter from his mind as he followed his friends.

Fellows were going now, in crowds. Billy Bunter's fat voice was heard as he crammed into the school omnibus with the chums of the Remove.

"I say, Cherry, I'll carry it, if you like."

"That's all right—I'll carry it, old fat man!" answered Bob. "It's a bit heavy."

"But, I say—"

"Squeeze up, there!"

"Make room for a chap!"

"Don't tread on my feet, Bolsover, you beast! Ow!"

The crowded bus rolled away with a buzz of cheery voices for Courtfield. As it rolled by the road over Courtfield Common, Billy Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, were glued on that heavy parcel on Bob Cherry's knees.

Had it been confided to Bunter's keeping, probably it would have been opened in the bus. But Bob Cherry was taking care of that cake! That parcel was not to be opened till Billy Bunter and his Christmas party were in the train.

There was a swarm at Courtfield Station. Harry Wharton took the tickets for the party, and soon all were aboard the train.

The engine shrieked; the train rolled out of the station.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked merry and bright; but there was a stern frown on the fat brow of William George Bunter. He had only one consolation; the bulky parcel, containing a cake, that rested on Bob Cherry's knees. The train had covered about a hundred yards from Courtfield Station, when Billy Bunter stretched out a fat hand to that parcel.

"Gimme that cake!" said Bunter.

"Here you are, old fat man!"

Billy Bunter took the parcel on his fat knees. He cut the string, and unwrapped the paper, disclosing a cardboard box, such as cakes are packed in. The frown left his fat brow. He removed the lid from the box. He blinked into it.

Then he jumped. A stack of old newspapers was revealed.

"That's the packing!" explained Bob genially. "The cake's underneath, old fat bean! It's not quite so large as you'd suppose from the box, But it's quite a good cake."

Bunter lifted out the bundle of newspapers. There was not much room for anything else in the box. But there was room for the cake. There it was! It was not a large cake. It was a small cake. It was about three inches long, and oval in shape.

Bunter gazed at it. Bunter could eat almost anything—especially in the way of cakes. But he could not eat that cake. Even Billy Bunter could not eat a cake of soap!

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the rest of the carriage.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter glared at the hilarious five with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. Bunter did not seem amused! But the rumble of the train was drowned in the merry roar from Bunter's Christmas party!

THE END.

(Look out for a real feast of thrills in next week's super story of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "THE CRUISE OF THE FIREFLY!" It's one of Frank Richards' extra-specials!)

WHO SAYS FIVE MINUTES WITH YOUR EDITOR? THEN—



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS—AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

CEMPUS fugit! Time flies—and waits for no man! There's not the slightest doubt about it, either, chums!

It seems hardly believable that twelve months have elapsed since I wrote my last Christmas chat. Yet another Christmas is here—another round of festivities will shortly commence. And another chance is given me to wish my loyal readers wherever they may be the time-honoured wish—

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A BRIGHT AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

Christmas is the greatest festival of the year, and I feel sure that there is not one of you who has not looked forward to having a merry time.

In the next few days you will all be meeting old friends and relations, and will forget all your troubles—if you have any—during the Christmas festivities. It is my earnest wish that not one of you will have anything to dull your pleasures during Christmas-time.

This festival is one during which we should all be happy. But there must be many whose Christmas will, through stress of circumstances, be nothing out of the ordinary. May I ask all my chums who are placed in better circumstances to give a kindly thought to their less fortunate friends.

A helping hand and a kind word will go a long way to make a few more hearts bright and cheerful during this time of

PEACE AND GOOD WILL TO ALL MEN!

Your Editor sincerely hopes that the year that is drawing to a close has been kind to all of you.

As I look back on the past, I have every reason to feel grateful. Week in and week out, I have made new friends in all parts of the world. Little wonder, then, that the MAGNET has perhaps the largest circulation of any boy's paper on the market!

It would, indeed, be the greatest pleasure of my life at a time like this to be able to shake hands with all of you and personally wish you a Merry Christmas. This is impossible, however, and I can only write these few lines, trusting they will cement the bond of friendship which has sprung up between us all—one that will, I feel confident, last for many years to come.

In presenting this

ENLARGED CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE "MAGNET"

my staff and I sincerely hope that the additional reading-matter and the many special features in it will be fully appreciated by every one of you.

AS this is the time when presents are given, be sure and choose something extra good!

The "HOLIDAY ANNUAL"

is a present which will gladden the heart

of every boy and girl. In its 256 pages you will find grand school stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood, fun and adventure yarns, articles, poems, sketches and coloured plates—in fact, everything the modern boy and girl wants to read. This year's "Holiday Annual"—the finest of its kind ever published—is obtainable from all newsagents at the bargain price of five shillings. "Get in on the ground floor!" as Fisher T. Fish would say, and get one of these world-famous Annuals while there is still time. It's

FAR TOO GOOD TO MISS!

At this juncture, I also have great pleasure in bringing before your notice the Bumper Christmas Issue of our companion paper—the GEM, now on sale, in which you will find a seasonable story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, entitled:

"THE MYSTERY OF EASTWOOD HOUSE!"

By Martin Clifford,

telling of the sensational disappearance of Lord Eastwood and his son, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. In addition, there is also a sparkling story dealing with the early adventures of our old favourites, Harry Wharton & Co., by the celebrated Frank Richards.

Before I close this chat of mine, let me inform you, chums, that there is a very special reason why you should order next week's issue of the MAGNET early.

As you all know the old paper is usually on sale every Saturday. Well, next week's issue WILL BE PUBLISHED ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18th. This is done to cope with the enormous rush at this time of the year.

I am sure you will all be pleased to get your copy of the MAGNET early. So don't forget, the next issue of the MAGNET will be on sale Friday morning next.

And another bright and cheery number it will be, too. The special Christmas story of Harry Wharton & Co., is entitled:

"THE CRUISE OF THE FIREFLY!"

By Frank Richards,

and is the type of yarn one can read and enjoy at this time of the year. Thrills, fun and adventure follow in rapid succession aboard the Firefly, bound for the Spanish Coast on an unlawful mission, unbeknown to the Greyfriars guests aboard. The climax comes when a pursuing craft opens fire on the Firefly! If that's not enough to get you interested, well I don't know what is!

Till next Friday, then, here's wishing you all that you can wish yourselves.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

19-12-36

A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY!

Another Rollicking Fine Instalment of Dicky Nugent's Laughable Holiday Serial:
"THE HAWNTED HEADMASTER!"

Eat, Drink and be Merry this Happy Christmas-tide!



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 219.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

December 19th, 1936.



DABNEY A DABSTER AT PARTIES—DASH HIM!

Says

CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE

I've never previously had reason to suspect Dabney of being depraved. But this Christmas, I'm sorry to say, the blighter has grimly determined to be a Life and Soul of the Party!

And if there's anything more depraved than that, I'd like you to name it! I suspected there was something wrong when Dab. turned up to the party wearing a grin that made me think at once of a ventriloquist's dummy. But it was not till the party was nearly over that I found out what it was.

In the meantime, Dab. had beaten all the rest of the party hollow at blind man's buff, musical chairs, charades, riddles, and intelligence tests!

The unfaltering way in which he stepped out and nabbed his victim when he was blind man left my guests speechless with admiration.

His cold, calculating, deliberate movements at musical chairs made the rest of the players look like a lot of fumbling idiots suffering from St. Vitus Dance.

The careless ease with which he threw out riddles and invented charades and the easy carelessness with which he answered other people's almost overwhelming us.

As for intelligence tests—well, after the first few questions, we all gave it up.

and left it to Dabney. Somebody murmured something about Datas the Second; and, honour bright, you people, it wasn't a bit of an exaggeration!

Naturally, everybody got fed up to the teeth. There's nothing more exasperating at a party than a chap who's better than everybody at everything. Black looks began to be directed towards Dab.

I saw that something had to be done to save the evening. And I did it by reaching out from behind a curtain in front of which Dab. happened to be standing, and yanking him into a recess by the neck!

"Now, you footling fat-head, tell me what's the idea!" I hissed. "You're ruining the evening for everybody. You imagine you're the life and soul of the party—instead of which you're a dashed nuisance!"

"But I've prepared for months for this!" Dab. gasped.

I stared.

"By gad! You have, really?"

"Why not?" sniffed Dab. "Somebody has to be the life and soul of the party, I suppose? Well, why not me?"

"And you really mean to say you came here to-night with the deliberate intention of doing all this?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dab. as cool as a cucumber. "I did more than that. For the last six weeks I've taken a correspondence course in Drawing-room Entertainment!"

Words failed me for a few minutes, I can tell you! But they came out with a rush when I did start! I told Dabney just what I thought of fellows who specialised in being clever at parties, and I told him what I was in the habit of doing to them if they insisted on being clever at any party of mine. Finally, I told him that fellows who had taken a course in Drawing-room Entertainment got it twice as bad!

And after that Dabney piped down and normal people got a look in—and the party finished up a success, after all!

DEBTS COLLECTED!

Just tell me the name of the chap and how much, and I'll collect that debt he owes you all right! I provide my own bludgeons, and absolutely no charge is made other than 75 per cent commission on the amount collected.—Write, wire, or call, BOLSOVER MAJOR, He Men's Corner, The Rag, Greyfriars.

JACK JOLLY'S LITTLE MISTAKE!

"Yarooooo! Reskow! Keepimoff!"

Doctor Birchmell's terrified howls rang out defiantly on the midnight air. The site of a weird, spectral shape, gliding across his room properly scared the Head of St. Sam's. If it had been daylight, you would have seen that his face was almost green with fear. As it was, he was in a blue funk!

As the weird shape drew nearer and nearer to the foot of the Put-Down bed, the Head's pannick reached a climax. He made a dive under the bedclothes and stayed there, uttering mournful and muffled moans!

Meanwhile, his cries had awakened many in the Skool House, and lights were being switched on in some of the dormitories.

Jack Jolly of the Fourth was one of the first to get up. He was quickly joined by his pals, Merry and Bright and Fearless.

"It was the Head's voice, you fellows," remarked Jolly, as he slipped on a dressing-gown. "I'd recognise it anywhere."

"Perhaps there's a berg-lar in his room, tortehering him till he reveals the whereabouts of the skool plate," suggested Merry.

"More probably he's suffering from nitemaro!" larled Jolly. "To make up for his disappointment over Miss Molly's Christmas pudding turning out so tuff, he had a good feed of donuts before going to bed—so it wouldn't be serprizing. But we'll soon find out."

With these words, the kaptin of the Fourth led the way out of the dorm. at the dubble, and the Co. galloped along through the deserted passidges and down the stairs towards the Head's study.

Their pace quickened, as they reached the floor where Dr. Birchmell's study was situated, for the Head's yells, now muffled, sounded more urgent than ever. They heard him shouting: "Ghosts! Spooks! Help!"

Such cries mito well have dawning the bold-est hart; but Jack Jolly & Co. were only spurred on to greater efforts. It took a good deal more than a meor ghost to make the heroes of the Fourth nervous!

With an entreuridging shout on his lips, Jolly bust through the doorway of the Head's study. It was easier to do that than he had antissipated, for the door proved to be open; and consokwenty the kaptin of the Fourth entered the room at an uneggspectedly high speed and finished upon the floor with the rest of the Co. on top of him!

But the Fourth Formers were on their feet again in a split second, looking for the ghost. And they didn't have far to look. In the darkness of the middle of the room, they saw a white, shapeless mass, quivering, and quaking like a jelly, and uttering weird, muffled moans as it did so.

"The ghost!" cried Jack Jolly. "Give it beans, you fellows!"

The Co. made a rush at the thing they took to be the ghost.

Bang! Crash! Wallop! Under the combined weight of Jack Jolly and his pals, the bed collapsed with a deafening clatter. The Fourth Formers and the suspected ghost rolled over on the floor, struggling fiercely.

"Don't let it get away, you chaps!" shouted Jack Jolly. "Ghost or no ghost, we'll bump it and teach it not to hawnt St. Sam's again!"

"Hear, hear!" Jack Jolly and his pals piled into the "ghost" for all they were worth: and it was only when it started yelling out in a very familiar voice that they realised they had made a slite mistake.

"Half a minnit!" gasped Frank Fearless. "There's something wrong here. It's not a ghost, after all!"

"My hat! Then who is it?"

"Me, you yung id-juts!" yelled the Head's well-known voice—and the sheets and blankets that surrounded the "ghost" were flung aside to reveal Doctor Birchmell himself.

"Why, it's the Head!" ojackulated Jack Jolly, in serprize, as he got up and switched on the light.

"What's the idea of you dressing up as a ghost, sir?"

"Grooooo! Fathead!" snorted Doctor Birchmell, tenderly rubbing his

head on a couple of chairs! Good-nite, boys!"

And Doctor Birchmell made off at eggsspress speed, leaving the sceptical Fourth Formers larling fit to bust over Jack Jolly's little mistake!

A SHOCK FOR ST. SAM'S!

"Merry Christmas, everybody!"

injured anattermy, as he staggered to his feet. "I was protecting myself against that beestly specter—not dressing up as a ghost myself! It's a bit thick for you yung idjuts to come along and add to my trubbles by assauling me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Dashed if I see any thing to cacko at!" said the Head, peevishly, as Jack Jolly & Co. roared. "You wouldn't, if you'd seen it!"

"No, but I mito put it down to too many do-nuts at supper!" larled Jolly. "I wouldn't worry about ghosts, if I were you. It wasn't a ghost. It was a nitemaro!"

"Nitemare be blowed!" snorted the Head. "It was a real, genuine ghost, and, brave as I am—"

"Oh crikey!" "I'm not going to stay here any more to-nite!" finished the Head. "I shall sleep in Mr. Lickham's room to-nite. I am sure Lickham will be delited to make himself up

the krisp air of the snow-bound quad.

It was the morning after the eggssitement in the Head's study, and several loaded sharrabangs were just on the point of taking away the fellows for the Christmas hollerdays.

As the cheering died away, the engines began to hum, and the first of the sharras moved away from the Skool House.

It was just at that moment that a bearded figger in cap and gown came cantering up the drive, waving his arms wildly.

"Stop!" "Hallo, hallo! It's the Head!" eggssclaimed Jack Jolly. "Stop the car, driver. Perhaps he wants to give us all a Christmas present!"

Unforehunitly the sharra was a bit slow in pulling up, and, as the Head galloped forward to meet it, it gave a little jerk forward, giving him a biff in the breadbasket that knocked him head over heels into the snow!

Bang! "Ow-ow-ow! Yooop!" hooted Doctor Birchmell. But he was on his feet again before you could say "Nife!"

"What is the meaning of this here?" he wrapped out, when he had recovered his breth. "What are you all a-doing of?"

The fellows in the sharrabangs stared. "Going home for our Christmas hollerdays, of course, sir," said Jack Jolly. "It's breaking-up day to-day."

"You're doing no such thing!" said the Head. "I'm sorry, and all that—but, for the time being, Christmas hollerdays are off!"

For a moment the fellows in the sharrabangs stared at the Head in utter silence. Then they found their tungs and there was a roar.

"Cheese it, sir!" "Play the game!" "Don't be a cadd, sir!"

"What's the big idea?" "I'll tell you," said Doctor Birchmell. "My dawter, Miss Molly, is missing!"

"Yes, but—"

"Last nite, boys," said

the Head, with a catch in his voice, "I insulted Miss Molly's Christmas pudding. I mito say, in justiss to myself, that there was every reason for insulting it. It was as tuff as a lump of concrete! But Miss Molly cut up rusty when I told her what I thought of it."

"Grato pip!" "And she went off in a huff, boys," said the Head, tears glistening in his somewhat shifty eyes as he spoke. "Where she has gone, nobody knows. She has vanished just as if the earth had opened and swallowed her up!"

"My hat!" "That takes a bit of swallowing, sir!"

"Nevertheless, it is tref! Do you eggsspect me, boys, in the circumstances, to allow you to go home just as if nothing had happened?"

"Is that a conundrum, sir?"

"Give it up!" "That is eggactly what

our old friend, Bob Cherry, whose chirpy little articles never fail to please, would like to say, "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's all the best to all!" in a voice that would carry all over the Empire. And, from the sound of it when he told me that, it won't be a lot stronger to achieve his wish!

Frank Nugent, Tom Brown, Dick Rake, William Wibley, and Peter Todd, to mention just a few of our leading writers, all send their special greetings. Vernon-Smith says he's sure you're all "Boulder" have a good time. And Fisher T. Fish yawns "How'ya, pals!" Marjorie and the Bluff House girls want me to convey their very best wishes.

If you don't spot the name of your favourite contributor amongst that lot, chums—well, it's because we haven't space for all of them!

Once again, a very merry Christmas to you all!

HARRY WHARTON CALLING!

Hallo, everybody! This is Harry Wharton calling—and wishing readers of the "Greyfriars Herald" all over the world a very merry Christmas! And the same wish is cordially echoed by every member of our schoolboy editorial staff, not to mention all the contributors whose news and vews have appeared in our columns during the last twelve months!

Dicky Nugent in particular wants to extend a grubby and ink-stained hand of friendship to all those who follow the amazing and amusing adventures of the heroes of St. Sam's. In a mood of unaccustomed exaltation, he has actually burst into verse to express his feelings:

We wish you joy and tons of tuck— Prime turkeys, geese, and hams, boys— Presents galore—and lots of luck; And so say all St. Sam's boys!

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Doctor Birchmell sat at his desk, pouring over the reports as they came in and eggssaming finger-prints and other clues through an enormous magnifying glass. But, despite his efforts, the day wore on without any real news of the missing Miss Molly.

Darkness had fallen when Burleigh of the Sixth, who was the Head's first assistant, called off the search for the day and reported to his cheef.

there it was to find Doctor Birchmell leaning up against the wall outside the study, noeking at the neeze with fear, and Burleigh getting up from the linoleum, nursing his jaw.

"What happened, Burleigh?" asked Jack Jolly, who was first on the seen.

"A ghostly apparition came out of the Head's study and socked me on the jaw, that's all!" groaned Burleigh.

And a buzz of sheer amazement ran through

the crowd. If Burleigh had seen it, then there was no longer any doubt about it. Doctor Birchmell's specter was not a meer figment of the imagination but a real, live ghost!

(Don't miss the up-rouarious Christmas fun in next week's instalment!)

Doctor Birchmell frowned fiercely, as he listened to his dis-courridging report.

"You are sure you searched everywhere, Burleigh? Did you look up the chimbleys?"

"Every one of them, sir."

"Did you follow up any footprints?"

"Duzzens of 'em, sir," said Burleigh. "Some turned out to be sheep's footprints and some belonged to horses and dogs; but we didn't find a single footprint belonging to a missing yung lady!"

The Head rose with a weery sigh.

"Well, I'd better be making tracks, Burleigh. Like to join me in a little supper in my study?"

"Thanks, sir; to tell you the trewth, I do feel rather peckish," confessed the kaptin of St. Sam's, with a grin. And the pair of them trotted along in the direction of the Head's study together.

Two minnits later the skool was startled by the very dickens of a din.

Bang! Crash! Wallop! Thud!

"Help! It's the ghost! Reskow!"

"Nab it, sir! Don't let it get away!"

There was a rush of feet from all parts towards the Head's corridor, from which direction the sound had come.

When the crowd arrived



BORED BY CHRISTMAS! Sad Story of a Supercilious Senior!

"Don't talk to me about Christmas," yawned Cedric Hilton, of the Fifth, when Blundell called to see him on the eve of breaking-up.

"Personally, I think it's an absolute bore!" "Wha-a-a?"

"All right for kids, of course—and the lower classes," admitted Hilton, languidly lighting a cigarette. "But for men of the world like me, what is there in it? It simply bores me to tears to see everybody dashin' about, smilin' an' happy. I nearly yawn my head off when I see chaps buyin' each other presents and shakin' hands an' talkin' about all the jolly best an' should auld acquaintances be forgot, an' all that rot. As to Christmas parties—"

"Well, what about Christmas parties?" asked

Blundell, in a somewhat peculiar voice.

"They give me chronic heeby-jeebies!" sighed Hilton. "If it's an evenin's gamblin' or playin' billiards, of course, I'm all in favour."

Blundell stood up.

"H'm! Well, it's just as well you mentioned it," he said. "Matter of fact, I'd called along to ask you to a Christmas party I'm having at home. But now I understand how you feel about Christmas parties, of course, I won't do it."

"Hey! Half a minute!" yelled Hilton. "I didn't exactly mean—"

But Blundell had already gone. And our last information is that Hilton is still spending his vac. kicking himself round his own drawing-room!