

"BILLY BUNTER'S HOUSE-WARMING!"

Screamingly Funny School Yarn of
HARRY WHARTON & CO., inside.

The Magnet ^{2^d}

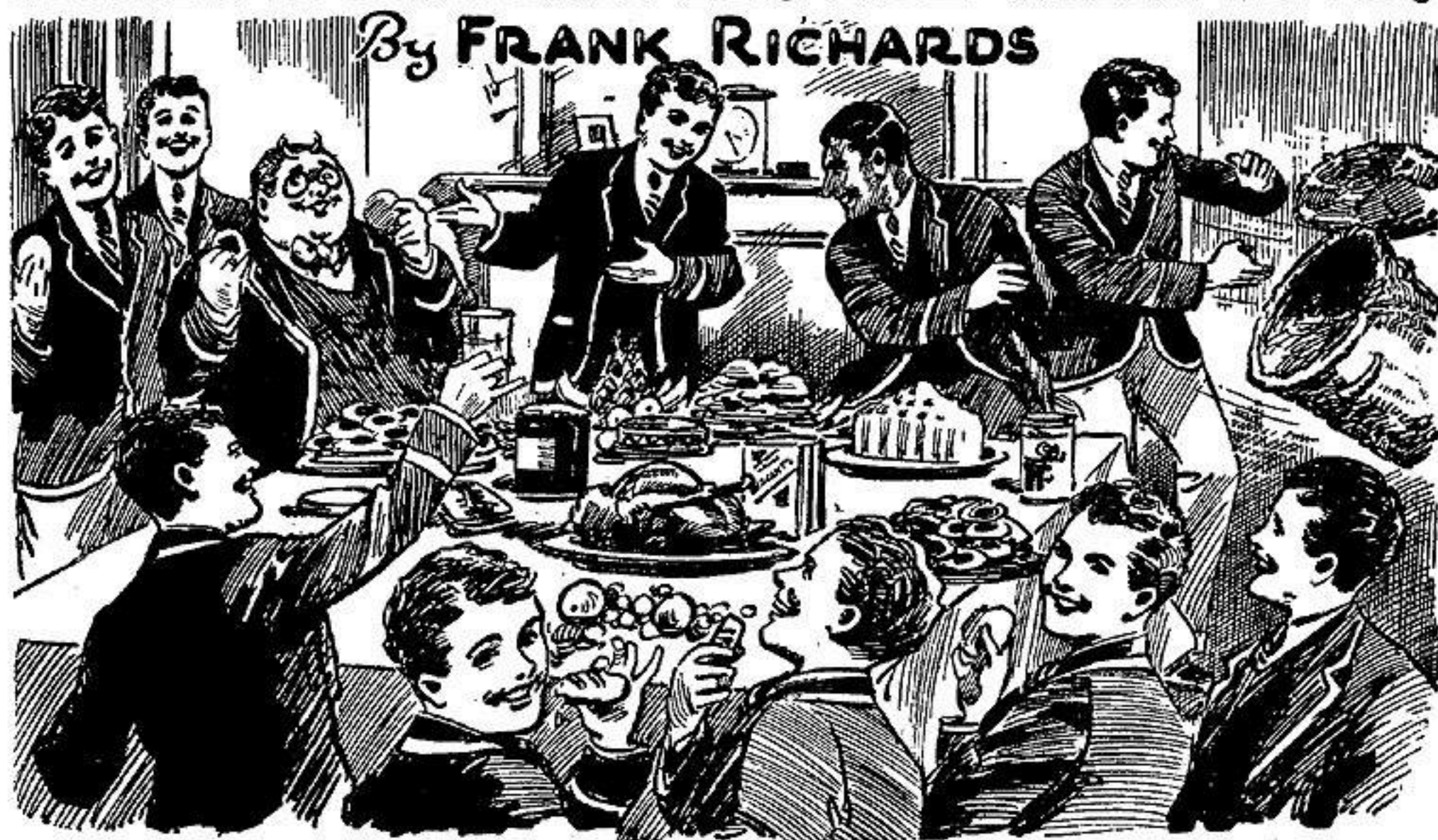
FREE GIFTS
for
READERS
NEXT WEEK
See Inside!



HAMPERED!

THERE'S TONS OF TUCK AND EVERYBODY'S INVITED TO—

BILLY BUNTER'S HOUSE-WARMING!



An Amusing and Amazing School Yarn of HARRY WHARTON & CO., the Cheery Chums of Greyfriars

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

'Ware Beaks!

"**H**OOK it, you fags!" said Hobson of the Shell.

"Us what?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Fags!" said Hobson cheerfully. "Scrubby little fags! Hook it!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at James Hobson as if they could have eaten him. But they did not "hook" it!

There was, as usual, a crowd at Courtfield on the first day of term. The train from Lantham Junction had disgorged a swarm of Greyfriars and Highcliffe fellows.

The former had to take the local train for Friardale, which was the station for Greyfriars School. The local train was waiting in the station, and it was filling up fast. Everybody wanted to go by the first train; and the fact that there was another to follow in ten minutes, appealed to few.

The Famous Five had been a little delayed in getting to the local platform. Bob Cherry, in sheer exuberance of spirits, had tipped a shining silk topper off the superb head of Cecil Reginald Temple of the Fourth—which had led to an argument with Temple, Dabney & Co. After which the chums of the Remove rushed for the local train—a little late!

Most of the carriages were full up. But one, evidently, was not. From the doorway of that carriage Hobson of the Shell leaned. On either side of him, Stewart and Hoskins, two other Shell fellows, could be seen. There was a glimpse of a hat farther back in the carriage. That was all!

And if four fellows supposed that they were going to have a carriage to themselves, when fellows were standing up all along the train, they had another

guess coming, in the opinion of the Famous Five.

Hobson waved them off loftily—shooing them off, in fact, as if they were troublesome chickens, as they gathered at the door. As if to add insult to injury, he addressed them as fags. Had the Famous Five been disposed to pass on—which they weren't in the very least—that would have held them to the spot.

"You pie-faced Shell-fish!" said Bob Cherry. "We're coming in!"

"Hook it!" repeated Hobson.

"You cheeky tick!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "You've only got four in there!"

"Yank him out!" said Johnny Bull.

Hobson grinned.

"Better not!" he advised. "Run along, kids, and pack in with the other fags! I'm keeping the seats here for some men in the Shell!"

"You're jolly well not!" roared Bob.

"The notfulness is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Get out of that doorway, fathead!" said Harry Wharton.

"Better not kick up a shindy!" said Hobson. "I can tell you—"

What Hobson of the Shell had been going to tell the Removes was never told. He was interrupted.

It was a rush that interrupted him. Bob Cherry charged, and Hobson went over backwards in the carriage. He grabbed Bob, as he went, and Bob sprawled headlong over him.

"Back up, you fellows!" panted Bob. "What-ho!"

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, piled in after Bob.

They rather expected Stewart and Hoskins to dispute their entrance. But Stewart and Hoskins sat where they were, grinning.

Hobson, on his back on the floor,

struggled and roared. Bob Cherry was sitting on his neck, and the other fellows trampling on his legs. Hobson could do nothing but roar; but he roared with great energy.

Then a sharp voice cut through Hobson's roar like a knife!

"Stop that at once!"

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "'Ware, beaks!"

"Oh, my hat!"

So far, the Famous Five had seen nothing of the fourth passenger in that carriage, but a hat! Now they suddenly became aware that that hat was on the head of Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell!

The face under that hat was turned towards them, with a petrifying glare.

Mr. Hacker was a sharp-tempered gentleman at the best of times. That sudden and uproarious invasion of his carriage seemed to have given a sharper edge to his sharp temper. He rose to his feet, thunderous.

"What does this mean? How dare you!" he thundered. "Wharton—Cherry—I repeat, how dare you be guilty of this disorderly conduct on the railway! I shall report this to your Form-master!"

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "Didn't see you, sir!"

Bob Cherry got off Hobson's neck as quickly as if that neck had suddenly become red-hot. The other fellows got off his legs. Hobson sat up and spluttered.

"Oooooogh!"

"Remove boys, of course!" said Mr. Hacker, in his acid tones. "The most unruly Form at Greyfriars! How dare you force a way into this carriage! Have you no respect even for a member of Dr. Locke's staff?"

The Famous Five blinked at him.

They understood now why Hobson had had the unexampled cheek to bid them "hook" it! With a beak in

the carriage, rags, of course, were off! Even if the Remove were the most unruly Form at Greyfriars, the most reckless member of that unruly Form would not have thought of rushing a carriage in which a master was seated. Only they hadn't seen the master there!

"We never saw you, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Nonsense!" rapped Mr. Hacker.

"Hadden't the foggiest!" said Johnny Bull.

"Are you blind?" sneered Mr. Hacker.

"The blindness is not terrific, honoured sahib," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but the hurryfulness was great, and—"

"I shall report you to Mr. Quelch! Now leave this carriage at once!" snapped Mr. Hacker.

Harry Wharton paused a moment. There were two vacant seats in that carriage. Two members of the famous Co., at least, had a right to remain, Hacker or no Hacker! But beaks, after all, were beaks, and the captain of the Remove yielded the point.

"Come on, you men!" he said.

Frank Nugent stepped out, after him, Hurree Singh and Harry Wharton followed. Johnny Bull sat down.

"Come on, Johnny, old bean!" said Bob Cherry.

"I'm going by this train," said Johnny calmly. "There's another seat opposite, if you want one."

"But—I say—"

"Sit down," said Johnny. "You other fellows cut along, or you'll lose the train. Room for two of us in here."

The three fellows outside gazed in, uncertain. Bob, about to step out, stopped. Johnny Bull, planted in his seat, sat there like a rock, immovable. Mr. Hacker glared at him, speechless. Hobby, Hoskins, and Stewart exchanged glances.

"Bull!" hooted Mr. Hacker at last.

"Yes, sir!" said Johnny calmly.

"I have ordered you to leave this carriage!"

"You're not my Form-master, sir," said Johnny Bull, "and even my Form-master would have no right to order a passenger out of a carriage where there is an empty seat."

"Johnny, old chap!" murmured Bob.

Grunt from Johnny. Johnny was a Yorkshireman, and, like many of the natives of that great county, he had a streak of obstinacy in him, when he thought he was being put upon. There was absolutely no doubt that he had a right to sit in that carriage if he chose to do so. What he had a right to do, he was going to do; and that was that.

"Will you leave this carriage, Bull?" roared Mr. Hacker.

"No, sir!" answered Johnny. "I won't!"

"We've a right to sit in empty places, sir!" said Bob.

"Silence!"

That was enough for Bob. He sat down in the other empty seat. If Johnny was going to chance it, Bob was not the man to leave him to it. He sat down, and sat tight.

Mr. Hacker stood staring at them, rather at a loss. He had exceeded his rights and his authority; which was not uncommon with the master of the Shell. On the other hand, defiance of a beak was a very risky and delicate business.

"If you two Remove boys do not leave this carriage instantly, I shall call your Form-master here!" said Mr. Hacker at last, in a grinding voice.

"Very well, sir!" said Johnny. "Call him, if you like. He's on the platform somewhere."

Mr. Hacker, breathing hard and deep, stepped out of the carriage. At a distance, he spotted the rather tall and angular form of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. He whisked along to speak to him.

There was a shriek from the engine. Porters slammed doors all along the train; it was starting.

"Oh gum!" ejaculated Hobson. "Hacker's losing this train!"

"No reason why we should if Hacker does," remarked Harry Wharton; and he jumped in again, followed by Nugent and Hurree Singh. "Hobby, old man, it's very nice of your beak to let me have his seat." And the captain of the Remove sat down in the corner lately occupied by Mr. Hacker.

"You cheeky swab!" exclaimed Hobby.

"What about pitching these Shell ticks out on their necks?" asked Bob.

The carriage door slammed. The train was moving. Bob Cherry looked along from the window.

Mr. Quelch, at a distance, had popped into a carriage and disappeared. Mr. Hacker, realising that he was losing the train, turned back, but he turned back too late; the train was in motion.

Mr. Hacker stood staring after it as it glided out of the station—and the expression on his face, as Bob remarked to his comrades, was worth a guinea a box!

Who says that the age of miracles is past? Billy Bunter, the impetuous prize porker of the Greyfriars Remove, has got a tuck hamper filled to the brim with good things—AND EVERYBODY IS CORDIALLY INVITED TO THE LAVISH SPREAD!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Doggo!

BILLY BUNTER snorted.

"Gone!"

Bunter was still at Lantham Junction.

That fat ornament of the Greyfriars Remove had missed the Courtfield train, hunting up and down the platform for a fellow who was not there. That fellow, if found, was expected by the fat Owl of the Remove to exude a small loan, of which Billy Bunter was greatly in need. As the fellow in question was not there, Bunter had naturally failed to find him; and when he gave up the hopeless quest and turned his attention to the Courtfield train, it was only to see the guard's van disappearing down the line.

Which was annoying.

Harry Wharton & Co., Bunter knew, had gone in that train. Most of the fellows he knew were on it—and Bunter was badly in need of a pal.

Most of the fellows bound for Greyfriars arrived at Lantham Junction from some direction or other. Assured of falling among friends at that general meeting-place, Bunter had taken a ticket only as far as Lantham; the balance of his journey money had been expended on light refreshments.

Bunter had to get on to Courtfield, and then on to Friardale; but without a ticket, or the wherewithal to purchase one, he required somebody to see him through. He blinked up and down Lantham platform in search of a victim.

Plenty of other fellows had missed that connection. Loder and Walker and Carne of the Sixth Form stood quite near him in a group; in another group stood Coker and Potter and Greene of the Fifth. But even Billy Bunter did not think of trying to "touch" Sixth and Fifth Form men for a loan. He spotted Skinner and Snoop, but they were hopeless; then he spotted Hazeldene and rolled over to him.

"I say, Hazel, old chap, jolly glad to see you again!" said Bunter, with a beaming blink through his big spectacles.

Hazel stared at him.

"Are you?" he said. "You've got all the gladness on your side, then, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Hazel—"

Hazeldene of the Remove walked along the platform, leaving him blinking. Perhaps Hazel guessed why Billy Bunter was so jolly glad to see him. Anyhow, he walked on.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

He rolled away to the train. Most of the fellows had gone by the earlier one, and there was no crush now. It was easy to get a seat—even an empty carriage if a fellow went first-class. Bunter got into a first-class carriage.

His happy idea was to wait till it filled up, and then select the likeliest fellows to touch for his fare. If Lord Mauleverer was there he was sure to travel first-class, and Bunter hoped that Mauly might get into that carriage. Anyhow, some Greyfriars fellows were sure to get in. One of them—Bunter hoped, at least—was going to stand the necessary half-crown. If that hope failed him, the fat Owl of the Remove would be driven to his last desperate resource—"bilking" the railway company. It was a resource to which he was not wholly unaccustomed.

He sat in the carriage and blinked out at the fellows on the platform.

Ogilvy and Russell of the Remove passed.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter, "get in here."

The two Removites glanced round at him.

"We're going third," said Russell.

"And you'd better do the same while you've got time. Bunter!" grinned Ogilvy. "They look at the tickets before we start here."

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter. He had forgotten that.

Ogilvy and Russell walked on, laughing.

Billy Bunter rose from his seat—but it was not to leave the carriage.

He pulled the door shut, then he flattened himself on the floor of the carriage and squeezed under the seat.

From that refuge he did not intend to emerge till the train had started. This was an old game with William George Bunter.

The train was not booked to start yet. The hidden Owl waited impatiently. It was rather dusty and far from comfortable under the seat neither was there ample room for Bunter's unusual circumference. The railway company had taken no trouble whatever to make things comfortable for bilks.

He heard the carriage door open at last. Fellows were going to get in; he hoped, Remove fellows. Then he heard the voice of Carne of the Sixth.

"Lots of room here, you men; the carriage is empty. Trickle in."

"We're going third," came Loder's answer. "Come on, Walker."

"Oh, all right!"

The door closed again.

Billy Bunter could have groaned. It was a Sixth Form man and a prefect.

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who had got in. It was unlikely that juniors would barge into a carriage occupied by a Sixth Form prefect. Bunter, sorely in need of a friend, was not likely to see that friend in need arrive now.

Neither, apparently, was Carne of the Sixth going to let anybody else into that carriage if he could help it. He had shut the door, and stood at it, looking out. Bunter heard a voice that was rather like the bellow of a bull and rather like the growl of a bulldog, and recognised the dulcet tones of Coker of the Fifth.

"Here, I say, Carne let a man in!"

"All these seats are taken, Coker," answered Carne calmly.

"Look here, that's rot, Carne!"

"Is it?" said Carne cheerfully. "Well, that's that!"

"Look here——" roared Coker.

"Oh, come along the train!" came Potter's voice. "Lots of seats along the train, Coker. Don't begin the term rowing with a prefect."

Snort!—from Horace Coker. But he went along the train with Potter and Greene, and Bunter heard Carne chuckle.

Bunter did not feel like chuckling. If Arthur Carne would not let Fifth Form men in he was not likely to let juniors in. Bunter's hopes of finding a friend in need sank to zero.

"Room for a fellow?" came a familiar voice from the platform. It was the voice Bunter wanted most to hear—that of Lord Mauleverer of the Remove.

"No," answered Carne coolly. "Cut along, Mauleverer."

Billy Bunter, from under the seat, gave Carne's boots an inimical glare. Why the surly brute wanted a carriage to himself Bunter could not imagine—but evidently Arthur Carne did.

"Dash it all! The seats are all empty, Carne," he heard his lordship say.

"Cut along!" snapped Carne.

Lord Mauleverer, it seemed, cut along, as bidden, for Bunter did not hear his voice again. A minute later another voice was heard.

"Tickets, please!"

Carne showed his ticket; and the inspector glanced in, saw no one else, and passed on. Another minute or two, and the train was in motion. Carne sat down in a corner seat, his heels almost touching a fat little nose below.

Bunter glared at those heels.

This was really awful!

With juniors in the carriage, especially Remove fellows, Bunter would have rolled out into view as soon as the train started, but he dared not roll out into the view of a Sixth Form prefect.

Carne of the Sixth was not, perhaps, a very dutiful prefect, but he would have done his duty with a young rascal caught bilking the railway company; Bunter had no doubt about that.

Not that Bunter regarded himself as a young rascal. His idea was that he was doing the only possible thing in the difficult circumstances—"doing" the railway company at the same time was merely incidental.

Still, he knew how other people looked at these things. Obviously he had to keep "doggo" so long as that obnoxious prefect was sitting there—which meant all the way to Courtfield.

A scent of cigarette-smoke whiffed in the carriage and reached a little fat nose. Then he knew why Carne did not want other fellows in, unless his own pals in the Sixth. Carne was smoking cigarettes on the way to school.

It was not, of course, a smoking carriage; Carne would not have risked that. But, having it to himself, he

turned it into a smoker for his own behoof.

"Smoky beast!" breathed Bunter.

Utterly unaware of his presence, Arthur Carne smoked one cigarette after another, littering the floor with tag-ends.

Bunter, under the seat, breathed suppressed fury. It was twenty minutes, at least, to Courtfield. Five had hardly passed. How he was going to stand another fifteen, cramped under that seat, breathing dust, Bunter did not know. Worst of all, some of the dust was getting into his little fat nose. He felt an almost overpowering desire to sneeze.

A fellow who had to keep his presence a deep secret could not afford to sneeze. Bunter had to keep silent. He struggled with that sneeze.

Dust tickled his nose. Again and again that sneeze nearly escaped him, and by herculean efforts he choked it back.

But it could not last!

All of a sudden, in spite of his efforts, that sneeze escaped! From long suppression it had gathered force. It came almost like a blast on a foghorn! It roared!

"Atchooooooo-oooooooooh!"

That sudden blast under his seat took Carne of the Sixth by surprise. He

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jumped! In fact, he bounded! It was injudicious to bound with a half-smoked cigarette in his mouth. As Carne bounded the cigarette dropped on his hand, and the hot end felt fearfully hot.

"Yaroooh!" spluttered Carne.

"Atchooo-oooo-ooop!" roared Bunter.

"Ow! Oh! Ah! Oooop!"

"Atchooooooh!"

Carne of the Sixth was burnt, and he was furious. He stooped, groped, and dragged a wriggling fat junior out from under the seat.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

"Tickets, Please!"

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Leggo! Atchooh! Ooooh! Leggo!"

Smack, smack, smack!

Carne of the Sixth had a grip on Bunter's collar with his left hand. His right smote Bunter, hard and heavy.

The hot end of a cigarette on his hand was neither grateful nor comforting. Carne was hurt, and he was enraged. He snacked and snacked.

Billy Bunter wriggled and roared.

"Ow! Beast! Stop it! Leggo!" he squeaked frantically. "Ow! Oh crikey! Wow!"

He wrenched himself away from the angry Sixth Former and bolted to the other end of the carriage.

Carne rubbed his hand and glared at him, evidently inclined to follow and administer a few more.

"Ow! You keep off!" gasped Bunter. "Wharrer you walloping a fellow for?"

"What were you doing under that seat?" demanded Carne.

"Oh! Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I wasn't travelling without a ticket, Carne! I've got it in my pip-pip-pocket! Besides, Manly would have stood me a ticket if you'd let him get in."

"Bilking the railway company?" said Carne. "You young rascal! I shall report this to your Form-master!"

"I—I—I say, Carne, I—I'd rather

you didn't mention it to Quelch, if—if you don't mind!" said Bunter anxiously. "He—he might misunderstand!"

"I shall mention it to him as soon as I get to Greyfriars!" answered Carne. "You can look out for a flogging if you're not sacked the first day of term, for disgracing your school, you dishonest young scoundrel!"

"Oh, really, Carne——"

"Now shut up, or I'll give you a few more!" snapped Carne.

He sat down again, scowling. In a junior's presence he could not continue to smoke, which was annoying. In the holidays the black sheep of the Sixth was accustomed to letting himself go a little. He was not looking forward with any pleasure to the restraints and restrictions of school. At Greyfriars a fellow who felt—or fancied he felt—the need of a smoke had to be awfully careful about it—locking his study door, or sneaking into some secluded spot. So it was fearfully irritating to be deprived of his last smoke on the way to school.

Billy Bunter sat down as far as he could get from the Sixth Form man. He eyed him uneasily through his big spectacles.

The problem of his fare was still unsolved. Carne, it was quite certain, was not going to see him through with the railway company. Carne was going to report him to Quelch—a terrifying prospect. Billy Bunter had an idea in his fat head that railway companies were fair game. But he had no hope whatever that Mr. Quelch would share that view.

"I—I say, Carne," he ventured at last, when the train was drawing in to Courtfield.

"Hold your tongue!" growled Carne.

"But I—I say, I—I'd rather you didn't speak to Quelch!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you keep it dark, and—and I'll keep it dark about your smoking."

Carne sat and stared at him with a stare like that of the fabled Gorgon. He had stopped smoking; but Bunter, of course, knew that he had been smoking before that Gargantuan sneeze apprised him that he was not alone in the carriage. The fat and fatuous Owl was trying to make terms with him. Bunter's idea was that one good turn deserved another.

"You—you—you——" gasped Carne.

"That's fair!" urged Bunter. "You'd got into a fearful row with the Head if he knew you were smoking on the train—you a prefect, too!"

Carne did not answer. He just gazed at Bunter. The idea of that fat and fatuous youth making terms with him, a Sixth Form prefect, seemed to take his breath away.

The fat Owl blinked at him hopefully. It seemed a reasonable proposition to Bunter. Perhaps he took silence for consent, for he went on still more hopefully.

"And—and I say, Carne, you might lend me half-a-crown. I'll settle up to-morrow out of a postal order I'm expecting. I won't say a word about your smoking—see?"

Carne rose to his feet.

He did not speak, he stepped along the carriage and grabbed Billy Bunter by the collar.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter, in anticipation.

His anticipations were realised!

Smack, smack, smack!

"Ow! Oh crikey! Leave off!" wailed Bunter, in anguish. "I—I say, I won't say a word about—— Yaroooh! I won't— Yoo-hoop! Ow! You beast, if you don't leave off hitting me I'll go straight to the Head and say—— Yaroooop!"

Smack, smack!

It was fortunate for Bunter that the train stopped in Courtfield Station. Carne's idea seemed to be to go on smacking his head as long as the journey lasted. Luckily it came to an end.

"There, you young rascal!" gasped Carne. "Take that!"

He delivered a final smack, and stepped out of the carriage.

Billy Bunter was left rubbing a pair of red, burning, fat ears and yelling.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. "What did the brute get his rag out like that for, I wonder? Ow! Beast!"

Having waited judiciously for Carne of the Sixth to clear off, Billy Bunter rolled dismally out of the carriage. He rolled away to the other platform, where the local train for Friardale was waiting.

ticket, Bunter," snapped Mr. Hacker, "and if you have done so you had better buy another."

"I—I haven't any money, sir."

Had it been Capper, the master of the Fourth, or Wiggins, the master of the Third, Billy Bunter would probably have got by with this. But Mr. Hacker was not a kind-hearted man—and he was in a specially acid temper at the moment.

"In that case, Bunter, you had better explain the matter to the stationmaster when you arrive at Friardale!" he said.

With that Mr. Hacker turned and walked away.

Billy Bunter blinked after him bitterly. Hacker's advice was all right, so far as that went, but Billy Bunter had had altogether too much of explain-

"Tickets, please!"

Those words from the ticket-collector at the exit had no terrors for Bunter now. But they caused some dismay to Mr. Hacker, who felt in his ticket-pocket in vain for the slip of cardboard that Bunter held in his fat hand.

Passengers behind Mr. Hacker were held up as he felt in one pocket and then in another for the missing ticket.

"Tickets, please!" repeated the collector. "If you've not got a ticket, sir—"

"I have my ticket here!" yapped Mr. Hacker. "It is—was—in this pocket! I cannot imagine what has become of it. I shall find it in a moment—"

"You're keeping everybody waiting, sir—"

"Do not be impertinent!" snapped



Billy Bunter, under the carriage seat, gave Carne's boots an inimical glare as the Sixth Former sat down. A minute later, and a voice was heard: "Tickets, please!" The fat Removeite fairly quaked as the inspector put his head through the carriage window.

Among the people on that platform was a rather bony gentleman with a sharp-featured face, who did not look in a good temper. It was Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell, who, having lost his train, had to wait for the next.

Billy Bunter blinked at Mr. Hacker. Then he rolled up to him. Bunter was, of course, happily unaware of Mr. Hacker's trouble with Remove fellows on the earlier train. He did not know that Mr. Hacker attributed the loss of his train to Harry Wharton & Co., and was feeling extremely inimical towards the most untidy Form at Greyfriars and all the members thereof.

"If you please, sir!" squeaked Bunter.

Mr. Hacker gave him a stony stare.

"What do you want, Bunter?" he snapped.

"If you please, sir, I've lost my ticket!" said Bunter hopefully. "I—I can't find my own Form-master, sir! Will you please tell me what I had better do, sir?"

"You should not have lost your

ing to stationmasters about lost tickets! He had found stationmasters very sceptical gentlemen.

Then suddenly Bunter gave a jump.

On the spot where Mr. Hacker had been standing lay an oblong piece of printed cardboard. It was a railway ticket.

Evidently it had slipped from Mr. Hacker's ticket pocket and dropped where he was standing.

Bunter gave it one blink.

Then he grabbed.

Hacker, as a Greyfriars master, ought to have seen him through, in Bunter's opinion. Now he was going to see him through.

Billy Bunter rolled on to the train quite cheerfully. His fat ears were still burning from Carne's hefty smacks; but he grinned a cheery grin as the local train rolled on to Friardale. The problem that had worried him all the way from Lantham was solved at last.

At Friardale, the fat Owl alighted, with a grin on his face, and a ticket in his hand.

Mr. Hacker crossly. He groped savagely in pocket after pocket.

Skinner winked at Snoop. Billy Bunter giggled.

"I say, you fellows, fancy a beak travelling without a ticket!" whispered Bunter—in a whisper that was heard by everybody on the spot.

There was a chortle.

Mr. Hacker glared round. He gave Bunter a scaring look, and resumed his desperate search for his ticket.

"Please stand aside, sir," said the collector; and Mr. Hacker stood aside, on the platform, while the crowd passed him, giving up their tickets—and grinning.

"I say, you fellows, fancy a beak bilking the railway!" floated back to Mr. Hacker's ears, as the Greyfriars fellows crowded out.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Hacker was still searching for his ticket when the school bus rolled off to Greyfriars.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Whose Hamper?

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Did you find the fellow you were looking for at Lantham, old fat man?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I mean, lend me a hand, old fellow!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I say, this hamper's jolly heavy!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had been in some time before they had the pleasure—or otherwise—of seeing Billy Bunter. Now, coming across the Remove landing in a cheery bunch, they saw him.

Bunter was coming up the Remove staircase. He was dragging a hamper. It was rather uncommon to see the fat Owl exerting himself; but he was exerting himself now. That hamper was heavy. It was a big, round hamper, evidently well-filled.

The Famous Five regarded it, and him, with interest. Plenty of Greyfriars fellows brought back hampers and other things after the holidays. Such consignments of good things had to pass the inspection of the House dame.

"Has Mrs. Kebble seen that hamper, Bunter?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, yes; that's all right," said Bunter. "I say, lend me a hand! I'm going to whack this hamper out with you fellows."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I mean it!" said Bunter. "Nothing mean about me, I hope! It's a ripping hamper, I can tell you—specially packed for me before I left Bunter Court. Lend a fellow a hand. I've had to drag the blessed thing up."

"Why the dickens didn't you get

Gosling or Trotter to carry it up, fat-head?"

"Well, they might have—I mean, they've got plenty to do, first day of term," said Bunter. "I say, lend a fellow a hand!"

"Right-ho!"

Harry Wharton & Co. cheerfully lent a hand.

It was rather unusual for Billy Bunter to bring a hamper back after the holidays. Little or none of the vast wealth of Bunter Court, hitherto, had been expended in that manner. Generally, Bunter had a keen scent for other fellows' hampers, but no hamper of his own. Now that he was, for once, well provided, however, he seemed bent on lavish hospitality.

"Lots and lots!" said Bunter cheerfully. "I'm asking you fellows—and I've asked Smithy and Redwing, and Ogilvy and Russell—lots and lots! I hope you fellows are hungry. I know I jolly well am."

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry relieved him of the hamper. It was quite a good weight for two fellows; and really it was a wonder how Bunter had got it as far as the Remove staircase on his own. He was panting and puffing and blowing with his exertions.

"I say, you fellows, get it along to my study," said Bunter. He gave a rather anxious blink over the banisters through his big spectacles. "I say, don't waste time, old chaps!"

The hamper was got along to Study No. 7 in the Remove. In that study, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton regarded it with interest as it was rolled in.

"What are you bringing that here for?" asked Peter. "Standing us a spread, or what?"

"It's Bunter's!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Eh? Where did Bunter snaffle it?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Well, if it's Bunter's, roll it in," said Peter. "Blessed if I shan't begin to believe that there really is such a place as Bunter Court, at this rate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky ass!" hooted Bunter.

The hamper was deposited in the study. Quite an interested crowd surrounded Bunter as he proceeded to open it.

Their interest increased when it was open. It was undoubtedly an uncommonly good hamper. It was packed to the brim with excellent things. Bunter, with a beaming fat face, handed them out, and every fellow lent a hand at stacking them on the study table.

There was a Christmas pudding. There were mince-pies in dozens. There were two or three cold chickens. There were jellies and candied fruits; cakes and tarts; all sorts of good things.

As the hamper was unpacked, the stack of good things on the table grew more and more imposing.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, looked in at the doorway. His chum, Tom Redwing, looked in over his shoulder. Both of them stared at the enticing array on the table.

"Great pip!" ejaculated the Bounder. "Has Bunter really got a hamper?"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Looks like it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The look-likeness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, come in!" said Bunter. "Get going—no need to waste time. I say, that looks a decent spread, what?"

"What-ho!" said Bob.

"Topping, old fat bean!" said Frank Nugent.

"The topfulness is terrific."

Ogilvy and Russell arrived. Two or three more fellows, passing the study, were called in by the hospitable fat Owl, and they joined up cheerfully. Study No. 7 was soon crowded.

The empty hamper was pitched into a corner. A crowd of fellows surrounded the table. Imposing as the stack on the table was, it diminished rapidly under the attacks of a dozen fellows.

Billy Bunter beamed over the festive board.

He did not talk; his plump chin was too busy for talking. But he beamed with hospitality. More Remove fellows came along; Squiff, Tom Brown, Bol-sover major, joined in the spread.

"Don't leave anything, you fellows," Bunter spoke between huge bites. "I don't want a thing left—not a thing! Clear the table! One of you fellows can stand me a study supper."

"Yes, rather, old fat bean!" said Harry Wharton, with a laugh.

"Have some more mince pies, old chap! They're good! Not so good as we have at Bunter Court—but jolly good!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

As that hamper was supposed to have come from Bunter's home with Bunter, his remark was a little surprising.

"I—I—I mean—" stammered Bunter. "I mean, try the Christmas pudding, old fellow. Specially made by our chef at Bunter Court, you know. Some—some of the mince pies were got in, you know—that's what I mean. I say, try those jellies, they're spiffing!"

"Hallo!" Skinner looked in, with



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Snoop. "Who's standing the jolly old house-warming?"

"I say, you fellows, come in!" said Bunter, with his mouth full. "Plenty to go round!"

Skinner and Snoop could not come in—there was no more room in the study. But good things were handed to them in the doorway.

Ample as the supplies were, they were rapidly being cleared now. Bunter had stated that he wanted nothing left; and his guests were taking him at his word. Little was left now—and it was fast going.

Hazeldene came up the passage and looked in.

"You fellows been larking with the Shell?" he asked.

"Have a mince pie, old chap!" said Bunter hastily.

"Thanks! I say, have you been——"

"Pass Hazel some of the cake, you fellows."

"Anything happened in the Shell?" asked Harry Wharton. "We had a bit of an argument with Hacker on the train."

"I don't think Hacker's in yet. I believe he got into some trouble at Friardale, trying to bilk the railway, and——"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He, he, he!"

"It's Hobson!" explained Hazeldene.

"He——"

"Have another mince tart, Hazel—I mean, a jam pie—that is—a mince pie——" interrupted Bunter.

"Thanks! Hobson is going round like a wild Indian on the warpath," grinned Hazel. "He can't find a hamper——"

"What?"

"I say, you fellows, have some more cake——"

"Oh, my hat!" yelled the Bounder. "Hobson can't find a hamper!"

"So he's telling the wide world!" grinned Hazel. "From what I hear, he had no end of a hamper, and Mrs. Kebble was rather doubtful whether she could let him have such a stack of stuff. He had to leave it with her, and let her go over it first. Then——"

"I say, you fellows, finish that cake and——"

"Then she was called away, it seems," said Hazel. "Bunter——"

"Bunter?"

"Yes, Bunter came and told her there was a smell of burning in the Rag, and she scooted off to see about it——"

"I say, you fellows, there's still some mince pies——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"And when she got back the hamper was gone," continued Hazel. "She thought Hobby had snaffled it, of course, and went for him—but he hadn't! Somebody seems to have taken it by mistake—but Hobby can't find out who it was! He's going all over the shop asking who's got his hamper."

The feasters of Study No. 7 looked at one another—and looked at Billy Bunter. Of all the handsome array on the study table, only a single mince pie remained. Bunter grabbed it hastily.

"I say, you fellows seem to have had rather a spread here," remarked Hazel. "Wish I'd dropped in sooner! Who's been standing it?"

"Bunter!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Bunter!"

"Yes—he—he—he had a hamper——"

"Oh, my hat!" Hazel yelled. "Ha, ha, ha! Hobby hasn't thought of looking in the Remove yet! Ha, ha, ha!"

Hazel went on up the passage yelling. Skinner and Snoop followed him, chortling. Other fellows faded out of

the study. The Famous Five gasped at William George Bunter.

"You—you—you——" gasped Harry Wharton. "Was that Hobson's hamper, you fat brigand?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! If that's the way you thank a chap for standing you a ripping spread——"

"It was Hobby's hamper!" roared Johnny Bull.

"I suppose that's what you call manners in Yorkshire—roaring at a chap after he's stood you the spread of the term——"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter——"

"Well, my hat!" said Peter Todd.

The Famous Five left Study No. 7. All the guests melted away—most of them grinning.

Billy Bunter blinked rather uneasily at Peter through his big spectacles.

"I—I say, Toddy, you—you don't think that was Hobson's hamper, do you, old chap?" he ventured.

"I know it was, you fat fraud!"

"Oh, really, Toddy! I told you I brought that hamper back with me from Bunter Court——"

"Yes. I ought to have known from that, that you hadn't!"

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"Beast! I haven't been near the House dame's room!" hooted Bunter.

"And I only went to tell her there was something burning in the Rag. I never saw Hobson's hamper there, and never took the label off it. The label must have dropped off, on the railway—you know how careless those railway porters are! It's pretty thick, I think, to make out that I'd snaffle a fellow's hamper. Besides, Hobson ain't in the Remove, so what does it matter? I say, if he makes a fuss about it, Peter, I shall expect you to stand by a pal. You jolly well had a whack in Hobson's hamper—I mean, in my hamper, and—— I—I say, Toddy, what are you going to do with that cricket stump?"

Peter Todd did not explain what he was going to do with the cricket stump. He proceeded to do it!

Bunter jumped for the door. Peter jumped for Bunter. He got in three with the stump before the fat Owl escaped. Which, Bunter could not help feeling, was fearfully ungrateful of Toddy, after such a splendid spread.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Benefit of the Doubt!

"WINGATE wants you, Bunter, at——"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter came to a halt on the landing. He had left his study rather hurriedly, tired of Toddy

and the stump. He was considering going down to Hall, when Temple, of the Fourth, called to him from the stairs.

Temple, it seemed, had been told to find Bunter—and judging by his expression, did not like the task. Cecil Reginald Temple was far too important a person to be sent looking for Lower Fourth fags—in Temple's own opinion, though, apparently, not in Wingate's.

"I—I—I say, Temple, t-t-tell him I—I haven't come yet, will you?" gasped Bunter. "Or—or tell him I'm with Quelch! No—with the Head, that's better!"

Temple stared at him for a moment. Then he grinned, and called out over the lower banisters:

"I say, Wingate! Bunter says he hasn't come yet, and is with Mr. Quelch, and with the Head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from a dozen fellows.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

He rolled dismally down. Wingate, as head prefect, could not be disregarded, much as Bunter would have liked to disregard him.

"I—I say, Wingate," he stammered, as he reached the Greyfriars captain in the lower passage. "I say, I never had it——"

"Hacker seems to think you had!" grinned Wingate.

"Oh lor'! Is Hobson's beak taking it up?" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, Wingate, I haven't been in the House dame's room, and I never——"

"You young ass! Hacker didn't drop his ticket in the House dame's room, I suppose!" said Wingate, staring at him. "What do you mean?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He realised that it was not the hamper. "I—I mean—— Oh crikey! I say, is old Hacker making a fuss about a railway ticket? I—I never had that, either."

"Go and tell Mr. Quelch so!" said Wingate, with a laugh. "You can depend on your beak to see justice done, Bunter."

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter. That, as a matter of fact, was what the hapless fat Owl was afraid of.

He rolled away dismally to Masters' Passage. Mr. Quelch's door stood open, and as he approached it he heard the voice of his Form-master:

"I can scarcely believe, Hacker——"

"I am absolutely assured of it, Quelch!" came the sharp, acid tones of the master of the Shell. "In my mind there is absolutely no doubt whatever."

"I must, at all events, hear Bunter! Oh, you are here—come in, Bunter!" said the Remove master.

Billy Bunter entered the study, with the sort of feeling that the ancient Daniel might have had in entering the lions' den.

Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes on him—eyes that the Remove men compared to gimlets, for their penetrating qualities. Mr. Hacker gave him a cold, angry, contemptuous stare.

Bunter faced his Form-master, in the lowest spirits. That affair of the railway ticket was hours old—Bunter had almost forgotten it, when he was so disagreeably reminded of it. Even now he could not begin to guess how Hacker had spotted him. The last he had seen of Hacker, the Shell master had been frantically searching through his pockets, on Friardale platform, for a missing ticket. Why he thought of Bunter, in connection with the missing ticket, was a mystery to the fat Owl. But it seemed that he had.

"I—I say, sir, I—I never had it!" gasped Bunter.

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"He certainly had it!" snapped Mr. Hacker.

"Bunter! You informed Mr. Hacker, that you had lost your railway ticket!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, yes, sir! It—it slipped through a hole in the—the lining of my pocket," stammered Bunter. He was glad to see that, at all events, there was no suspicion abroad that he had never had a ticket at all. Carne of the Sixth could not have carried out the threat of reporting him.

"Did you pick up a ticket dropped by Mr. Hacker?"

"Oh! No, sir!" gasped Bunter.

It hardly occurred to Bunter's fat brain that he was speaking untruthfully. His one idea was to get out of this—and there was room in his podgy intellect for only one idea at a time.

It had seemed to Bunter quite a wind-fall to get hold of Hacker's ticket. But he realised now that the matter was more serious than it had seemed to him at the time!

Beaks were such silly asses! Goodness only knew how a beak might look at such an episode! A beak might even call it pilfering! It did not occur to Bunter that a beak who called it pilfering would be quite correct!

"I—I never saw it, sir!" said Bunter. "I—I never knew Mr. Hacker had a ticket at all, sir."

"Nonsense! You must have known that Mr. Hacker had a ticket, as he was travelling by rail, Bunter."

"Oh! I—I mean, the collector at Friardale thought he was bilking, sir."

"Wha-a-t? Be silent, you foolish boy!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch hastily; while Hacker's bony face reddened with wrath.

"This boy," said Hacker bitterly, "is speaking untruthfully. He stated to me that he had lost his ticket; yet, at Friardale, I saw him hand a ticket over to the collector when he left the platform."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. It dawned on him how he had been spotted.

Hacker, having been unable to find that elusive ticket, had remembered Bunter's ticketless state, and remembered having seen the ticketless Owl hand a ticket over. He had put two and two together—quite an easy arithmetical matter for a Form-master.

"Where did you obtain the ticket you gave up at Friardale, Bunter?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"From—from the booking-office, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean, I—I hadn't lost it, after all—it—it was in another pocket."

"You have already stated, Bunter, that you lost your ticket through a hole in the lining of your pocket!"

"That—that was my coat-pocket, sir! It—it slipped into my—my jacket pocket, as—as it happened, sir! I—I found it just in time to—to give up, sir."

Mr. Quelch gazed at him searchingly.

"You are aware, Bunter, that if you picked up a ticket dropped by anyone, it was an act of dishonesty to keep it."

"W-was it, sir?"

"Bless my soul! Do you not know that it was, Bunter?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! Not—not the sort of thing I would do, sir! Some fellows in the Remove might, but not me, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Then you state that it was your own ticket that you gave up at Friardale?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, yes, sir, my ticket from Lantham, sir!"

Mr. Quelch glanced at the master of

the Shell. Mr. Hacker compressed his thin lips bitterly.

"Do you believe Bunter's statement, Mr. Hacker?"

"No, sir, I do not!" answered Mr. Hacker. "I do not believe one word of Bunter's statement, sir. I believe that he was travelling without a ticket, in all probability swindling the railway company, sir, and that he picked up the ticket I must have dropped."

"You have no reason, sir, to suppose anything of the kind!" said Mr. Quelch sharply. "Bunter told you that he had lost his ticket; and it is scarcely reasonable to assume, from that, that he was travelling without a ticket at all."

"A boy who would pilfer a ticket, sir, would travel without one in the first place!" said Mr. Hacker, in his bitterest tone. "A boy dishonest enough to do the one, would do the other."

Mr. Quelch set his lips. He was the man to stand by a member of his Form. Bunter, it was true, was not a very creditable or reliable member of that Form. Still, Bunter was entitled to justice.

"Can you say, sir, that you saw Bunter pick up your ticket?"

"Had I seen him do so, sir, I should have compelled him to return my property," snapped Mr. Hacker.

"Then you did not see him?"

"I did not, sir, but no doubt exists in my mind on the subject. Bunter had no ticket, yet he gave one up on leaving Friardale Station."

"That, sir, is not a sufficient reason for bringing what amounts to a charge of dishonesty against a member of my Form!" said Mr. Quelch warmly. "It is quite possible, indeed probable, that Bunter found the ticket he had lost. Really, Mr. Hacker—"

"Really, Mr. Quelch, if this boy is allowed to go scot-free after an act of pilfering—"

"I refuse, sir, to allow that word to be used. I refuse, sir, definitely, to listen to anything of the kind." Quelch's temper was rising, as well as Hacker's. "Bunter, you may go!"

"Oh! Thank you, sir!" gasped Bunter.

He went—almost in a bound!

Mr. Hacker breathed long and hard, through his long, thin nose. Mr. Quelch eyed him grimly and indignantly. Bunter, he knew, was unreliable; but Hacker, he also knew, was suspicious and distrustful. It was a question of proof; and there was no proof. Bunter was entitled to the benefit of the doubt.

"Then I am to be put to the loss of my railway ticket?" said Mr. Hacker.

"Railway passengers who drop their tickets, sir, must expect to be put to that loss!" said Mr. Quelch.

"As the ticket was picked up, and used, by a boy of your Form—"

"Nothing of the kind, sir!"

"Very well, Mr. Quelch!" said Hacker, his voice trembling with suppressed anger, "I shall make inquiries, sir, whether anyone actually saw Bunter pick up my ticket."

"Until you have made such inquiries, sir, and learned something more definite, it is useless to discuss the matter."

"And the other boys of your Form, sir?" said Mr. Hacker. "Cherry, and Bull, who deliberately defied and disregarded me at Courtfield Station, as I have described to you—"

"I am sorry, Mr. Hacker, if boys of my Form have displeased you; but on your own showing, you ordered them out of a carriage in which there were unoccupied seats. They had every right

to occupy such seats. Indeed, any railway official who might have been present, would have regarded your order as utterly unwarrantable."

"Does that mean, Mr. Quelch, that the boys are not to be punished for their insolence?"

"I see no insolence, sir, in any boy exercising his just rights, and no occasion for punishment."

Mr. Hacker almost choked.

He could not trust himself to speak again. He whisked out of the study. Something like a snort from Mr. Quelch followed him. On the first day of term, Quelch, like all schoolmasters, was a busy man. He had plenty to do without having his time wasted by frivolous complaints from an interfering, acid-tempered, suspicious colleague. Mr. Hacker almost slammed the door after him.

At the end of the passage, he sighted Billy Bunter.

Bunter was grinning, and speaking to Squiff of the Remove.

"I say—ho, he, he—that old ass Hacker—"

"Shurrup, you fathead!" breathed Squiff in alarm, as the master of the Shell came along like a thundercloud.

Bunter gave a startled blink round, spotted Hacker, and bolted. Mr. Hacker cast a glare after him, and went on his way—boiling!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Getting Rid of the Evidence!

"SEEN a hamper?" asked Hobson of the Shell.

Billy Bunter started.

"A—a—a hamper?" he repeated.

"Some howling ass has bagged my hamper by mistake!" explained Hobson. "Seen anything of it, Bunter?"

Hobson of the Shell was going up and down, and round about, inquiring after that lost hamper. He was getting tired of the quest. He had asked nearly everybody at Greyfriars, without deriving any information from them. But he had to have his hamper.

There was going to be a study supper in Hobby's study in the Shell. The hamper was indispensable. Hobby had asked five or six fellows—all quite keen to help him dispose of the succulent contents of that hamper. It had not yet dawned on Hobby that the contents had been already disposed of!

"I heard that you went to the House dame's room about the time," went on Hobson. "About a fire or something."

"Oh, really, Hobson—"

"Well, did you see anybody walking off a hamper, with my name on the label?" asked the Shell fellow.

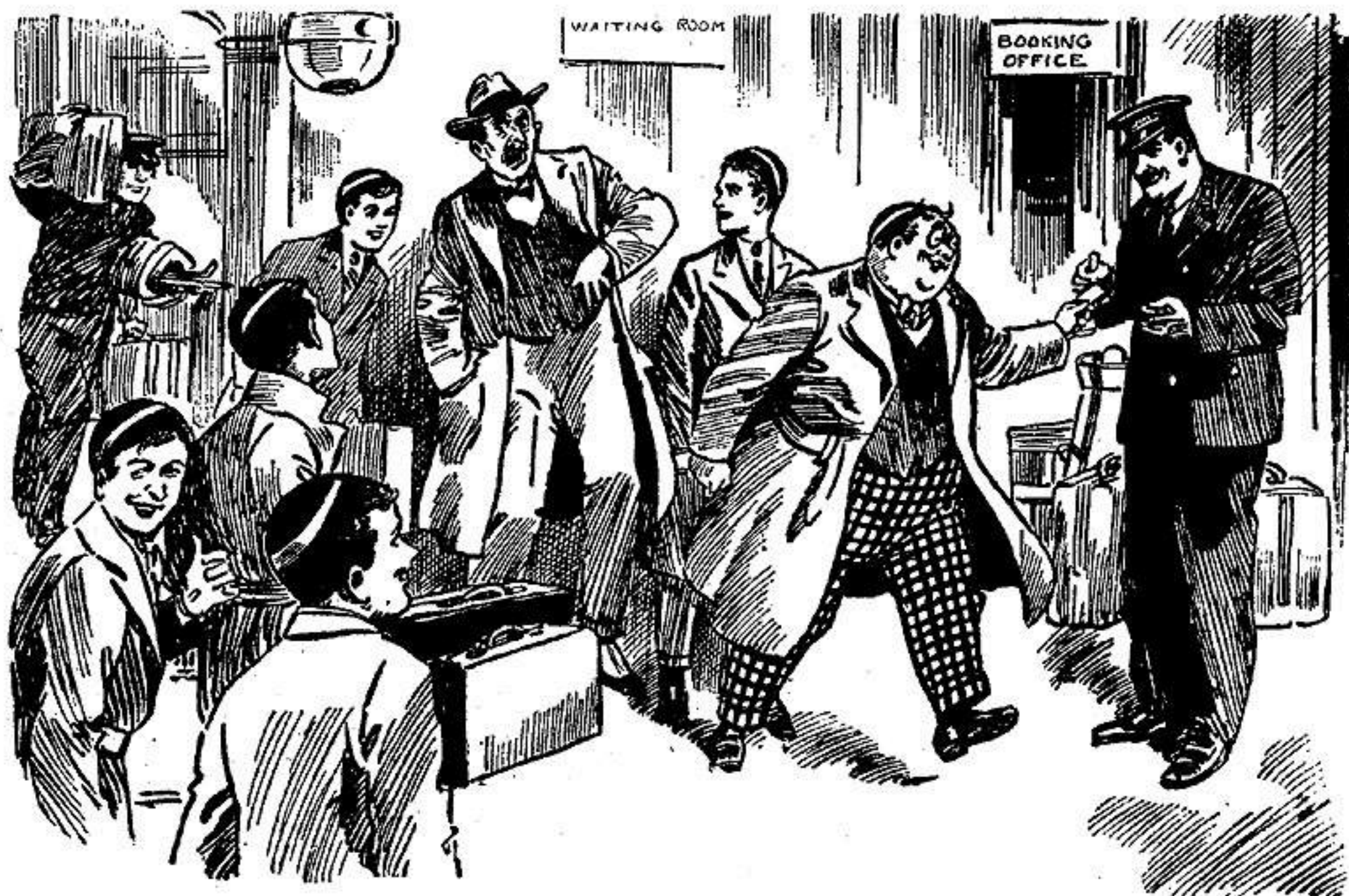
"Oh! No! Sure it came at all?" asked Bunter.

"You silly ass, I tipped Gosling to take it to the House dame's room. I had to leave it there for Mrs. Kebble to nose into. Then some silly fathead walked it off by mistake."

Hobby of the Shell had a nice, kind, unsuspicious nature. It had not yet occurred to him that there had been no "mistake" about the walking-off of that hamper!

On the first day of term there were a good many hampers about. Some thoughtless or fatheaded fellow might have walked off the wrong one by mistake. Hobby supposed that some such fellow had. He was asking Bunter for information, little guessing how much the fat Owl could have given him.

"Have you asked Coker?" suggested Bunter.



Mr. Hacker glared round at the Greyfriars Juniors, and then resumed his desperate search for his ticket. "Please stand aside, sir!" said the collector. The Shell Form-master stood aside, while the crowd passed him, giving up their tickets—and grinning. "Fancy a beak bilking the railway!" said Billy Bunter.

"Coker?" repeated Hobson. "Coker of the Fifth?"

"Well, I know he's got a hamper," said Bunter, "and you know what a fool he is!"

"Oh!" said Hobson. "Just the silly idiot to do it!"

And Hobby, much to Bunter's relief, rushed off to the Fifth, to make inquiries in that quarter for his missing hamper.

Billy Bunter returned to the Remove passage in rather a worried frame of mind. First day of term had landed him in a lot of worries.

So far he had got through the affair of Hacker's ticket; Quelch had stood up for him, as he was bound to stand up for a man in his Form. But Bunter could not help thinking that Quelch's attitude would change if he received a certain report from Carne of the Sixth.

He could only hope that, in the rush of first day at School, Carne of the Sixth had forgotten about it. Anyhow, he had not yet reported Bunter for bilking the railway.

More immediately worrying was the matter of Hobson's hamper. Hobby seemed bent on making a fuss about that mouldy old hamper. It seemed to Bunter that it was high time that Hobby let that trifling matter drop.

The fat Owl blinked rather uneasily into Study No. 7. But Peter Todd had gone down to the Rag, and the cricket stump lay on a shelf.

Bunter rolled into the study.

The empty hamper stood there in full view. The table was littered with fragments of the feast. A few figs remained in one of the boxes, and Bunter thoughtfully ate them while he considered the matter.

Hobby was welcome to his hamper now, so far as that went. But the

empty hamper was not likely to afford James Hobson much satisfaction. Bunter would willingly have conveyed it, now that it was empty, to Hobby's study in the Shell and left it there. He was, in fact, anxious to get rid of it.

Sooner or later, Hobby would learn that his hamper had been snaffled. He was not fearfully bright, but he might guess why Bunter had taken that false alarm of a fire in the Rag to the House dame. He might hear of the tremendous feast in Study No. 7 and get suspicious.

Bunter did not want an infuriated Shell fellow raging on his track. He did not want the incident to reach Hacker's ears and set him going again. Hacker had already made out that Bunter had pilfered his railway ticket. He would make out that Bunter had pilfered Hobby's hamper. It would be like him, Bunter bitterly reflected.

The fat grub-raider of the Remove had to get rid of that hamper. He had got rid of the contents; now he had to get rid of the hamper. It was evidence against him—indubitable evidence, so long as it remained in his study. But it was necessary to get rid of it unseen. He had had great luck in getting it to the study undetected, but at that time Hobson of the Shell had not been going up and down in search of it. Now he was. Bunter shuddered at the thought of running into Hobson with that hamper.

He blinked out of the study as Fisher T. Fish came down the passage.

"I say, Fishy!" he squeaked.

Fishy stopped and looked in.

"Anything left?" he said hopefully.

"I hear you've been standing spreads in this study, Bunter."

"There's the hamper," said Bunter.

"I've done with it now. Fishy! It—it's worth something—a jolly good hamper

if a fellow wanted one! I—I'll give it to you, if you like."

Fisher T. Fish grinned. No doubt the hamper was worth something, and Fishy was always keen on getting something for nothing. But on this occasion he did not seem keen.

"Thank you for nothing, big boy!" he answered. "I guess you'd like Hobson to spot it in my study instead of yours, if he comes up here looking for it. I'll mention that we cut our eye-teeth airy in Noo Yark!"

And Fisher T. Fish passed on his way, grinning.

"Beast!" said Bunter.

Skinner and Snoop came up the passage. They stopped to grin in at the door of Study No. 7. As they had shared in that feast of the gods, Bunter might really have expected a little help from them, or, at least, sympathy. But they did not seem very sympathetic.

"Look out for Hobby!" said Skinner. "I hear that he's tumbled to it that his hamper was pinched!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"He's been jawing to Coker!" grinned Snoop. "Coker's advised him to look along the Remove studies."

"Oh crikey!"

Skinner and Snoop walked on, chuckling.

Billy Bunter grasped the hamper and dragged it as far as the door. Then he stopped. If Hobby was going to draw the Remove studies, he might appear in the passage any moment.

Bunter hastily dragged the hamper back and shut the door.

"Oh lor'!" he groaned.

The fat Owl blinked almost desperately at that wretched hamper. After the feast came the reckoning. Bunter was beginning to feel like a gunman with a body to dispose of.

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The beastly hamper was too big to conceal in his study. He dare not drag it out. He blinked at the window.

It was the only resource.

If that empty hamper was found on the path, under the study windows, nobody could possibly tell from which window it had dropped—at least, Bunter hoped that nobody could. It was his last hope.

He pushed up the lower sash. He heaved the empty hamper to the window, heaved it out on the sill, and pushed.

It rolled over and shot downwards.

Bunter gasped with relief.

It was gone at last.

The next moment he gasped again.

From the spaces below a fearful yell floated up.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

In the urgent, pressing need of getting rid of that hamper, it had not occurred to Bunter's powerful brain that someone might be passing along the path under the study windows at an unlucky moment.

It seemed, however, that someone was. It seemed also that he had got the hamper—from a height of twenty or thirty feet! And that fearful yell seemed to indicate that damage was done.

"Oh lor'!" gurgled Bunter.

Hastily he closed the window. Hurriedly he quitted the study. He was sorry for the fellow who had got the hamper, if it came to that; but his chief concern was for W. G. Bunter. He vanished.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mad?

MR. HACKER, for a dizzy, dreadful moment, fancied that the skies were falling—or, alternatively, as the lawyers say, that the ancient buildings of Greyfriars were collapsing on his head.

It really was astounding.

Since his interview with Mr. Quelch, the master of the Shell had been busy. Like other masters, he had plenty to do on the first day of term, but he was setting aside his usual avocations to attend to the affair of Bunter and the lost ticket.

That affair had roused Mr. Hacker's bitterest ire.

He had had a most unpleasant experience at Friardale Station. The ticket collector had hardly concealed his belief that he was bilking the railway. The matter had been settled by paying the fare from Lantham. Half-a-crown was not a large sum, but it annoyed Mr. Hacker to have to pay it twice. He was still more annoyed by the man's ungrounded suspicions. He had arrived at the school intensely irritated; and, reflection having shown him how the matter stood, he had gone to Quelch—for justice on a rascally Remove boy who had not only pinched his ticket, but placed him in an awkward and ridiculous position. And Quelch had refused to find Bunter guilty, leaving Mr. Hacker feeling like a cat whose mouse had escaped.

Convinced that Bunter had had his ticket, Hacker carefully recalled what boys he had seen on that train—the second train. From juniors he could not hope to derive information; they would not have given the fat Owl away if they knew. But he remembered that he had seen Sixth Form men—prefects—on the train. They were in duty bound to back up a master in pursuit of a culprit.

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He found Loder of the Sixth in his study, but Loder knew nothing. He found Walker of the Sixth in the prefects' room, but Walker knew nothing. Then he looked for Carne of the Sixth, who had been on that train. Carne was out of the House, so out of the House went Hacker, looking for him.

The January dusk was falling, but it was not yet dark. A good many fellows were out of the House.

Hacker walked round, looking for Carne. Thus it happened that Mr. Hacker was passing along the path under the Remove study windows.

He sighted Carne of the Sixth in the distance coming along that path. So he stopped there, and waited for him to come up.

Standing there, directly under the window of Study No. 7, Hacker had his eyes on the approaching prefect.

Suddenly his view was blotted out.

Something dropped on his head, with a fearful crash. It enveloped his head, descending as far as the lowest button of his waistcoat.

It was not the skies falling. It was not a sudden collapse of the ancient buildings of Greyfriars School. It seemed like that, to the astonished master of the Shell. But it wasn't! It was a large, round hamper, which fell with the open end downwards, and, Mr. Hacker's head being just below the open end, naturally enveloped him!

Imprisoned in the hamper, Mr. Hacker let out a startled yell and tottered. He yelled, and yelled again; he spluttered, and spluttered.

It was a large hamper. There was plenty of room for Mr. Hacker's rather bony form inside. The bottom of it squashed on his mortar-board. The rest of it surrounded him.

His arms were pinned down to his sides. Sudden darkness, inside the hamper, deprived him of vision. He tottered, he yelled, and he gurgled.

Carne of the Sixth was coming along, but he stopped, thunderstruck, at that sudden and startling sight.

"Great pip!" gasped Carne. "What is—"

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

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Ooooooh!" came from within the hamper. "Yooooogh! Oooooogh! Help! What—what—Yarooooogh!"

Inside the hamper Mr. Hacker struggled wildly.

There was a roar of voices from all directions. There was a howl of laughter. Mr. Prout and Mr. Quelch, who were walking in the quad before tea, stared round with astounded eyes at the extraordinary figure on the path under the Remove windows.

"Who—" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"What—" spluttered Mr. Prout.

It was really a surprising sight, at the first startled view. It looked as if a large, round hamper had sprouted a pair of long, thin legs, and was walking about on its own.

"Extraordinary!" spluttered Mr. Prout, amazed. "An absurd trick—an utterly absurd trick!" The Fifth Form master stared at the strange figure in stern disapproval. "There—there is someone inside that hamper, Quelch—"

"Apparently so!" gasped Quelch.

"It is not a junior!" declared Prout. "It is too tall for a junior. Some Sixth Form boy, playing these extraordinary antics! Scandalous!"

"Who the dickens is it?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five came up at a run. "Some sportsman trying to be funny!" said Bob Cherry. "What a fatheaded idea of a joke!"

"It's a senior—" said Nugent.

"Looks like a master!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh crumbs! A master, japing like that!" gasped Wharton. "What the dickens could he be doing it for?"

"Mad, I suppose!" said the Bounder. "The madfulness must be terrific!"

Nobody had seen the hamper drop suddenly from a window. Nobody, of course, had the faintest idea that a hamper had dropped from an upper window. Such things did not happen often!

So far as anybody could see, some silly ass had put a hamper over his head, to parade in the quad, by way of a joke—a most extraordinary idea of a joke!

The wretched Hacker, inside the hamper, struggled frantically. He was trying to get it off. But it would not come off. Frantic struggles did not help in the least.

Hacker struggled and groaned.

"Urrghh! Help! Yurrrgggh!" came spluttering from the interior of the clinging hamper. "Wurrrrrgggh!"

"Scandalous!" boomed Prout. "Ridiculous! Absurd!" Prout rolled up and glared at the struggling hamper. "Who are you? I repeat, who are you? Give me your name, at once! I shall report this prank to the Head! Scandalous!"

"Yurrrrrggghhh!"

"It's a beak!" yelled Temple of the Fourth.

"Oh, rather!" gasped Dabney.

"I—I say, I—I believe it's Hacker!" spluttered Hobson of the Shell. "I know those skinny legs! I—I believe it's my beak!"

"Hacker!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Is he mad?" exclaimed Peter Todd, in wonder.

"Must be, to play a game like that in open quad!" said Hoskins of the Shell. "I noticed that he was rather excited to-day—"

"He kicked up a row on the train—you fellows remember?" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather! Mad as a hatter!"

"I guess it's the bee's knee!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll tell a man, it's the opossum's side-whiskers!"

"It's Hacker—"

"He's mad—"

"It's Hacker!" gasped Carne of the Sixth. "I know it's Hacker—"

"Extraordinary!" boomed Prout. "Unparalleled! Unprecedented! Quelch, it is a member of Dr. Locke's staff, playing these extraordinary antics—"

"Amazing!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Yurrrghh! Urrghh! Will you get this—this—off my head?" came a muffled howl from inside the hamper. "Will you—gurrghh!—help me?"

"Is—it—is that Hacker?" boomed Prout. "Is that Mr. Hacker?"

"Urrghh! Yes. Help!"

"Why have you done this, Hacker?" gasped Prout. "In goodness' name, Hacker, why have you played this extraordinary prank?"

"You old fool!"

"Wha-a-a-t?" spluttered Prout.

He almost staggered. Hacker, half-suffocated, and wholly infuriated, was not measuring his words. Really, it was enraging, for a man imprisoned in a hamper, the victim of an extraordinary trick, to be supposed to be playing a prank, like some thoughtless fag of the Second Form.

"Will you—grooogh—help me!"

shrieked Mr. Hacker. "I cannot get this off! Will you help me, instead of gabbling there?"

"Gabbling?" gasped Prout. "D-d-did you say gib-gub-gabbling?"

"Yurrrgh! I am suffocating! Help me!" raved Hacker. "Help me, you fool!"

"He is mad!" gasped Prout. "Evidently, he mistakes me for you, Quelch! You heard what he called me!"

"Really, Mr. Prout—" yapped the Remove master.

"Urrggh! Yurrrgh! Will you get this—this thing off my head?" shrieked Hacker. "Help me!"

"He—he desires it to be taken off!" gasped Prout. "He refuses to explain why he put it on—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Five or six pairs of hands grasped the hamper. Nobody could guess why Hacker had put it on. But as it seemed clear that he wanted it off again, plenty of fellows were willing to help.

"All hands on deck!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Go it!"

"A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hamper came off at last. A crimson and infuriated face was revealed. Fifty pairs of eyes, at least, fixed on it. Hacker was almost foaming at the mouth.

"My—my dear Hacker!" gasped Prout. Prout was thinking of appearances. "My dear fellow, calm yourself—calmness, I beg! Take my arm. Let me assist you to the House. If you lit down for a time, perhaps—"

"Will you stop talking nonsense, Prout?" roared Mr. Hacker.

"Eh? What?"

"My dear Hacker," exclaimed Quelch, "why did you—"

"Do you suppose I put my head into that hamper intentionally?" shrieked Mr. Hacker.

"Eh? I—I suppose so, but why—"

"Then you're a fool, sir!" roared Mr. Hacker.

"What—what?"

"That hamper, sir, was thrown on my head by some dastardly trickster!" shrieked the master of the Shell. "It was thrown from some window. I have no doubt that it was done by a boy of your Form, Quelch."

"I am sure that it was nothing of the kind—"

"I—I think the hamper must have been thrown from a window, sir!" gasped Carne of the Sixth.

He stared up at the Remove windows.

Everyone else stared up. Really, it seemed more probable, on second thoughts, that a hamper had been dropped on Hacker's head by some practical joker than that a Form-master had played so extraordinary a prank—unless, indeed, he was mad! Hacker was very nearly mad with rage—but he did not look insane in any other respect.

"Oh!" gasped Prout. "Some Remove boy—"

"Certainly not!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Those are the windows of the Remove studies!" yelled Mr. Hacker. "Some young scoundrel in your Form, Quelch!"

Mr. Quelch glared.

"It has yet to be proved that the hamper was thrown from a window at all!" he snapped.

And the Remove master stalked away. Quelch was the man to stand by his Form, and apparently he preferred to continue in the belief that Hacker had been playing amazing antics, rather

than take the view that some practical joker in the Remove had done this.

Hacker glared after him, foaming.

"I shall lay this before Dr. Locke!" he gasped. "The young scoundrel shall be expelled! Carne, please take care of that hamper! The owner must be traced. I rely upon you, Carne."

"Certainly, sir!" said Carne.

Hacker, almost gibbering with rage, whisked away to the House. He left the quad in a roar as he disappeared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Hacker!"

"I say, you fellows, I don't believe that hamper was chucked from a window! I'm jolly sure it wasn't! Hacker's mad, you know!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hacker, in his study, heard the yells of laughter from the quad. Perhaps he was pleased by that sound of happy boyish merriment. But it was more probable not.

"I haven't!" growled Hobson. "And look here, that hamper's been snaffled. I asked nearly every man at Greyfriars yesterday, but nobody seems to have taken it by mistake. Coker of the Fifth advised me to look in the Remove studies."

"Like his cheek!" said Bob Cherry warmly.

"Well, Coker said he'd had hampers raided before now," said Hobson. "Look here, a Fourth Form man says he saw you fellows trotting a hamper up the Remove staircase yesterday—a big round hamper, same as mine. If you brought a hamper back, of course, I'll take your word."

"We didn't," said Harry, and the Co. shook their heads. They had brought back various things, but no hamper.

"Well, then, I'd like to know whose hamper you were yanking up your staircase yesterday afternoon," said Hobson.

"A Remove man's," said Bob. "At least, so he told us. Your jolly old

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows Nothing!

LOOK here, Wharton!" It was the next morning. Harry Wharton & Co. were taking a trot in the quad while they waited for the bell for class. Hobson of the Shell, with a frowning brow, cut across to them.

The Famous Five came to a halt, regarding Hobby inquiringly. Hobby looked rather hostile; but the chums of the Remove were unaware of any cause for hostility, except the little argument on the train the previous day, which they had already almost forgotten, and supposed that Hobby had.

"Anything up?" asked Harry. "My hamper," said Hobson. "Oh, you haven't found it?" asked the captain of the Remove.

He did not expect an answer in the affirmative. He could not, of course, be sure; but he had the strongest suspicions that Bunter's hamper and Hobson's hamper were one and the same.

It was, at least, a remarkable coincidence if Bunter had brought a big hamper back to school at the same time that a big hamper was missed in the Shell.

hamper wasn't the only pebble on the beach, Hobby!"

"Well, if you know whose it was, of course, that settles it," said Hobby. "I'm not doubting your word, of course."

The Famous Five exchanged uncomfortable glances. They did not, in point of fact, know whose that hamper was. Bunter had stated that it was his, but they had a deep suspicion that it was Hobby's.

"Hold on," said Bob, as the Shell fellow was turning away. "It was Bunter's hamper—at least, he said it was. That's all we know about it."

"Well, I suppose he knows whether it was his hamper or not," said Hobby. He was clearly an unsuspicious fellow. "Still, somebody's snaffled my hamper. A mistake can't have lasted all this time. I want to find out who's got it, and punch him. Besides, I want the hamper, you know."

The Famous Five looked at one another as Hobson walked away.

"That fat pincher!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I—I suppose—" said Harry slowly. "No supposing about it!" grunted Johnny. "It was Hobby's hamper—of course it was!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles, and came scuttling up.

"Yes, old chap?" he said. "Coming into the tuckshop? There's time before class. Mrs. Mimble has got some scrumptious mince pies."

"Did you snaffle Hobson's hamper?"

"Eh? What hamper? Did Hobson have a hamper?" asked Bunter. "Who's Hobson?"

"Who's Hobson?" repeated Bob.

"Never heard of him," said Bunter. "I mean, I've forgotten there's a chap here named Hobson. I say, there isn't much time before class, if you're going to have a snack before we go in."

"We're not."

"Then why the thump did you call me?" yapped Bunter. "Making a chap out for nothing!"

"Hobson's still hunting for his hamper."

"Oh, blow Hobson!" said Bunter peevishly. "I'm fed-up with him and his hamper! I think very likely Coker of the Fifth had it. I know he had a hamper in his study. The beast kicked me when I looked in. Very likely Hobson never had a hamper at all. Just swank!"

"You blithering idiot! Did you snoop Hobby's hamper yesterday, and get us to help you off with it?" roared Bob.

"Certainly not! I hope I'm not the fellow to snoop a fellow's hamper! You fellows might—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Some fellows are above such things," said Bunter loftily. "I never knew Hobson had a hamper. I never heard Mrs. Kebble speaking to him about it. How could I? I was speaking to Gosling, at his lodge, at the time I was in the House dame's room—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Pretty thick, I think, making out that I had it!" said Bunter. "Why, I couldn't have carried it away; it was too heavy for me to shift. Not that I saw it, you know, or know anything about it. My belief is that Hobson's just swanking about a hamper—making out that he had one. I've known fellows swank like that!"

"You—you never saw it, and—and it was too heavy for you to shift!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Well, you fellows know how heavy it was, as you carried it up the Remove staircase! Fearfully heavy!"

"Then that was Hobby's hamper?"

"Oh, no; nothing of the sort! That was my hamper from home. I say, you fellows, don't you get making out that I know anything about Hobson's hamper," said Bunter anxiously. "Suppose Hacker got on to it? He's frightfully wild already! He would make out that I'd snaffled that hamper if he knew I'd had it—"

"Then you had it!" shrieked Bob.

"Oh, no! I keep on telling you that I never had it. I never went to the House dame's room at all yesterday, and Hobson's hamper certainly was not there when I was there. Besides, I left it there untouched when I went out of the room."

"Oh Christopher Columbus!"

"I hope you fellows can take my word!" said Bunter warmly. "It's a bit ungentlemanly to doubt a fellow's word. Dash it all, you'll be making out next that I'm untruthful—like you fellows! I call it thick!"

The bell for class rang out in the cold and frosty morning, interrupting the

discussion. The Famous Five headed for the Remove Form Room, no longer in doubt as to what had happened to Hobby's hamper. Billy Bunter snorted indignantly as he rolled after them.

Mr. Quelch had a rather severe expression on his face when he let his Form into the Remove-room. The Removites, as they took their places, could see that something was coming. It came!

"Yesterday," said Mr. Quelch, his gimlet eye roving over his Form, "as some of you are doubtless aware, an extraordinary thing occurred in the quadrangle. A hamper appears to have been dropped from a window, falling on a member of Dr. Locke's staff. Mr. Hacker has made a very serious complaint on this subject. It is not a laughing matter, Vernon-Smith!" added Mr. Quelch sharply.

"Oh," said the Bounder, "my mistake, sir! I thought it was!"

There was a chuckle. It was the first day in class. The Bounder was beginning early!

"Vernon-Smith, take a hundred lines!" snapped Mr. Quelch. Having thus reduced Smithy to seriousness, the Remove-master went on. "Some boy appears to have acted very carelessly in throwing an empty hamper from a window. As it occurred under the Remove windows, Mr. Hacker feels assured that it was the action of a boy in this Form. I am bound to inquire into the matter."

Billy Bunter kept his eyes and his spectacles on the desk before him. He was anxious not to meet the gimlet eye that was boring into the Remove.

"Every boy in this Form who brought a hamper back to the school yesterday will stand up!" said Mr. Quelch.

Five fellows in the Remove stood up. They were Monty Newland, Hazeldene, Ogilvy, Wibley, and Morgan.

Bunter sat tight! He certainly hadn't brought any hamper back to the school. Hobson of the Shell had brought Bunter's hamper!

Mr. Quelch glanced at the five.

"Where are your hampers now?" he asked.

"Mine's in my study, sir!" said Newland.

"So is mine, sir!" said Wibley.

"Mine's empty in the box-room, sir!" said Hazeldene.

"I gave mine to Trotter to take away after unpacking it, sir!" said Ogilvy.

"So did I, sir!" said Morgan.

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips. Those statements were obviously true. It was easy enough to investigate all of them. Likewise, it was easy enough to ascertain whether any other fellows had brought back a hamper, as all such articles had to pass the inspection of the House dame.

It was clear, therefore, to Mr. Quelch that it was not a Remove hamper that had fallen on Hacker's head. Hacker fancied so, just as he fancied that a Remove boy had bagged his railway ticket. Hacker was a suspicious man!

Hacker's hamper was in official hands, to be traced to the owner. If there had been only five hampers in the Remove, every one of which was open to inspection, obviously one of them was not Hacker's hamper! The matter was settled—to Mr. Quelch's satisfaction—also to Billy Bunter's!

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch at last. "I was sure that no Remove boy would be guilty of such an act. I am quite satisfied."

Several fellows glanced at Bunter. Most of them knew that Bunter had had a hamper, whether he had brought it to the school or not.

But it was nobody's business to give the fat Owl away. Mr. Quelch being satisfied, his Form left him in that state of satisfaction.

The subject was dismissed, and lessons began.

For the first time in his fat career Billy Bunter was glad for lessons to begin. He hoped that he had heard the last now of that mouldy hamper. Bunter had a hopeful nature.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Hard on Hobby!

"HOBSON!"

"Yes, Wingate?"

"You're wanted in your Form-master's study."

"Oh!" said Hobby.

It was after morning classes. Hobson of the Shell was in the quad with his friends, Stewart and Hoskins. They were discussing the mystery of the missing hamper—a mystery that looked as if it might have beaten Sherlock Holmes or Ferrers Locke!

It had not been a happy morning in the Shell. Hacker, never sweet-tempered, had started the new term in an unusually acidulated state. His Form had had the benefit of it. All the Shell had been glad to get clear of Hacker that morning.

"What the dickens does Hacker want?" muttered Hobson, as the Greyfriars captain passed on. "I thought we were done with him for a bit."

"Better go and see!" said Stewart.

"Might have found out something about your hamper, old man!" suggested Hoskins. "I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh, perhaps that's it!" assented Hobson, brightening a little. And he went to his Form-master's study to see what was wanted.

He started a little as he saw Mr. Hacker.

Hacker had not been good-tempered in the Form-room. But his aspect in the Form-room was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with his aspect now. His brows were knitted in thunderous gloom; his eyes glinted beneath them. He looked at Hobson like a Gorgon as the captain of the Shell entered.

"Hobson!" He rapped out the name like a bullet. "Is that your property?"

Hacker, as he spoke, pointed to a large, round hamper that stood by his study table. The startled Hobby blinked at it.

"I—I don't know—" he began.

"Take care what you say, Hobson!" said Mr. Hacker in a grinding voice. "That is the hamper that was flung—hurled—at me yesterday from an upper window—a Remove window! I concluded that the dastardly outrage was committed by a Remove boy. I laid a serious complaint before the Remove master. Now what do I find?"

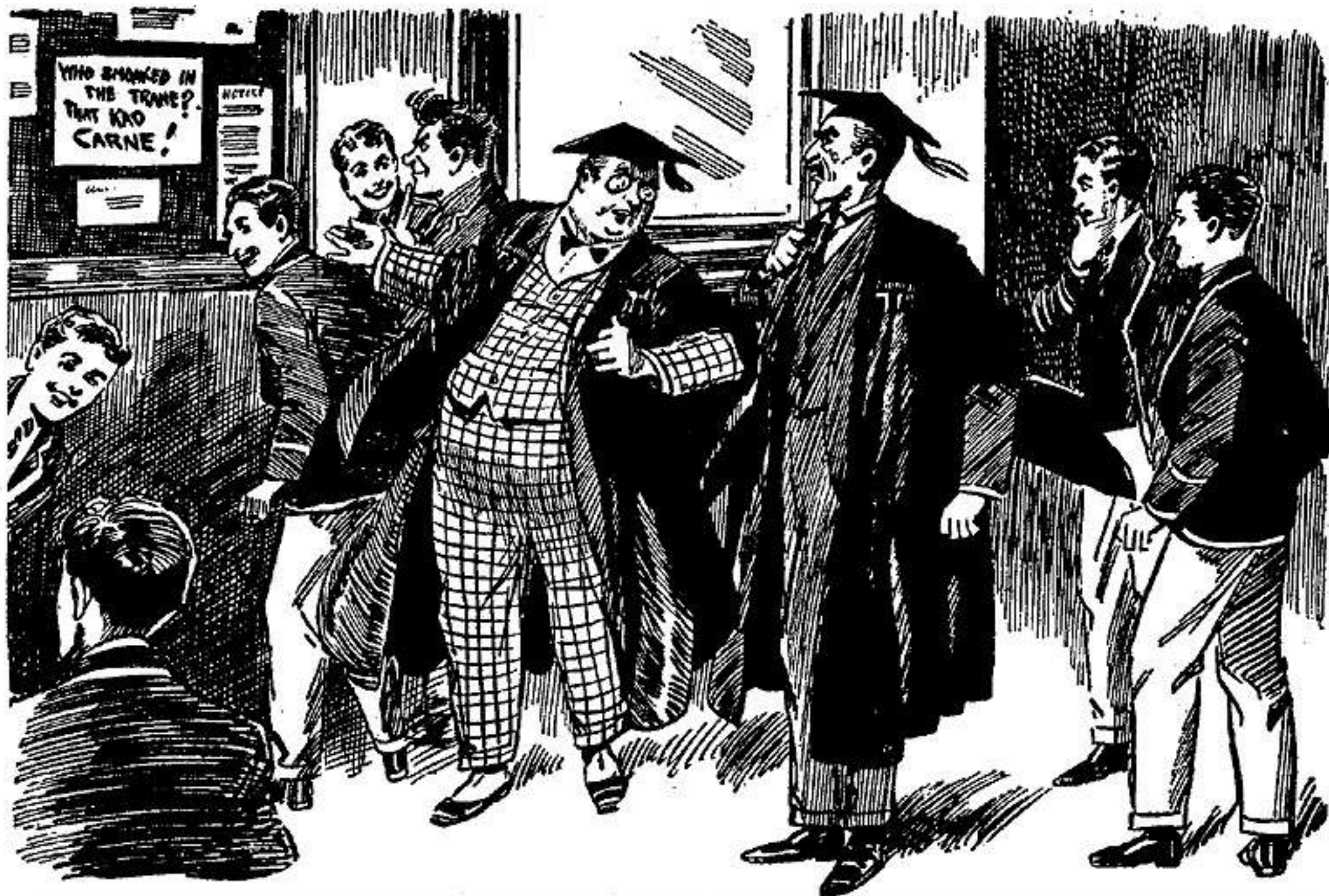
Hobby could only blink at him. He had not the least idea.

"I find," resumed Mr. Hacker in a voice compared with which the filing of a saw was musical—"I find that that hamper belongs to a boy in my own Form!"

"Oh!" gasped Hobby.

He blinked at the hamper. It was the same size and shape as his own, large and round. So, for all he knew, were a dozen others.

"Strict inquiry has been made," pursued Mr. Hacker, "and it transpires that every hamper brought back by a Remove boy can be accounted for. This is not one of them. You are the owner of this hamper, Hobson."



The two masters stared at the extraordinary notice on the board. Mr. Prout frowned portentously while Mr. Hacker looked sardonic. "This is—is amazing!" said the Fifth Form master. "A public affront to a prefect. The implied accusation must, of course, be unfounded!" "Absolutely!" agreed Mr. Hacker. "I have a very high opinion of Carne!"

"It—it looks like mine, sir!" stammered Hobson. "But there may have been others like mine, for all I know, and—"

"Mrs. Kebble has examined this hamper carefully, Hobson, at my request. She had identified it as yours."

"Oh!" gasped Hobby again.

"It happens, fortunately, that Mrs. Kebble gave it particular attention yesterday!" said Mr. Hacker grimly. "It appears that she was doubtful whether so large an amount of food-stuffs could be allowed to pass. While the matter was in abeyance she was called away, and in her absence the hamper was abstracted—"

"I—I know, sir! But—"

"Having taken particular notice of the hamper, Mrs. Kebble identifies it as a matter of certainty!" said Mr. Hacker. "All marks of identification, such as labels, have been removed—carefully—very carefully—but the hamper is identified as yours, Hobson. No doubt you did not expect this, after so carefully removing all marks of identification!" added Mr. Hacker bitterly.

"I—I didn't—"

"You did not expect that the hamper would be traced to you, Hobson! No doubt—no doubt! But it has been traced, as I have told you, and the matter has been placed beyond question."

"But, sir, I—"

"According to Mrs. Kebble's positive statement, no other hamper quite like this one was deposited in her room yesterday. I will, however, give you every opportunity to clear yourself, Hobson! It is a shock—a great shock—to me to find a boy in my own Form guilty of this dastardly outrage. If this is not your hamper, where is your hamper?"

"I—I don't know, sir!" gasped Hobson.

"You—do—not—know!" repeated Mr. Hacker in a terrifying voice.

"Oh crikey!" gasped the hapless Hobson. "No, sir! You see—"

"Take care, Hobson! You admit that you brought a hamper back to school!"

"Oh, yes, sir! I—"

"Do you admit that that is the hamper?"

"It—it looks like it, sir, but—"

"That is the hamper that was hurled at me, Hobson, by an unknown hand! I have been placed in the ridiculous position of laying a complaint before a colleague in connection with an outrage perpetrated by a boy of my own Form. Your cunning—I can use no other word—your cunning in hurling the hamper from the window of another boy's study—a boy in another Form—deceived me."

"I—I—I never—"

"For the last time, Hobson, if that is not your hamper, where is your hamper?" thundered Mr. Hacker.

"I—I can't say, sir! It was—was snaffled—"

"What?"

"I—I mean," gasped Hobson, "that is, bagged, sir—some fellow has got it somewhere—"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "Hobson, I am prepared to admit the remote chance that this is not your hamper. If it is not, your hamper is still in your possession! Where is it?"

"It—it's lost, sir! I—"

"Lost?" roared Mr. Hacker.

"Yes, sir! You see—"

"A hamper of that huge size—lost! Do you dare to stand before me, Hobson, and utter such palpable falsehoods?" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "Say no more! I will hear you no further. Follow me!"

Mr. Hacker strode to the door.

"But, sir—" gasped Hobby.

"Follow me, Hobson! I shall take you to your headmaster! I shall demand a public flogging as the punishment of this outrage! A mere caning will not suffice. Your headmaster will deal with you! Come!"

"Oh crumbs! But I say, sir—"

"Not another word!" thundered Mr. Hacker. "Follow me this instant!"

He strode out of the study.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Hobson.

He followed his Form-master. Stewart and Hoskins were waiting for him at the corner of the passage, and they stared in surprise as Mr. Hacker swept past them like a thundercloud, with Hobby almost tottering at his heels.

"What on earth's the row?" breathed Stewart.

"What's up?" gasped Claude Hoskins.

Mr. Hacker glared round.

"Hobson! How dare you stop to speak to those boys! Follow me instantly!"

"I—I haven't—I—I didn't—"

"Do you desire me to take you to your headmaster by your collar, Hobson? Will you follow me or not?" thundered Mr. Hacker.

"I—I'm coming, sir!" stuttered Hobby.

He hurried after Hacker.

Hoskins and Stewart were left staring in dismay.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Not Gully!

DR. LOCKE raised his eyebrows slightly.

The Head was seated at his writing-table, when Mr. Hacker knocked at his study door, and whisked (Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 13.)

in, followed by the unhappy Hobby. The calm glance of the headmaster recalled Mr. Hacker to himself a little. He composed his features, and unknitted his knitted brows. Greyfriars masters were not supposed to display signs of bad temper—especially in the majestic presence of their great chief.

"What is it, Mr. Hacker?" asked Dr. Locke.

"I regret, sir, to have to report this boy of my Form, and to request you to administer exemplary punishment!" said Mr. Hacker, as calmly as he could. "I have found, sir, that this boy, Hobson, was guilty of the outrage I reported to you yesterday—of hurling a heavy hamper, sir, at my head, from an upper window. I place the matter in your hands, sir."

"Very good!" said the Head. He turned a stern glance on Hobson. "Then it was you, Hobson, who—"

"No, sir! Oh, no!" gasped Hobson. "It wasn't me, sir! Oh, no!"

"Silence, Hobson!" yapped Mr. Hacker. "You are not here to utter falsehoods in the presence of your headmaster."

"I'm not uttering falsehoods!" exclaimed Hobby, with spirit. "And Dr. Locke wouldn't call a fellow a liar without any proof!"

"What—what? How dare you!" Hacker almost choked.

"Be silent, Hobson!" said the headmaster. "There is, I presume, no doubt in this matter, Mr. Hacker?"

"None, sir—absolutely none!"

"I never—" howled Hobson.

"This boy, sir—"

"I will hear what this boy has to say, if anything!" said Dr. Locke. "You deny having thrown the hamper from a window, Hobson?"

"Of course I do, sir! I never did it! Why should I?" gasped Hobson. "I thought a Remove swab had done it, like everybody else, as it was chucked from a Remove window, sir. I never knew it had happened till I heard the row in the quad—somebody called out that a beak was walking about with a hamper on his head, and I went out, and—"

"That will do!" said Dr. Locke hastily. "Mr. Hacker, please tell me what is the proof against this boy?"

"The hamper has been traced to him, sir. I had no doubt, in the first place, that it was a rascally prank played by one of Mr. Quelch's boys, and I laid my complaint before him. A most painful position for me, sir, as the culprit proves to be a boy in my own Form!"

"No doubt!" assented the Head. "Hobson, do you admit that the hamper is your property?"

"It looks like mine, sir; but—but there might be a dozen hampers like mine about—"

"The only one, sir!" said Mr. Hacker. "Mrs. Kebble's statement is positive on that point!"

"That matter is easily decided, Mr. The Magnet Library.—No. 1,510.

Hacker. If it is not Hobson's hamper, he can produce his hamper."

"I have directed him to do so, sir, and he has the astounding impudence to state that his hamper is lost—a hamper, sir, a large hamper—lost—as if it could be lost!" gasped Mr. Hacker.

"That is certainly a most extraordinary statement. Hobson, do you adhere to your statement that your hamper is lost?" asked the Head sternly.

"Yes, sir! Everybody knows it's lost!" gasped Hobson. "Ask any chap in the Shell, or the Fourth and Remove, for that matter. Everybody knows it was lost yesterday, sir. I was asking everybody at Greyfriars whether they'd seen it."

Hacker looked at him as if he could have bitten him.

"It is, of course, obvious that an article of such size could not possibly be lost, Dr. Locke."

"That is, of course, obvious!" said the Head. "If Hobson cannot produce his hamper, we must take it as proved that the one that was thrown from the study window was Hobson's."

"But it was lost, sir!" wailed Hobson. "I never saw it after Mrs. Kebble told me to leave it with her for examination. Some other fellow took it by—by mistake!"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Hacker.

"One moment," said the Head quietly. "It is possible, at least, that such a mistake can have occurred. Was not your name on the hamper, Hobson?"

"Yes, sir; there was a label with my name on it."

"You hear him, sir? Obviously no such mistake can have occurred when the name was on the hamper."

"It is certainly very difficult to believe in such a mistake, in such circumstances!" said Dr. Locke.

Hobson opened his mouth—and shut it again. It had long since dawned on Hobby that there had been no "mistake" in the matter, but that some unscrupulous young rascal had snaffled his hamper. But he did not want to tell the Head so.

"This boy's prevarications, sir—" said Mr. Hacker.

"One moment," said the Head again. "Hobson tells us that a large number of boys were aware that the hamper was lost yesterday. Can you give me the names of such boys, Hobson?"

"Every man in the Shell, sir," said Hobson readily, "and nearly all the Fourth and the Remove. Some of the Third and Second, and some of the Fifth Form men."

"Will all these boys bear out your statement, Hobson?"

"Certainly, sir! They all jolly well know that I was hunting all over the shop for my hamper, long before that happened to Mr. Hacker."

Mr. Hacker looked at him—rather less as if he wanted to bite him. Even the hasty, acid, bitter-tempered Hacker was impressed by this. Hobby could scarcely have offered to call that swarm of witnesses, unless they were going to testify in his favour.

"Now, Hobson," said Dr. Locke, "tell me where you were at the time of the attack on your Form-master. There is no doubt, Mr. Hacker, that the hamper was thrown from a Remove study?"

"None, sir! It was for that reason I complained to Mr. Quelch—"

"Precisely! Were you in a Remove study at the time, Hobson?"

"I haven't been in a Remove study at all this term, so far, sir."

"Where were you at that time?"

"In the Rag, sir! I was asking some fellows if they'd seen anything of my hamper, and then a man called in that

a beak was walking about the quad with a hamper on his head, and I ran out."

"Who was with you at the time, Hobson?"

"Stewart and Hoskins, sir, and Carr, of my Form. There were some Remove men in the Rag, too—Redwing, Field, Mauleverer, and Fish, and some more."

Dr. Locke glanced at Mr. Hacker.

"If the boys named bear out Hobson's statement, Mr. Hacker—"

Hacker's face was a study.

He had had no doubt—not a shadow of doubt—that if he traced the owner of that hamper, he had traced the perpetrator of the "outrage." He had taken that for granted, as a matter of course.

But he had to realise now, that he had taken too much for granted.

Obviously, if Hobson had been with a crowd of fellows in the Rag at the time of that outrage, he had not hurled the hamper from the window of a Remove study. And he was prepared to call a still more numerous crowd to prove that his hamper had been lost before the outrage occurred.

Mr. Hacker's feelings, at that moment, were not enviable.

He had marched a boy of his own Form to the headmaster to demand severe punishment, only to have it demonstrated that that boy was perfectly innocent—that being so clear now, that even Hacker could not doubt it.

There was a long pause.

Hobby suppressed a grin. He was feeling safe now. As he told Stewart and Hoskins afterwards, he had the Acid Drop in a cleft stick.

"Do you desire the boys named to be sent for and questioned, Mr. Hacker?" asked Dr. Locke, with a very cold note in his voice.

"Hem! It—it seems unnecessary, sir!" said Mr. Hacker haltingly. "It—it would appear that—that I was—was in error—hem!"

"In that case, Mr. Hacker, we may take it that Hobson is completely cleared of this charge?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! Certainly! It—it appears—"

"Very good! You may go, Hobson. Kindly remain a few minutes, sir," added the Head to Mr. Hacker.

Hobby left the study. He did not envy Hacker those "few minutes" with his chief! Hacker had been hasty and unjust; and Hobby had no doubt that there was going to be a heart-to-heart talk, after he was gone, which, in his opinion, served Hacker jolly well right.

Stewart and Hoskins, and a dozen other fellows, were waiting for Hobby when he came away. His cheerful grin reassured them.

"The old ass!" said Hobby. "What do you think? The old goat fancied it was me chucked that hamper at his silly napper yesterday, me, you know! The Head jolly soon got it out that it wasn't! I say, he's jawing Hacker now, I hope he'll rub it in! Serve him jolly well right, what?"

And there was general agreement that it did!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Reported!

ARTHUR CARNE, of the Sixth Form, caught his breath.

It was the following day, after class: and Carne of the Sixth had seen Mr. Quelch walk down Masters' Passage, and turn the corner, on his way to Masters' Common-room.

Having observed that carefully, Carne of the Sixth reasonably and naturally supposed that Quelch was clear of his study for a time. Any fellow would have supposed so.

For which reason, Carne was now standing at Mr. Quelch's telephone, in Mr. Quelch's study, with the receiver to his ear: and the husky voice of Bill Lodgey, horse-dealer and bookmaker, was coming through to his ear;

"You're on, sir!"

Carne was glad to know that he was on, so far as that went. He had had a sure snip: one of those tips straight from the horse's mouth, on which a fellow might have put his shirt.

It was a risky business, ringing up a man like Lodgey from the school. But when a fellow had such a snip, it was worth a little risk.

Carne was anxious to be "on." For if Love o' Mike won the following day, at four to one, Carne was going to bag four pounds from Mr. Lodgey: and Carne knew that Love o' Mike was going to win, at least, he was sure of it.

Quelch being safe off the scene, it was easy to borrow his phone for a few minutes. Carne had borrowed it—and he was on. Lodgey's husky voice had just told him so, over the wires.

And even as Lodgey's voice sounded in one of Carne's ears, into the other penetrated the voice of Mr. Quelch.

"Really, Hacker—"

Mr. Quelch and Mr. Hacker were just outside the study door!

Quelch, whom Carne had seen off safely for the Common-room, had evidently turned back. Hacker, it seemed, had intercepted him. Both of them were at the study door, and Arthur Carne, Sixth Form prefect, was standing at the telephone within, talking to a bookmaker, for which he was liable to the sack on the spot if found out.

Carne stood, for a second, petrified. Then he jammed the receiver back on the hook cutting off so suddenly that Mr. Lodgey at the other end was probably surprised. Carne's heart thumped.

The door-handle was already turning! How was he to explain his presence there?

A Sixth Form prefect had only to ask permission to use a telephone if the call he had to make was above board. But the kind of call that Carne had made had to be kept awfully secret. If Quelch knew that he had used the phone, what was he going to think—and suspect?

Carne had to find some excuse for his presence in Quelch's study. And he had to find it quick.

The door opened.

Carne stepped away from the telephone, even as it opened. Luckily for him, neither of the masters observed him for the moment.

Quelch was looking intensely annoyed. Hacker was looking very angry. They paused at the open doorway.

"The matter, sir, cannot rest where it is!" said Hacker. "That the outrage was perpetrated by a Remove boy is certain—"

"I see no reason whatever to suppose anything of the kind," said Mr. Quelch. "If you have anything in the nature of evidence to lay before me, I am prepared to hear it."

The two beaks came into the study. Then they became aware of Carne. Hacker gave him an acid glance, Quelch a look of surprise.

"Carne! What do you want here?" asked the Remove master.

"I—I came to—to speak to you, sir, and as you were not here I thought I would wait a few minutes—"

stammered Carne.

"Very well. What is it?"

Carne had to say something. Fortunately, for him, though not fortunately for a certain member of Mr. Quelch's Form, he had thought of something to say.

"I think, sir, I ought to report to you something that occurred on the first day of term," he said. "In connection with Bunter, of your Form, sir."

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows.

"It is now the third day of term, Carne," he said coldly. "If you had anything to report concerning Bunter, of my Form, you appear to have left it very late."

Carne realised that. But he could not explain to Mr. Quelch that he had not intended to bother about the matter at all, but had just thought of it as an excuse to account for his presence in the study.

pleasantly. "Please tell me what it is, Carne."

"It concerns what amounts to an act of dishonesty, sir," said Carne. He was quite self-possessed now. "I had a carriage on the train to myself, from Lantham to Courtfield, on the day we came back. I found, however, that Bunter was concealed under the seat. He was travelling without a ticket, and I warned him that I should report his conduct to you."

"You should have done so without delay!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I have done so now, sir!" said Carne.

Mr. Hacker almost grinned.

"Bunter was travelling without a ticket, concealed under the seat of a railway carriage!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir!" said Carne, glancing at him: rather surprised that the master of the Shell butted in.

"Precisely!" said Hacker. "Now, Mr. Quelch, what becomes of Bunter's statement that he did not pick up the ticket

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"Oh, quite, sir!" he said. "I was unwilling to trouble you with the matter: but, after thinking it over, it seems to me that I ought to mention it to you."

"You may proceed!" said Mr. Quelch. "If you will excuse me for a few moments, Mr. Hacker!" he added, with a touch of polite sarcasm.

"Certainly," said Mr. Hacker.

There was a gleam in Hacker's eyes. He was extremely interested to hear what Carne had to report concerning Bunter on the first day of term.

Hacker had by no means forgotten the episode of the lost ticket. It had been driven into the background by the affair of the hamper, that was all.

Since that hamper had bonneted Hacker, his whole attention had been concentrated on the trail of the hamper hurler! He had been going to question Carne, when the hamper had happened. Since then he had used no other, so to speak. But he was very interested now.

"Well?" said Mr. Quelch sharply. His eyes were on Carne, far from

I dropped at Courtfield? What becomes of his statement that he found his own ticket and gave it up at Friardale, now that a Sixth Form prefect reports that he was travelling in concealment without a ticket at all?"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard and deep. This was a facer for him.

He had stood by a boy in his own Form, as he was bound to do, in the absence of proof. Here was the proof.

"Carne!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "You should have reported this to me at once, if at all. You have been guilty of negligence, indeed, of neglect of duty."

"I—" began Carne.

"You need say no more, Carne! You may leave my study, and send Bunter to me!"

"Very well, sir."

Carne of the Sixth left the study. He scowled as he went down the passage.

He had failed to report Bunter's rascality, partly from carelessness, but partly because Bunter had seen him smoking on the train, and he considered

that the least said was the soonest mended. He would not have reported the fat Owl at all, had not Quelch caught him so unexpectedly in the study. Anyhow, Quelch had no suspicion that he had been using the telephone, and he was safe in that quarter.

He looked in the Rag for Bunter. Most of the Remove were there after tea. A fat voice greeted his ears as he opened the door and scowled in.

"I say, you fellows, my postal order hasn't come after all! It's rather rum, you know, but it hasn't—"

"The rumfulness is terrific, my esteemed, idiotic Bunter!"

"The rumfulness would be still more terrific, if it did come!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Bunter!" snapped Carne.

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles.

"Eh? Did you call me, Carne?"

"You're wanted in your Form-master's study! Go at once!"

"Oh crikey! I say, it wasn't me, Carne!" exclaimed Bunter, in great alarm.

"What wasn't you, you young ass?" asked Carne, staring at him.

"Oh! Anything! I mean, nothing!" stammered Bunter. "I—I say, what does Quelch want me for, Carne?"

"I dare say he will tell you!" snapped Carne, and he walked away.

And Billy Bunter, with a dire dread that something regarding Hobson's hamper had come to light, rolled uneasily away to his Form-master's study. Bunter had quite forgotten the episode of the railway ticket. He was going to be reminded of it now—painfully!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Poor old Bunter!

"O W!"

"What—"

"Poor old Bunter!"

"Ow! Wow! Yow! Ow! Wow!"

Harry Wharton & Co. and every other fellow in the Rag gazed at Bunter, as he rolled back into that apartment.

Bunter had only been gone ten minutes.

But it looked as if something had happened in that brief space.

He came into the Rag wriggling like an eel. His fat face was woebegone; he uttered a series of moans, groans, and mumbles; he squeaked and he squealed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Been through it, old fat man?" asked Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"Ow!" said Bunter in a tone of deep feeling. "Wow!"

"Did it hurt?" asked Skinner.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

"Well, old fat bean, if they've found out about Hobby's hamper—" said Harry Wharton. "You can't bonnet a beak, and nothing said, you know!"

"Ow! It wasn't that! Wow!"

"That's still a pleasure to come," remarked Skinner. "They're bound to spot you sooner or later."

"Ow! I say, you fellows— Wow! Oh crikey! Ow!" moaned Bunter.

"Sit down, old chap!" said Lord Mauleverer. He vacated his own armchair for the suffering Owl.

Bunter sat down; he reposed in that armchair for about the millionth part of a second, then he bounded.

"Ow! Wow! I don't want to sit down! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter leaned on the table and groaned. Sympathetic fellows surrounded him.

Billy Bunter was the fellow to make a tremendous fuss over a very little damage, but it was clear that in this case Bunter really was damaged; Quelch evidently had let himself go.

"But what—" asked Harry Wharton, puzzled.

"That beast Carne!" groaned Bunter.

"What have you been doing to Carne?"

"Ow! Nothing! The worm! The cad! The rotter! I'd forgotten all about it! Ow! Raking it up after all this time, you know! Wow! The beast! Ow!"

"But what—" asked Nugent.

"Making out that I was travelling without a ticket the day we came back," moaned Bunter. "Suspicious beast, you know! Just because he found me under the seat in his carriage, you know! Ow!"

"Oh crikey! You don't think that was enough to make anybody suspicious?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And that beast Hacker—ow!—making out I bagged his ticket!" groaned Bunter. "As if I'd bag a man's ticket, you know! Besides, he shouldn't have dropped it! How was I to know it was his ticket? Besides, I never picked it up! I told Quelch I never saw it, and that I didn't know it was Hacker's ticket when I saw it! And—and what do you think, you fellows? He didn't believe me!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"He's doubted my word before!" said Bunter. "It's rotten ungentlemanly, but he has! Quelch is no gentleman! Wow! That beast Hacker was there, making out that I was dishonest—me, you know!"

"Now, I wonder what could have given Hacker an impression that Bunter was dishonest, you men?" said the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, his rotten, suspicious mind!" said Bunter. "Ow! Careless old ass, you know, dropping his tickets about railway stations! Making out that a fellow picked it up, too! Just because I gave up a ticket at Friardale when I hadn't one! That's the sort of justice we get here! Wow!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" growled Johnny Bull. "People can be sent to chokey for swindling the railway company!"

"Beast! If you fellows hadn't left me behind at Lantham it would have been all right; one of you could have paid my fare. Ow! But fancy that beast Carne raking it up after days! I thought he'd forgotten. Ow! I told him I'd keep it dark about him smoking on the train if he didn't report me. Ow! One good—wow!—turn deserves another. Wow!"

"Dash it all! It's rather thick, leaving it hanging about all this time, and then reporting a man," said Vernon-Smith. "Cat-and-mouse trick."

"Oh, Carne's a rotter!" said Bob Cherry.

"I'll jolly well make him sit up for it!" groaned Bunter. "I'm jolly well going to tell the Head he was smoking on the train!"

"You think the Head will believe it?" asked Skinner with a chuckle.

"It's true!" howled Bunter. "He was smoking like a furnace! Matches and fag-ends all over the floor!"

"I shouldn't wonder!" grinned Skinner. "I jolly well know that Carne

and Loder smoke in their studies. But—"

"I'll go straight to the Head and say— Yow! Ow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fat duffer!" said the Bounder.

"What proof have you got?"

"Eh? My word," said Bunter.

"Oh crikey!"

"I—I say, you fellows, d-d-do you think the Head would think that I made it up just because Carne reported me for a licking?" asked Bunter.

"Haven't you?" granted Johnny Bull.

"No, you beast!" howled Bunter.

"It's true!"

"How can it be true, coming from you?" argued Johnny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Ow! I've had a fearful whopping! Ow! Quelch was insulting, too!" moaned Bunter. "He said I was a young rascal! Me, you know! He said I was untruthful!"

"Did—did—did he?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"He jolly well did! Just as if he was speaking to a fellow like you, you know—"

"Eh?"

"I told him that I never even saw Hacker's ticket, and that I walked on, leaving it exactly where Hacker dropped it—"

"Oh scissors! And after that he said you were untruthful?" stuttered Smithy.

"Yes, old chap; he actually used the words 'untruthful young rascal!' Fancy that!"

"Only fancy!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I've got to pay the half-crown, too!" said Bunter. "Hacker drops his tickets about, and I've got to pay for them! That's what they call justice here! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites.

"Oh, cackle!" said Bunter bitterly. "Cackle! I'll jolly well make Carne sit up for playing such a dirty trick on a chap, I know that! Letting a fellow think it was all over, and then raking it up like this! Wow!"

"Well, a fellow's a cad to play cat-and-mouse like that!" said Harry Wharton. "But you've only got what you deserved, old fat bean, if that's any comfort to you."

"Beast!"

Apparently that was no comfort to Bunter.

For a long, long time Billy Bunter moaned and groaned and mumbled. The lamentations of Job in ancient times had nothing on the lamentations of Bunter after that tremendous whopping from Quelch.

Undoubtedly Quelch had laid it on hard; he had felt it his duty to do so—and Quelch was a whale on duty. Billy Bunter could have done very well with a much less dutiful Form-master.

The hapless, fat Owl was still emitting occasional squeaks when the Remove went to their studies for prep that evening. At prep, in Study No. 7, he wriggled and wriggled, and there was a gleam in his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles; thoughts of vengeance were working in Billy Bunter's fat mind.

"Let him wait!" said Bunter suddenly and dramatically.

"Eh?" asked Peter Todd, looking up from prep. "Who?"

"That beast Carne!" said Bunter. "I'd jolly well like to make Quelch sit up, Toddy, but I—I won't!"

"No, I shouldn't!" agreed Peter.

"I'd jolly well like to boot Hacker, too, but—but I won't!"

"No; better not!" grinned Peter.



As Carne came round one side of the table, Bunter scuttled round the other, and took refuge behind Wingate. "I say, Wingate, stop him!" gasped the fat Removite. "I never stuck a cheeky label on his door!" "Hold on, Carne—" "Will you stand aside, Wingate?" yelled Carne angrily. "No!" said the Greyfriars captain cheerfully. "I won't!"

"But let that cad Carne wait!" said Bunter. "I'll make him sit up! I'll make him cringe, I'll make him squirm!"

"How?" asked Peter, with interest. "I haven't thought that bit out yet," confessed Bunter.

And Toddy chuckled and resumed prep; he thought that Billy Bunter would probably be quite a long time thinking that bit out.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Making Carne Cringe!

"O H, my hat!"
"Great pip!"
"Look!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was morning break, and some of the fellows had come along to the rack to look for letters. For once Billy Bunter was not there to ascertain whether his celebrated postal order had arrived.

But though Billy Bunter was not there, it was evident to all eyes that he had been there. Remove fellows remembered that he had been allowed to go out in second lesson to fetch a forgotten book. Now they knew why he had forgotten that book.

On the board under the rack there were several notices pinned. Among them was a large and conspicuous one, in sprawling capitals, daubed with a brush. It bore the startling inscription:

**"WHO SMOAKED IN THE TRANE?
THAT KAD CARNE!"**

Remove fellows who saw that startling paper had no doubt of the author. They knew of Bunter's feud with Carne of the Sixth; and they knew Bunter's

spelling. Bunter, evidently, had thought that "bit" out, and decided how he was going to make Carne of the Sixth cringe and squirm.

But Potter and Greene of the Fifth, who had come along with Coker of that Form, looked startled. They did not think of Bunter. They thought of Coker! They were not closely acquainted with Bunter's spelling. But they were acquainted with Horace Coker's.

"I—I say, I'd take that down if I were you, Coker, old man!" murmured Potter.

Coker of the Fifth stared at the paper.

"Eh? Why should I?" he asked.

"Well, Carne's a prefect!" said Greene. "You don't want a row in the Sixth, Coker!"

"Nothing to do with me, is it?" asked Coker, staring.

"Oh!" gasped Potter and Greene together. "Didn't you—"

"Don't be silly asses!" said Coker, frowning. "Think I spell like that?"

Potter and Greene did. That was why they had fancied it was Coker's handiwork.

"Think I'd spell 'who' with only one 'o'?" asked Coker scornfully. "Don't be silly goats if you can help it!"

And Coker walked away, frowning. Potter and Greene followed him, grinning. Coker was not the guilty man. Had he been, evidently, the spelling would have been still more original: "who" would have been spelt "whoo."

"Who the dickens can have put that up?" asked Hobson of the Shell.

"Some fag who wants whacking for his spelling!" grinned Temple of the Fourth.

"Jolly old Bunter!" chuckled Skinner.

"The Bunterfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Better take it down before a beak or prefect sees it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

But it was not easy to take it down. Instead of being pinned to the board, that paper—a whole foolscap sheet—was gummed on. The gum had had plenty of time to dry. That paper had to be scraped off, if it was to come off at all.

"What is this? What?" It was Prout's boom. "Bless my soul! What?"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker.

Prout and Hacker had come along together. Bob, who was opening a penknife to attempt to detach that remarkable paper, put the penknife back into his pocket. There was nothing doing now.

The two masters stared at that extraordinary paper. Mr. Prout frowned portentously, while Hacker looked sardonic.

"This is—is amazing!" said the Fifth Form master. "This is a public affront to a prefect! The implied accusation must, of course, be unfounded."

"Absolutely unfounded," agreed Mr. Hacker. "I have a very high opinion of Carne of the Sixth Form."

Hacker's high opinion of Carne of the Sixth Form was founded upon the fact that it was through Carne that Bunter had been nailed in the matter of the railway ticket. Hacker had had the pleasure of seeing Bunter whopped, and the still greater pleasure of scoring over Quelch. So he had quite a high opinion of that dutiful prefect, Arthur Carne of the Sixth Form.

More and more fellows gathered round, to stare and grin and chuckle.

No Remove man, at least, doubted that that paper was the work of William George Bunter. But they were not, of course, going to say so in the presence of beaks.

Loder and Carne and Walker came up together, wondering what was on. They stared at the paper, and Carne gave a jump.

"That's to your address, old man!" murmured Loder.

"But who the dooce—" said Walker.

Carne gritted his teeth. He knew who. It was Bunter of the Remove who had seen him smoking in the train on the first day of term.

"Carne!" Mr. Hacker glanced round at him. "I recommend you, Carne, to draw the headmaster's attention to this insult. It is a matter for a flogging!"

"I—I shall certainly do so, sir!" gasped Carne.

The two masters walked on, frowning. Such an affront to a Sixth Form prefect was, as Prout remarked, absolutely unprecedented.

"Well, that fat chump has done it now!" remarked Bob Cherry, as the Famous Five went out into the quad.

"The donefulness is terrific."

"Carne will have to take it up!" remarked Nugent. "If Bunter really spotted him smoking, I dare say he'd rather let it drop—but he can't, after that."

"I say, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled up, grinning. There was fat and fatuous satisfaction in the Owl's podgy face.

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at him. Evidently Bunter was completely and happily unaware of danger.

"I say, you fellows, seen anything on the board?" asked Bunter, grinning.

"You howling ass!" said Harry Wharton. "Don't you know it may mean a flogging?"

"Eh? Nothing to do with me, is it?" asked Bunter, blinking at him. "I never put that paper on the board! I haven't seen it—I took jolly good care not to go near it when we came out."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Carne knows it was you spotted him smoking, you fat Owl!" said Bob.

"Yes; but I've told a lot of fellows about it!" said Bunter astutely. "Might have been any chap stuck that paper up. See? Might have been one of you fellows, if you come to that! Carne won't know."

Bunter chortled.

"Safe as houses!" he declared. "Might have been any man in the Remove! They can't pick on me."

"Does any other man in the Remove spell like that?" howled Johnny Bull.

"Eh? What's wrong with the spelling?" asked Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I spell better than you fellows, and chance it!" said Bunter warmly. "Why, only the other day, I saw you spelling 'refuse' with a 'u,' Wharton, instead of a 'w.' You can't spell."

"Oh crikey! Do you think 'smoked' has an 'a' in it?" gasped Wharton.

"Yes, of course! Think there ought to be two 'a's'?" asked Bunter. "I wasn't quite sure; but I thought I'd only put one—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you fellows worry about that!" said Bunter. "The spelling's all right. They'll never guess who did it. I say, that will make that cad Carne cringe. It will get to the Head, you know, sticking it up like that for everybody to see."

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"You want it to get to the Head?" gasped Bob.

"Yes, rather! That beast Carne got me a whopping! I'm going to get him a ragging from the Head, see? The old bean would be fearfully shirty if he found out that his precious prefects smoked in railway trains. He, he, he! He's bound to hear about it now!"

"Not much doubt about that," said Harry. "And I fancy you're going to hear about it, too, you blithering Owl!"

"Rats!" said Bunter. "They won't know that I did it! Besides, if you come to that, I didn't do it!"

"You didn't!" shrieked the Famous Five.

"No! Not me! The fact is, you fellows are jolly suspicious," said Bunter. "The other day you were making out that I had Hobson's hamper. Now you're making out that I stuck that paper on the board! I really think—"

"Bunter!" It was the sharp voice of the Remove master.

Mr. Quelch looked out of the House. Billy Bunter jumped and blinked round through his big spectacles.

"Oh, yes, sir!" he gasped.

"Come here at once, Bunter!"

"Oh crikey!"

The fat satisfaction faded from Billy Bunter's face as if wiped off by a duster as he rolled into the House.

"Poor old Bunter!" murmured Bob. Evidently Bunter was "for" it!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

More Injustice for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER blinked at Mr. Quelch. He blinked at Carne of the Sixth, whose face was set, and whose eyes were glinting. He blinked at the work of his fat hands, still conspicuous on the board.

Bunter's feelings were a mixture of dread and indignation. He dreaded the result, if his handiwork was brought home to him; and he was deeply indignant at being picked upon in this way. There was, so far as Bunter knew, no evidence against him.

Mr. Quelch pointed to the board.

"Did you write that ridiculous paper, Bunter?" he asked.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Bunter promptly.

"Never seen it before, sir?"

"There are few, if any, other boys at Greyfriars, Bunter, who spell so very badly!" said Quelch.

"Isn't the spelling right, sir?" asked Bunter.

Mr. Quelch gave him a glare.

"This paper must have been placed here during second school," he said.

"You were absent from the Form-room in second school, Bunter!"

"I—I went to fetch a book, sir," said the dismayed Owl. "You—you remember I—I left my Latin grammar in my study, sir."

"I remember that you were gone very much longer than was necessary to fetch a book from your study, Bunter. Were you occupied in writing this ridiculous paper and gumming it on the board?"

"Oh, no, sir! There wasn't any gum in my study, sir; and I never looked in Cherry's study for some—"

"What?"

"I—I don't think I ought to be picked on, sir!" squeaked Bunter. "I'm not the only fellow who knows about Carne smoking in the train first day of term. I've told lots of fellows!"

Carne of the Sixth gave him a look. If looks could have slain, probably Billy Bunter's fat career would have terminated on the spot.

"What?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Then you admit, Bunter, that you have made this serious statement about a Sixth Form prefect?"

"I—I told him I'd keep it dark, sir, if he didn't report me!" gasped Bunter. "He jolly well knows I did."

Mr. Quelch looked long and hard at Billy Bunter. Then he looked long and hard at Carne of the Sixth. Carne reddened.

"I need hardly say, sir, that there is no truth in this young rascal's statement!" he said.

"I trust not, Carne!" said Mr. Quelch rather dryly.

"It was certainly Bunter who placed this paper on the board, sir. He has as good as admitted it."

"I haven't!" howled Bunter, in alarm. "I'd like to know how you make out that I did it. Nobody saw me; I jolly well know that! There was nobody about."

"There was nobody about?" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"Not a soul!" said Bunter firmly.

"Everybody was in the Form-rooms except me."

"Then you admit that you did it?"

"Eh—no! I'm saying that I didn't!" gasped Bunter. "I never came near the board. I didn't even look in the rack to see if there was a letter for me. And there wasn't, either."

"There—there—there wasn't?" stammered Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir. I was expecting a postal order, but it hasn't come."

"Then you did look in the rack?"

"Oh, no, sir! I never came near it. I haven't been on the spot at all, sir. I jolly well kept clear on purpose when we came out of Form."

"You kept clear on purpose?" almost babbled Mr. Quelch.

"Well, I thought I'd keep clear," said Bunter. "Not that I knew that paper was stuck there, of course. I'd never seen it; never knew it was there. I—I've only just seen it this minute. Still, I thought I'd keep clear, in case anybody thought I had a hand in it."

Mr. Quelch gazed at that hopeful member of his Form as if dumbfounded.

"Upon my word!" he said at last.

"Can I go now, sir?" asked Bunter.

"You incredibly stupid boy—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"There is no further doubt," said Mr. Quelch. "Carne, you may place this matter before the headmaster, or leave it in my hands, as you prefer."

"I leave it to you, sir," said Carne. He had his own reasons for not desiring to draw Dr. Locke's attention to the matter, if he could help it.

"Very well, Carne. Follow me to my study, Bunter!"

"But—but I say, sir—" gasped Bunter.

"Follow me at once!"

"Oh crikey!"

Mr. Quelch rustled away to his study, and Billy Bunter followed him in low spirits. Somehow—Bunter did not know how—Quelch had made up his mind that Bunter was guilty of that public affront to a member of the august body of prefects. It seemed frightfully unjust to Bunter.

In his study, Quelch picked up a cane from the table.

"Now, Bunter—"

"I—I say, sir, I—I never did it!" wailed Bunter. "And I wouldn't have, either, if Carne hadn't reported me! I told him so in the railway train, where he was smoking! I said that one good turn deserved another—"

"You will bend over that chair, Bunter!"

"Oh crikey! I—I never did it, sir!"

"I am going to cane you for untruth-

fulness, Bunter! Bend over that chair at once!"

"Oh lor'!"

Billy Bunter bent over the chair.

Whack, whack!

"Yow-ow!"

Rather to Bunter's surprise, he received only "two." He had rather expected a full "six." Perhaps Mr. Quelch considered that there were reasons for going easy with that remarkable member of his Form.

Still, two whacks were enough for Bunter. He roared..

Mr. Quelch laid down the cane.

"You may go, Bunter!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Bunter went.

Billy Bunter had stated that he was going to make that beast Carne of the Sixth cringe and squirm. Whether Carne of the Sixth was cringing or not, there was no doubt that Bunter was doing the squirming. He squirmed like an eel as he went down the passage.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner's Stunt!

"**C**HEEKY cad!" said Skinner.
"Who, and which?" asked Bob Cherry.

"That cad Carne!" hissed Harold Skinner.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You taken on Bunter's jolly old feud?" grinned Bob.

Skinner came up the Remove staircase with a furious face. Half a dozen Remove fellows were there before tea, and all of them could see that Skinner had been "whopped." They were not quite sure whether they sympathised, however. Harold Skinner deserved more whoppings than he generally received.

"Six?" asked Vernon-Smith.

Skinner wriggled.

"Yes! The brute came on me in the Cloisters just as I was putting on a smoke! Ow! Six for smoking! Wow!"

"I guess you ain't got a kick coming, Skinner," said Fisher T. Fish. "It's always six for smoking!"

"Serve you jolly well right, if you ask me!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I didn't ask you!" snapped Skinner. "All right from a man like Wingate or Gwynne or Sykes. But Carne—the fellow whom Bunter saw smoking in a train—giving a man six for smoking! Rotten hypocrite!"

Bob Cherry laughed.

"Well, Carne ought to give himself six, if he really did his duty!" he remarked. "But it was his duty to give you six, Skinner!"

"I'll give him duty!" snarled Skinner. "I jolly well believe he was going into the Cloisters for a smoke himself! I know he does sometimes! I wish the Head would spot him there! Ow! Putrid humbug! Wow!"

"I say, you fellows, Carne's an awful rotter!" said Billy Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you, he was smoking like a furnace that day in the train! I offered to keep it dark, and he smacked my head—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if he's so jolly down on smoking in juniors, I'll show him that we're down on smoking in seniors!" said Skinner, between his teeth. "I'd stand it from a man who plays the game like Wingate, but for a smoky cad like Carne to whop a man for smoking, that's too jolly thick! And I jolly well know how to make him sit up, too!"

"How's that?" asked Bob.

"You'll see in a minute!"

Skinner wriggled on to his study.

Most of the fellows on the landing

(Continued on next page.)

The STately HOMES of GREYFRIARS

BUNTER COURT

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

When Bunter falls asleep in dorm,
And starts his famous snoring,
Beneath the bedclothes, snug and warm,
In dreams he goes exploring;
There, in the country of the night,
He finds a famous mansion,
A glorious and a dazzling sight,
A house of great expansion!

(2)

Oh, mighty are its massive walls!
The house itself is fitted
With fifty-seven banquet halls
(But bathrooms are omitted!).
There Bunters sit all day to gorge,
With dukes and earls and princes;
They eat, till even William George
Stops snoring while he winces!

(4)

Ten valets pant and rush about,
His lightest whisper heeding!
He kicks them as he passes out—
This shows his gentle breeding!
Ignoring earls and dukes and lords,
Their mumbled greetings scorning,
He deigns to nod his head when hordes
Of princes cry: "Good-morning!"

(6)

Then, after ridin' for an hour
On motor-cars and horses,
He goes back keenly to devour
A lunch of twenty courses!
He starts with pheasant, soup and fish,
Which sounds extremely pleasant;
And then, to follow up this dish,
More soup, more fish, more pheasant!

(8)

This is a true and clear report
Of Billy Bunter's version
Of that great mansion, Bunter Court!
They run a cheap excursion
To see this wondrous place, and stroll
The woods and hills behind it;
And Bunter loves it heart and soul—
Or would, if he could find it!

(3)

The grandeur of Billy Bunter's
ancestral home described with
a feeling of awe and pride by
our clever long-haired poet.

At every morning sharp at eight
The servants (alias warders!)
Bring in to William George in state
A sack of postal orders.
Then breakfast follows, and once more
The Owl commences eating,
While princes wait outside his door
To give him humble greeting.

(5)

With ridin' boots upon his calves,
He mounts his favourite hunter.
The creature promptly breaks in halves
Beneath the weight of Bunter!
And then he tries a Rolls in vain;
The chauffeur says he's sorry,
He'll find a car to stand the strain—
And brings a ten-ton lorry!

(7)

Outside the massive building lies
The park—a bit of heaven!
It has a lake about the size
Of Somerset and Devon!
The gardens stretch on every hand
In miles of flowers and fountains;
It even has a jungle, and
A mighty range of mountains!

(9)

I think the place has iron bars
Across the window entries,
And guests arrive in closed-up cars,
Escorted there by sentries!
But whether from an aerodrome
You go, or ear or hike it,
To Bunter it is Home, Sweet Home!
(Because there's no place like it!)

Next Week: THE COBBLER'S SHOP,
the home of Dick Penfold.

grinned. Still, it was agreed that Skinner had some cause to be indignant. It was a prefect's privilege and duty to "whop" for smoking, but undoubtedly that prefect was expected not to indulge himself in the practice for which he whopped others.

Six from a decent man like Wingate, Skinner would have taken as all in the day's work; but six from Carne, in the circumstances, annoyed him deeply, and roused his revengeful ire.

He came back along the Remove passage in a few minutes with a slip of paper in his hand. It was a gummed luggage label.

"Look at that!" he said

He held it up. On the gummed label, in place of an address, was written, in block capitals:

"SMOKING-ROOM."

"I'm going to gum that on Carne's study door!" said Skinner.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites.

"Carne's out now!" said Skinner, with a sour grin. "Everybody in the Sixth will see this before he comes in. I hope the Head will walk along to the Sixth and see one of his precious prefects' studies labelled Smoking-Room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter, "Fine!"

"Jolly good scheme!" chuckled the Bounder. "Don't get spotted!"

"I'll watch it!" said Skinner.

He slipped the label into his pocket and lounged down the staircase. There was a chortle on the Remove landing.

There was no doubt that the bully of the Sixth would "sit up" considerably if he found his study labelled Smoking-Room.

Already there had been a great deal of talk and laughter on the subject of Billy Bunter's notice on the board. That had made Carne the talk of the school.

Fellows discussed, all over Greyfriars, whether a fag really had spotted a Sixth Form prefect smoking on the train. That was not the sort of talk to please a senior sportsman who had his little secrets to keep. Carne was anxious for the subject to die out. Skinner's stunt was likely to keep it very much alive!

The juniors watched him over the banisters, as he went. He disappeared in the direction of the Sixth Form studies.

At the corner, Skinner stopped. Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth were talking in the doorway of the former's study.

Skinner became interested in the pigeons in the quad, from a window, till the two great men of the Sixth finished their chat. Gwynne walked away at last, and Wingate shut his door.

The coast was clear!

Skinner wetted the gum on the label, all ready for sticking, and held it in the palm of his hand as he walked quickly down the passage.

Had a Sixth Form door opened he would have walked on, the label still hidden in the palm of his hand.

But no door opened.

Reaching Carne's door, he had to pause hardly a few seconds, to jam the label on the oak.

Leaving it there, he walked on quickly, and turned the corner at the end.

He had not been spotted. But his heart was beating rather fast. Skinner had more malice than nerve; and he was glad to be through.

Five minutes later Skinner came up

the Remove staircase, with a cheery grin on his face. He was still feeling the effects of Carne's ashplant, but he had the satisfaction of having given that dutiful prefect a Roland for his Oliver!

"I say, you fellows, here he comes!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say, have you done it, old chap?"

"I've done it!" answered Skinner. "It's sticking on Carne's door now!"

"He, he, he!"

"Carne will be fearfully wild when he sees it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"That's what I want."

"Lucky you don't leave clues behind you, like Bunter!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner, grinning, went on to his study. The Famous Five gathered in Study No. 1 to tea, where they were honoured by the company of William George Bunter, whose postal order had not yet arrived. But Billy Bunter, for once, did not devote his whole and sole attention to the foodstuffs. He was grinning and chortling over Skinner's stunt and its probable effect on that beast Arthur Carne of the Sixth.

Tea was not over when Hazeldene came up the Remove staircase and paused to look in.

"Bunter here?" grinned Hazel.

"Been at it again, Bunter?"

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunter.

"There's a row on in the Sixth—"

"He, he, he!"

"Somebody's stuck a cheeky label on Carne's door—"

"He, he, he!"

"Better put some exercise books in your bags, old fat man! Think Carne won't know it was you?" asked Hazel.

"Eh? It wasn't me!"

"Wasn't it? I fancy Carne will think it was."

"Oh crikey!"

Hazel, grinning, walked on up the passage. But Billy Bunter was not grinning now. He was not chuckling. His fat face was fearfully serious.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Smoking-Room!"

"H A, ha, ha!"

"Cheek!" said Loder.

"Yes, but—ha, ha, ha!" roared Walker.

"Ha, ha, ha!" bawled Coker of the Fifth. "See that, you men? Ha, ha, ha!"

Sounds of laughter from the Sixth Form passage greeted Carne's ears when he came into the House. He stared. It was quite unusual for a crowd of fellows to gather there—especially laughing loudly, like a mob of fags. But there they were—and Carne wondered what was up. He noticed that they were outside his study door.

Half a dozen of the Sixth were on the spot, as many of the Fifth, and more than a dozen other fellows, attracted by the fact that something was "on." Loder, who pronounced it "cheek," was laughing, with the rest. Coker of the Fifth howled with merriment. More fellows were heading for the spot when Carne came in.

Wingate glanced from his study doorway as Carne passed.

"Anything up?" asked the Greyfriars captain.

"Seems so," answered Carne, puzzled.

"Blessed if I know what!"

There was a sudden howl from Hobson of the Shell, who was in the little crowd outside Carne's door.

"I say, here comes Carne!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"No deception, gentlemen!" said Walker of the Sixth, chuckling. "A man will know now where he can go for a quiet smoke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But who the dickens can have done that?" asked Potter. "It's gummed on the door—"

"Some cheeky fag!" chuckled Greene.

"I've heard that some fag spotted Carne smoking on the train," said Coker. "You remember there was a notice on the board this morning. Ha, ha, ha!"

Carne hurried up. He pushed an angry way through the grinning, chuckling crowd, and stared at the label gummed on his study door. The startling inscription, in clear block capitals, met his staring eyes:

"SMOKING-ROOM."

Carne gazed at it. The other fellows looked at Carne, and looked at one another. Even Sixth Form prefects were grinning over it. Even Wingate grinned as he followed Carne up the passage and saw the label on the door.

Carne did not grin. His face was crimson with fury. He glared round at the grinning crowd.

"Who did this?" he roared.

"Somebody who knows you, Carne!" chuckled Coker of the Fifth. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter—that young scoundrel Bunter!"

Carne jumped to it at once. Bunter had stuck that remarkable notice on the board that morning. Bunter had done this. Carne had no doubt of it.

"This sort of thing won't do!" Wingate suppressed a chuckle. "This is cheek to the prefects. You think it was Bunter, Carne?"

"I know it was!" howled Carne. "It was Bunter this morning; his beak whopped him for it. And now I'll—"

"Hold on!" said Wingate. "I shouldn't think Bunter was asking for another whopping already. Better make sure."

"I tell you I know it was Bunter! Of course it was! By gum, I'll go and root him out, and—"

Carne had his ashplant under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand and strode away up the passage.

More and more fellows gathered. Seldom had the Sixth Form quarters echoed to such merriment.

Wingate hastily followed Carne. He rejoined him as he was tramping savagely up the stairs, ashplant in hand.

"Better make sure, old bean!" said the Greyfriars captain.

Carne gave him an angry glare.

"I tell you I'm sure!" he snarled.

"Well," said Wingate, "I'm not! We'll hear what Bunter has to say, anyhow."

"I don't want you to butt into this, Wingate."

"As head prefect, old bean, I shall butt in, whether you want me to or not," answered the captain of Greyfriars coolly. "You're a bit excited, and you're not going to whop the wrong man."

"I'm going to whop Bunter!" hooted Carne.

"We shall see!"

They arrived in the Remove passage together. A number of Removites were to be seen there, surrounding Hazel, who was telling them the news. They all looked round, grinning, at the sight of the two prefects.



"Ooooooh!" gasped Dr. Locke, as the plank tipped and he plunged into the stream. Instantly Mr. Quelch stretched out a helping hand. The Head grasped it. It was Mr. Quelch's intention to drag his chief out. Unfortunately, it worked the other way, and the struggling man dragged Quelch in. Splash! "Grooooooogh! Help!"

Harry Wharton was looking from the doorway of Study No. 1. Carne called to him.

"Where's Bunter, Wharton?"

An alarmed squeak came from the study behind the captain of the Remove.

"I say, don't tell him I'm here, you know."

Harry Wharton stepped back, and the two Sixth Formers entered the study.

Billy Bunter whipped round the table.

Across the table, he blinked at Carne, in great alarm, through his big spectacles.

"I say, it wasn't me, Carne!" squeaked Bunter.

"You cheeky young rotter!" Carne strode round the table. "Bend over that chair! I'll—"

Bunter did not bend over the chair. As Carne came round one side of the table, Bunter scuttled round the other and took refuge behind Wingate.

"I say, Wingate, stop him!" he gasped. "It wasn't me!"

"Hold on, Carne—"

"Will you stand aside, Wingate?" yelled Carne.

"No!" said the Greyfriars captain cheerfully. "I won't! If it was Bunter stuck that label on your door, Carne, you can whop him, as he deserves. But we'll ascertain the facts first."

"I tell you I know—"

"And I tell you, you don't, yet! Now, Bunter, somebody's been sticking a cheeky paper on Carne's door in the Sixth! Have you been playing your silly prank of this morning over again?"

"Oh dear! No!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! All these fellows know that I haven't been near the Sixth! I say, you fellows, you can tell Wingate—"

"They will all tell lies, of course!" snarled Carne.

"They will all do nothing of the

kind," answered Wingate, while the Famous Five glared at Carne. "We'll get at the facts, if you please. Easy enough to do that."

Carne gritted his teeth. Wingate was taking the matter in hand, as he was entitled to do, as head prefect. Carne was only anxious to get on with the whopping. But the Greyfriars captain meant to have his way, and he had it.

"You deny having played this trick, like the other, Bunter?"

"Oh lor! Yes! Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter. "I never did it! Oh dear! I haven't been near Carne's study."

"We'll make sure of that!" said Wingate. "When were you last in your study, Carne?"

"About half an hour ago!" snarled Carne.

"That label wasn't on your door when you left it?"

"Of course not."

"Then it was stuck on during the last half-hour."

"I know that! What—"

"Where have you been during the last half-hour, Bunter?"

"Up here in the Remove," gasped Bunter. "I came up after class—lots of fellows know."

"Bunter's been in this study for the last quarter of an hour, Wingate," said Harry Wharton. "We've been having tea—"

"And before that he was on the landing, and so was I!" said Bob Cherry. "Bull was there, too—and so was Smithy, and Fishy—and two or three other fellows—more than half an hour ago."

"And before that I was in my study, and Toddy knows!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, Toddy, you tell Wingate—"

Peter Todd was looking in at the door.

"That's true, Wingate," said Peter Todd. "Bunter's been frowsting over

the fire in the study since class, till he went out to try to stick somebody for tea—"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

Most of the Removites, if not all of them, knew that it was Skinner who had labelled Carne's door. They had, of course, no intention of mentioning what they know on that subject. It was a question of proving an "alibi" for Bunter—and there were a dozen fellows to prove it.

The evidence was overwhelming that Billy Bunter had been in the Remove quarters at the time that the label must have been gummed on Carne's door, downstairs in the Sixth. Even Carne had to admit it, unwilling as he was to see his victim escape.

"It was not Bunter!" said Wingate, tersely. "You see that, Carne? Some other cheeky young sweep picked up the idea from that young duffer's idiotic paper on the board this morning. That's clear."

"It was Bunter who started that yarn, anyhow!" said Carne between his teeth. "It would not have got about at all, but for Bunter."

He made a movement towards the fat Owl. But Wingate's stalwart form stood in front of Bunter, and he did not move.

"Bunter's beak has dealt with that, Carne! A fellow can't be whopped twice for the same thing!" said the Greyfriars captain quietly. "It's up to you to spot the young rascal who labelled your door. Come out of this, please."

Carne gave him a look.

He had been absolutely certain that the offender was Bunter. He had to admit that it was not. Gladly he would have whopped the fat junior, all the same. The prospect of spotting the offender was very remote, though he

had no doubt that a dozen fellows could have told him, had they liked. But there was nothing doing—and Carne at last tucked the ashplant under his arm and walked out of the study. Wingate followed him out.

Billy Bunter gasped with relief when they were gone. Carne, for the next ten minutes or so, was busy scraping a gummed label off his study door—under the eyes of a dozen grinning fellows. When he was finished, he went into his study, and slammed the door with a slam that woke every echo in the Sixth.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Very Dutiful Prefect!

"MR. QUELCH, the matter cannot rest where it is!"

"Mr. Hacker, I fail to see that it is my concern!"

Mr. Quelch walked into his study. Mr. Hacker remained in the passage, frowning.

Quelch's door closed.

Hacker drew a deep breath and walked up Masters' Passage.

It was the affair of the hamper that worried Hacker. The term was now nearly a week old. Billy Bunter had dismissed that affair from his mind long ago. Mr. Hacker had not.

A heavy hamper, on the head, was one of those things that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Hacker had had a rap on the head; he had been made to jump almost out of his skin; worst of all, he had been made to look ridiculous. Mr. Hacker was very particular about his dignity, and his dignity had been badly damaged. Hacker was as keen as ever on tracking down the hamper-hurler. He had tracked down the wrong man, and very nearly succeeded in getting a boy of his own Form a flogging for nothing—and he had had to listen to some straight talk from his chief on the subject of hasty judgments! This, of course, had not pleased or gratified Hacker at all.

The hamper had been hurled from a Remove window. After Hobby's happy escape, Mr. Hacker returned to his

original theory, that it had been hurled by a Remove boy. He had little doubt that the hurler was one of those cheeky young rascals, Harry Wharton & Co., who had cheeked him on the train. Quelch declined to share his opinion, or even to take up the matter at all. In Quelch's opinion, it was time the matter dropped. In Hacker's, it was not.

As he reached his study door, after leaving the Remove master, Mr. Hacker saw a Sixth Form prefect standing there, apparently waiting for him. He frowned at Carne of the Sixth. Not that Carne had given any offence—in fact, he had risen in Hacker's estimation, over the affair of the railway ticket. Hacker frowned because he was in a bad temper.

"If I may speak to you a few minutes, sir—" said Carne.

"What is it, Carne?" snapped Mr. Hacker. He was in no mood to listen to reports about fellows in his Form!

"About what happened on the first day of the term, sir," said Carne.

Mr. Hacker looked quite genial.

"You mean the hurling of the hamper from a Remove window, Carne?"

"Yes, sir! I understood that it was your wish that the prefects should make every possible investigation," said Carne smoothly.

"Most certainly," said Mr. Hacker. "Most decidedly. If you have made any discovery, Carne—"

"I think so, sir."

"Very good! Please step into my study!"

Carne stepped into Mr. Hacker's study. Hacker, who seldom looked genial, almost beamed on him. Carne, it seemed, was the only member of the august body of prefects who realised how very serious and important this matter was. Hacker's estimation of Carne, already high, rose higher.

"I have been making some inquiries, sir!" said Carne. "I felt that such a matter as an assault on a member of Dr. Locke's staff could not be allowed to pass. It seems to be beyond question that Hobson's hamper was taken by some boy to whom it did not belong, and it can hardly be doubted that it

was thrown from the window by the same boy—"

"Doubtless!" assented Mr. Hacker. "A Remove boy?"

"I think so, sir."

Mr. Hacker's eyes gleamed. This would be another "facer" for Quelch, if it could be proved.

"Please go on, Carne," he said.

"There is a boy in the Remove, sir, who has been punished more than once for such offences," said Carne glibly. "He has been caned for going down to the pantry, and such things. A boy named Bunter."

"Bunter!" repeated Mr. Hacker.

"I found, sir," went on Carne, "that Mrs. Kebble was called away from her room on the first day of the term, and that it was during her absence that the hamper was abstracted. It occurred to me to inquire just how and why she was called away, as it might throw some light on the matter."

Mr. Hacker smiled.

"You are quite a detective, Carne! And the result?"

"I learned, sir, that Mrs. Kebble was called away on that occasion by Bunter, with an alarm of something burning in the Rag. On proceeding there, however, Mrs. Kebble found that it was a false alarm."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hacker.

"Mrs. Kebble thought that it was a case of a foolish boy making a mistake. I do not think so, sir. It seems quite clear to me that Bunter deliberately tricked Mrs. Kebble away, with designs on the hamper."

"Nothing could be clearer!" said Mr. Hacker. "If I had been aware of this, I should have known what to think. I shall go to Mr. Quelch at once, and demand that Bunter be questioned. I must say, Carne, that I have a very high opinion of your sense of a prefect's duty, and can only admire the keenness with which you have carried it out."

"Thank you, sir!" said Carne, with a dutiful snirk.

Mr. Hacker was quite unaware that Carne had his own account to settle with Bunter of the Remove.

Bunter had started the smoking story, which had led to some other young rascal labelling Carne's study the "Smoking-Room." Carne could not whop Bunter for what some other young rascal had done. Bunter, if he was to be whopped, had to be whopped for his own sins. That, though the master of the Shell never dreamed of suspecting it, was the reason why that dutiful prefect had so dutifully pursued the affair of the snaffled hamper.

Carne had been cudgelling his brains for some "handle" against Bunter. The affair of the hamper came in useful to that end, that was all.

Billy Bunter's reputation as a grub-raider put the idea into his head, and he remembered that Hacker had been standing under the window of Study No. 7 in the Remove when the hamper dropped.

Then his inquiry of the House dame made matters quite clear. Bunter had snaffled that hamper, and Bunter, in consequence, was the fellow who had thrown it from the window. Carne of the Sixth did not care two hoots, or one, whether a dozen hampers dropped on Hacker. But he had the hapless fat Owl where he wanted him now. Bunter was going to have something to think of, other than telling smoking stories about Sixth Form prefects!

Mr. Hacker rubbed his hands.

"Please come with me, Carne," he said.

"Certainly, sir!"

Carne followed him down the passage.

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to Mr. Quelch's study. Hacker tapped and entered, and the Remove master glanced up at him with ill-concealed impatience.

"Mr. Quelch—" began Hacker. "One moment, sir!" Quelch raised his hand. "If it is the affair of the hamper again, I must say that I have no time—I may add, no inclination—" "Will you allow me to speak, sir?" said Hacker acidly. "The perpetrator of that dastardly outrage has now been discovered, and it is a boy in your Form."

"I do not believe so, sir, for one moment," said Mr. Quelch.

"Carne has now brought the facts to light!" said Mr. Hacker. "Facts, sir, that might have been brought to light by yourself, had you investigated the matter a little more thoroughly, sir."

"Really, Mr. Hacker—" "Really, Mr. Quelch—"

"Kindly tell me what you have discovered, Carne—if anything!" said the Remove master, breathing hard.

"I considered it my duty, sir—" "Please come to the point!"

Carne came to the point.

Mr. Quelch listened, with a knitted brow. Then he stepped to his window and called to a Remove boy in the quad.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!" Harry Wharton looked round.

"Please send Bunter to my study at once!"

"Yes, sir!"

Harry Wharton hurried away in search of Bunter. Mr. Quelch sat down at his table again, and rather pointedly resumed marking Form papers. Perhaps he desired to make it clear that he had no time to waste, if Mr. Hacker had.

Five minutes elapsed before Bunter arrived. Probably the Owl of the Remove was in no hurry to come.

But he arrived at last. There was a tap at the door, and it opened to reveal the fat face and glimmering spectacles of the fat Owl.

Bunter blinked at Mr. Quelch uneasily; then at Hacker, in alarm; then at Carne, in greater alarm. Why he had been sent for, Bunter did not know, but he could see that it was trouble.

"Bunter!" Mr. Quelch rapped out the name.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Did you take a hamper belonging to Hobson of the Shell from the House dame's room, on the first day of term?"

Bunter gasped.

He had absolutely and completely forgotten that hamper by this time. This was an utterly unexpected and most unpleasant reminder.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "No, sir! Certainly not! Oh lor'!"

"Oh, no, sir! I never went near the House dame's room that day!" stammered Bunter. "I never saw Gosling take in Hobson's hamper. You can ask Gosling, sir. He will remember that I asked him whose it was."

Snort from Hacker. Carne grinned. Mr. Quelch breathed hard and deep.

"Carne has inquired of the House dame, Bunter, and she has told him that you called her way with an alarm of fire in the junior room."

"Oh, I—I mean, I—I thought I ought to call Mrs. Kebble, sir, as—as there was something burning in the Rag, sir."

"It transpired, Bunter, that nothing was burning there," said Mr. Quelch sternly. "Was that merely an excuse to get the House dame away from her room while you abstracted the hamper?"

"Yes, sir—I mean, no, sir! I—I never called Mrs. Kebble, sir. I mean, I only called her because there was a fire—that is, there wasn't a fire!" stammered Bunter. "I wasn't thinking about Hobson's hamper at all, sir. I never heard Mrs. Kebble tell Hobby that it had to be left with her, for her to look through before he could have it. I never knew it was there at all, sir! I—I only went to the House-dame's room to—to see if something had come for me. Besides, I—I never went!"

"You never went!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir. I was in the Remove passage at the time."

"At what time?" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"At the time I was in the House dame's room, sir—that is, I mean the time I wasn't there! C-c-can I go now, sir?"

"This boy's prevarications—" said Mr. Hacker, in a deep voice.

"Kindly leave this matter in my hands, sir! Bunter, I command you to tell me the truth at once. You carried Hobson's hamper away from the House dame's room on the first day of term."

"I didn't!" gasped Bunter. "I couldn't, sir! It was too heavy for me to carry. I had to drag it along, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"You can ask Cherry, sir, and Wharton. They had to help me get it up the Remove staircase—"

"Then you admit that you did take it?"

"Oh, no! I—I never even saw it, sir! It—it quite surprised me when I heard that Hobby had lost a hamper. I—I couldn't believe it at first, sir, I was so—so surprised."

"Upon my word! You took the hamper to your study?"

"No!" howled Bunter. "Wharton and Cherry did! You can ask them, sir!"

"You did not tell Wharton and Cherry, I presume, that you had purloined the hamper?" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, no, sir! Besides, I hadn't! It was my hamper from home—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, there wasn't a hamper at all! That—that's what I meant to say, sir! I—I never saw Wharton and Cherry at all that day, so—so far as I remember!" gasped Bunter. "May I go now, sir?"

"You may not, Bunter!"

"Oh lor'!"

"There appears to be no doubt that Bunter purloined the hamper, and conveyed it to his study!" said Mr. Quelch. "The boy is too stupid to realise that such an act amounted to pilfering—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Now, Bunter, I warn you to answer me carefully. The hamper in question was thrown from a study window in the Remove."

"W-w-was it really, sir?" moaned Bunter.

"Did you throw that hamper at Mr. Hacker, Bunter?"

"Obviously—" began the master of the Shell.

"Answer me, Bunter!"

"No, sir; I never knew that Mr. Hacker was under the window," groaned Bunter. "I never knew anybody was there till I heard him yell, sir."

"Why did you throw the hamper from the window?"

"I—I didn't!"

"What?" shrieked Mr. Quelch.

"I—I never had the hamper at all, sir. I never stood a spread in my study, first day of term, and the fellows didn't think I'd pinched Hobby's hamper when Hazel came up and said it was missing. Nothing of the kind! They—they know me too well. As for throwing the hamper out of the window, I never even thought of it. Besides, I offered it to Fishy, and he wouldn't take it—"

"You threw the hamper from your study window, to get rid of it, without knowing that Mr. Hacker was on the path below! You did not know that he was there?"

"Not till he yelled out, sir, and then I didn't know it was Mr. Hacker," gasped Bunter. "Oh lor'! I never knew it was Hacker till I—I came out in the quad, sir, and fellows were saying that Hacker had gone mad—"

"What?"

"Gone mad, sir—walking about the quad with a hamper on his head."

Mr. Quelch's face twitched.

"I—I—I was quite surprised to see Mr. Hacker with that hamper on his head, sir!" said Bunter. "I never knew how it got there, not having thrown it out of my study window to get shut of it, sir! I—I—I thought Mr. Hacker had gone mad, sir, same as all the other fellows."

"Mr. Quelch—" gasped Hacker.

"Say no more, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch hastily.

"Yes, sir! Can I go now?" asked Bunter anxiously. "Now—now that you know that I had nothing to do with it, sir—"

"Silence! Mr. Hacker, it appears that this stupid boy threw the hamper from his study window, with utter foolishness and carelessness, without being aware that anyone was below."

"It fell upon me, sir!" hooted Mr. Hacker.

"By accident, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "Such an accident, certainly, should never have occurred, but it was an accident—certainly not an intentional attack. You will acknowledge that, Mr. Hacker."

Hacker breathed hard through his long, thin nose.

He was unwilling to acknowledge it; he would have preferred to see the hamper-hurler "sacked" for an attack on a member of the staff. But it was so obviously the case that the Acid Drop had to acknowledge it. He gave an unwilling grunt of assent.

"The matter," said Mr. Quelch, "is now cleared up. Bunter will be caned with the utmost severity for having abstracted the hamper—"

"Oh crikey!"

"He will be given five hundred lines, in addition, for having carelessly thrown it from a study window—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,510.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Bend Over, Bunter!"

BILLY BUNTER blinked dismally and apprehensively at his Form-master. He could see that Quelch was going to be a beast. There was every sign of it in the Remove master's grim countenance.

"I never touched it, sir!" groaned Bunter. "I'm not a fellow to touch any fellow's tuck. You can ask any chap in the Remove, sir. It's not the sort of thing I would do."

"It appears, Bunter, that the hamper was taken while Mrs. Kebble was called away from her room. It was you who called her away."

"Oh crumbs!"

"The value of the hamper will be ascertained, and a bill for the amount sent to Bunter's father——"

"Oh lor'!"

"I trust, Mr. Hacker, that you are satisfied?"

"Quite, sir!" said Hacker.

Even the Acid Drop was satisfied with the extent of the punishment meted out to the hapless Owl.

Mr. Quelch rose and picked up his cane.

"I—I say, sir——"

"Bend over, and touch your toes, Bunter!"

"But I—I never did it, sir!" stuttered Bunter. "If Carne makes out that I did it, sir, it's only because I caught him smoking on the train——"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Quelch. "Bunter, bend over, this instant, or I will take you to your headmaster for a flogging!"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter bent over and touched his toes. Already, early in the term as it was, Billy Bunter had captured one hefty licking. Now history repeated itself—only more so. It was quite harrowing for Bunter. The way of the transgressor was hard!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Lays the Trap!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

It was Saturday afternoon. That afternoon being a half-holiday, the Famous Five were walking over to Cliff House School, at Pegg, to see Marjorie & Co., whom they had not yet seen since coming back for the new term.

It was a crisp, clear winter's day, and a walk through the frosty woodland was delightful—to strenuous fellows like the Famous Five, at least. By a footpath in Friardale Wood, they reached the stream that rippled through the wood, to join the Sark, half a mile away.

The stream was crossed by a plank bridge, resting on stones on either bank. And as they came along to that bridge the chums of the Remove were surprised by the sight of a fat figure bending at the other side of the plank.

That fat figure was too busy to see them coming. But it jumped as Bob Cherry's roar awoke the echoes of the frosty woodlands.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked across the stream at the Famous Five. They trotted across the plank, in single file, and reached the farther side, where Bunter stood blinking.

"What the dickens are you up to?" asked Harry Wharton, with a suspicious glare at the fat Owl. "If you were shifting the end of the plank——"

"No! No! Nothing of the kind," said Bunter hastily. "Still, if I were you I'd come back another way. That plank mightn't be safe."

"Then you were shifting it?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Not at all, old chap! Besides, I never knew you were coming this way! Look what that beast did for me yesterday—getting me a fearful whopping and five hundred lines, making out that I snaffed Hobson's hamper—as if I'd touch a fellow's hamper! Serve him right, to get a ducking!"

"Is Carne coming this way?" said Harry Wharton blankly.

"Well, he might be," said Bunter mysteriously. "He might, and he might not. I may have heard him tell Loder that he was going down to Friardale to see a man, and taking the short cut through the wood. Or I may not! Don't you fellows ask questions, and I'll tell you no whoppers—see?"

"Isn't he a coughdrop?" grinned Nugent. "So you've found out that Carne of the Sixth is coming along this path this afternoon, and you were shifting the plank to tip him into the water when he crossed it."

"Well, look what he did!" said Bunter warmly. "Getting a fellow licked, just because a fellow spotted him smoking in the train!"

"The duckfulness of the execrable Carne may not matter, my idiotic Bunter, but suppose other persons tip off the absurd plank and are duckfully immersed in the cold and idiotic water?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You pernicious porpoise!" said Johnny Bull. "Why, we might have tipped in if we'd come along ten minutes later."

"He, he, he!" That possibility seemed to strike Bunter as funny. He chuckled.

"You howling ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Leave that plank alone! Haven't you sense enough not to make the bridge unsafe, you blithering bloater?"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Better kick him!" said Johnny Bull. "Kick him all the way to Pegg, and that will keep him out of mischief!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter backed away promptly. The Famous Five followed him up. They did not care very much whether Carne of the Sixth got a ducking; but they certainly did care whether the plank bridge was left unsafe for the general public.

"All kick together!" said Bob Cherry. "The kickfulness is the proper caper."

"Go it!"

"Ow! Beasts! Wow! Keep off!" roared Bunter. "Yaroo! Leave off kicking me, you beasts! I'm going, ain't I?"

And Bunter went—as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

Behind him, the Famous Five trotted, letting out a foot every now and then to keep Bunter in motion.

For nearly a quarter of a mile Billy Bunter puffed and blew along the frosty footpath; and then his wind failed him and he leaned on a tree and gasped and gurgled for breath.

"Oooooooooogh!"

"That's a tip, you dangerous maniac!" said the captain of the Remove. "Mind, if we find that plank loose when we come back we'll kick you all round the quad and back again!"

"Oooooooooogh!"

The chums of the Remove pursued

their way and disappeared through the wood.

For about ten minutes Billy Bunter leaned on the tree and gurgled. Then, having recovered his breath, the fat junior rolled back towards the stream.

Harry Wharton & Co. had no doubt that the emphatic "tip" they had given Bunter would have its effect upon the fat and fatuous Owl. They were far from realising how determinedly the Owl of the Remove was on the trail of vengeance. The worm will turn—and Bunter had turned!

He would have liked to thrash Carne of the Sixth. He would have liked to boot him across the quad. But these were not practical propositions. He could, however, get him a ducking, as he knew that Carne was coming along that path during the afternoon. And that he was going to do. Billy Bunter's fat mind was firmly made up on that point.

Having arrived at the plank bridge again, the fat junior blinked round through his big spectacles to make sure that the coast was clear.

The woodland path was not much trodden in the winter. Still, it was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and other fellows might be about—and some of the masters might be out walking. Billy Bunter wanted to duck Carne of the Sixth—but still more he wanted to keep it dark that he had had a hand in that ducking.

But there was no one to be seen, and the fat Owl stooped over the plank and resumed the labour that had been interrupted by the Famous Five.

It was rather hard labour for Bunter. The plank was long and thick and heavy, and far from easy to move.

Billy Bunter gasped and spluttered and gurgled over his task, and moved the heavy plank inch by inch.

But he got through at last.

The end of the plank rested on a stone. Bunter shifted it inch by inch till it barely rested on the edge of the stone. There was just enough support for the plank to keep it in position.

The lightest tread on it would be enough to tip it sideways—with the inevitable result that whoever trod on it would be tipped off into the water.

Anyone arriving on Bunter's side of the stream would have seen at once that the plank was unsafe. But anyone arriving from the other side could have seen nothing of it. And it was from the Greyfriars side that Carne would be coming.

Successful at last, the fat Owl rose to his feet, gasping after his exertions. He blinked round anxiously again, but the coast was still clear. Carne, no doubt, was coming—but he had not come yet!

Billy Bunter grinned breathlessly.

All was ready for the beast now when he came! When the beast tipped into three feet of icy water, perhaps he would be sorry that he had got Bunter those whoppings.

Grinning, the fat Owl beat a retreat. It was judicious to be as far as possible from the spot when Carne tipped in. He cut through the wood to Friardale Lane, and rolled back to Greyfriars—grinning!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Catch!

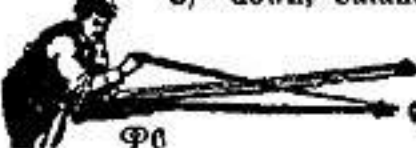
SPLASH!

"Oooooogh!" Dr. Locke hardly knew what was happening.

Fifty times at least, in his walks

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abroad, he had crossed that plank bridge over the stream in Friardale Wood, and it had been perfectly safe—firm as a rock!

He stepped on it for the fifty-first time without a doubt!

He was walking with Mr. Quelch. Quelch was a friend, as well as a member of his staff. Often they had little walks together. When they reached the plank bridge, over which it was necessary to walk singly, the Remove master stood politely aside for his chief to pass first. Then it happened!

The headmaster took only one step on the plank!

It tipped!

Before Dr. Locke knew what was happening, before the horrified Remove master could stretch out a hand, the Head was plunging in the water.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Dr. Locke, as he plunged.

Instantly Mr. Quelch sprang to the rescue.

He reached over to his chief, stretching out a helping hand. Dr. Locke caught it, as he plunged and splashed. It was Mr. Quelch's intention to drag him instantly out. Unfortunately, it worked out the other way, and the struggling man dragged Mr. Quelch in!

Splash!

"Grooooooogh!"

"Oooooogh! Help!"

"Guurrrrh!"

Dr. Locke tottered up to his waist in water. Mr. Quelch had landed in head-first, and he lifted a drenched and dripping head from the stream.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Ow! Wooooogh!"

"Uggggggghh!" gurgled the Head.

The water was only two or three feet deep. There was no danger of drowning. But it was horribly wet, and fearfully cold.

Such a ducking, for Carne, would have been extremely unpleasant. But it was

(Continued on next page.)



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.

"STAND by, everybody, for an important announcement—"

No, chums, it's not a wireless announcer calling the British Isles! It's your Editor calling readers in all quarters of the globe!

And I'll bet you're all ears, what?

In my Chat last week I promised to "spill the beans" concerning the wonderful

FREE GIFTS

that are to be presented with the MAGNET. Well, here goes! In next week's MAGNET you will find the First Two of a series of

PHOTOGRAVURE POSTCARDS DEPICTING BRITAIN'S DEFENDERS!

This magnificent series of Photogravure Cards—which every reader of the MAGNET will want to collect—shows the latest British tanks, ships, planes and guns. These mechanical marvels, which guarantee the safety of our shores, make a set of pictures which will undoubtedly be treasured by all of you. The first two cards

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one of the largest aircraft-carriers—"floating hornets' nests," as they are called—of the British Navy.

Don't forget, then, to order a copy of next Saturday's MAGNET and subsequent issues and thus make sure of collecting the full set of photogravure postcards.

And here's another important point to remember, chums—with the commencement of our GRAND FREE GIFTS I have arranged an extra-special programme. Mr. Frank Richards has turned in a delightful series of Greyfriars yarns that is calculated to surpass all previous masterpieces. Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch are both laid up with severe colds and have been taken away to a nursing home. The result is that Greyfriars is left without a headmaster! Then, like a bombshell, comes the startling news

that Mr. Hacker has been selected to carry on in Dr. Locke's place. Naturally enough, with an acid-tempered master like Hacker "holding the reins" Harry Wharton & Co. scent trouble. And, sure enough, it comes!

In desperation the Greyfriars juniors rise in wrath against the tyrant headmaster and declare a stay-in strike! Lessons and authority are cast to the four winds, and the rebels rally as one man, determined to teach the would-be dictator the error of his ways! Thrills, fun and excitement, following in rapid succession, make the opening yarn of this rip-roaring series,

"THE STAY-IN STRIKE AT GREY-FRIARS!"

one of the best that I have ever been able to offer you. Take my tip, and ask your newsagent to reserve a copy of next Saturday's MAGNET for you right away!

Have you ever wondered why it is that vehicles in this country always keep to the left side of the road? George Watkins, of Canterbury, asks me if I can tell him how it was that this

RULE OF THE ROAD

came into being. Why, for instance, shouldn't we keep to the right instead of the left? The reason is that years ago, when people used to travel on horseback, there was always the chance that a lonely horseman might come across an enemy or a highwayman. So as not to be taken by surprise, a horseman would always keep over to the left of the road, in order to have his right hand free to draw his sword if it were necessary. And the custom of "keeping to the left" has continued to this day.

Here's a curious paragraph which may interest my readers. It concerns

THE MAN WHO SOLD HIS HEAD!

A Rumanian clerk has sold his head to a scientific institute. He is, of course, allowed to keep it while he lives, but the scientists will take possession of it after he dies. The reason this man sold his

head is that he has not been able to sleep for over nineteen years! He suffered concussion of the brain during the War, and then discovered that sleep was impossible for him. This peculiar complaint, however, has given him an extraordinarily large appetite—one even greater than Billy Bunter's. The pupils of his eyes have also contracted to a large extent. As this is probably the only case of its kind in the world, scientists are naturally anxious to study it, and that is why they have bought his head!

How would you like to keep

A PET ALLIGATOR?

I don't suppose many people would care to possess such an awkward pet, but a Kent farmer kept one in a wired enclosure in which there was a pond. As the alligator grew, however, the farmer decided to get rid of it, and sent it to a zoo eight miles away. Believe it or not, the morning after the alligator had been sent to the zoo it was discovered back on the farm, trying to get through the wire into its pond! Luckily the alligator seems to have made its journey without "putting the wind up" any chance traveller on the same road.

Now for a few

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to various queries which have been sent in by readers:

Why are Certain Labourers Called "Navvies"? (G. T., of Hove): The word is short for "navigators," a name given to the men who dug the earliest British canals. The name has since been applied to men who do digging work.

Why are Policemen Called "Bobbies"? ("Curious," of Walsall): Because the police force was reorganised by Sir Robert Peel, about a hundred years ago. Hence we use "Robert," or "Bobby" for a policeman. At one time the police were known as "Peelers."

Is there a King Buried in Soho? (H. J., of Hampstead): Yes, the former King Theodoro of Corsica, is buried in St. Anne's, Soho, London. He lost his throne and came to London penniless. He was imprisoned for debt, made over his kingdom to his creditors, and died a pauper.

What is an Ermine? (Jack Thomas, of Cardiff): A stoat—with its winter coat on! In northern parts of Scotland stoats change their colour to white in winter. This very rarely happens in England, however.

When was Cleopatra's Needle set up on the Thames Embankment? ("Magnetite," of Clapham): It was set up in the year 1878. It was originally built in 1500 B.C.

So much for now. But take my tip and don't miss next Saturday's bumper Free Gift issue of the MAGNET.

YOUR EDITOR,

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,510.

a more serious matter for two middle-aged gentlemen.

Quelch was the first to flounder out. Dripping with water, smothered with mud, he got on the bank and dragged the dizzy headmaster after him.

Water ran down them in streams, and formed pools at their feet.

"Oooooogh!" gasped the Head.

"Woooooogh!" spluttered Mr. Quelch.

"The—the plank must have slipped!" gasped Dr. Locke.

He blinked at it dizzily. One end of the plank was plunged under water now. Evidently it had slipped.

Mr. Quelch caught his chief's arm.

"We must hasten, sir—we shall catch cold!"

"Yes, yes, certainly, my dear Quelch!" gasped Dr. Locke.

They hurried back the way they had come. It was more than half a mile back to the school. It was only too probable that they would catch cold!

A Sixth Form man, coming along, met them half-way.

Carne of the Sixth stopped, staring in astonishment.

"Has—has anything happened, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Ooogh! Yes! The—the plank—ooogh!—on the stream—urrrgh! slipped—atchooooogh!" gasped Dr. Locke. "We are—are drenched, Carne—ooogh!"

"Please hurry back to the school, Carne, and warn them to be in readiness!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Mrs. Kebble—hot-water bottles—Lose no time!"

"Certainly, sir!" gasped Carne.

He turned and ran. Carne had to see a man in Friardale that afternoon, but Mr. Lodgey had to wait. And when Carne, later, went to keep that appointment, he was not likely to go by way of the plank bridge!

Mr. Quelch and the Head tottered on. By the time they came out into the road both were sneezing.

But Carne had lost no time. He had spread the news; and at that point a sympathetic crowd from Greyfriars met them. Mr. Prout gave a plump arm to the headmaster. Mr. Hacker gave Quelch an assisting hand. They sneezed their way onward, and arrived at the school. Through a deeply sympathising crowd they sneezed their way in. The Head was led to his house—Mr. Quelch to his room in the School House—to hot-water bottles and blankets. Prout telephoned for the doctor. And a buzzing crowd in the quad were excitedly discussing the startling episode, when a fat figure rolled in at the gates.

Billy Bunter blinked.

He could see that something had happened. He fully expected to hear that something had happened. But he was surprised by so much excitement.

Fellows—even Sixth Form prefects—had been ducked before without all this fuss!

"I say, you fellows, anything happened?" asked Bunter, rolling up to a group of Removites.

"Yes, rather!" answered Vernon-Smith. "Accident at the plank bridge—"

"He, he, he!"

The Bunder stared at him.

"What are you cackling at, you fat ass? It's pretty serious!" he snapped. Even the scapegrace of Greyfriars was concerned for the Head.

"What rot!" said Bunter. "Fat lot you care whether Carne gets a ducking or not, Smithy!"

"Your silly ass!" howled Peter Todd. "It wasn't Carne—"

Billy Bunter jumped.

"Was—wasn't Carne?" he ejaculated. "Who was it, then?"

"The Head!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"And Quelch—"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter was serious enough now. He blinked at the Remove fellows in utter horror.

"They're tucked up in bed now, and they're both going to have fearful colds!" said Peter.

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter.

Billy Bunter rolled on to the House. He rolled into his study and shut the door.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Oh lor! The Head—oh crumbs!—and Quelch—oh jiminy!"

He had laid that trap for Carne of the Sixth, and he had made a catch—he had caught his headmaster and his Form-master!

Harry Wharton & Co. came cheerfully in at the gates just on lock-up. As yet they knew nothing of the thrilling event of the afternoon. Billy Bunter was waiting for them at the gates. His fat face was serious, not to say solemn. He blinked anxiously at the Famous Five through his big spectacles.

"You fat villain!" said Bob. "You shifted that plank, after all! We had to go a mile round coming back! You—"

"I—I didn't!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, I—I want you to be jolly careful not to say anything about seeing me there this afternoon. I can tell you that's important."

"Do you mean that Carne got a ducking?" asked Harry.

"Oh! No! Worse than that!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, keep it dark! Not that I did it, you know! If anybody asks you mind you say that I wasn't there when you saw me there! That's important! Of

course, I never dreamed that the Head would be going that way—"

"The Head!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"And—and Quelch—"

"The esteemed Quelch!" ejaculated Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Never dreamed of it, of course!" groaned Bunter. "But—but they did—and—and they're both laid up—"

"The Head—and Quelch—laid up!" stuttered Nugent.

"Yes—they've caught awful colds—the fellows are saying that they won't be about again for—weeks!" groaned Bunter. "It wasn't my fault, you know! I—I meant it for Carne! And—and I never did it! I wasn't moving that plank when you saw me shifting it, and I—I never went back after you were gone on—I—I went to the pictures at Courtfield!"

"You dangerous lunatic!" gasped Harry Wharton. "You've got the Head and Quelch a ducking—"

"No!" howled Bunter. "I keep on telling you I never did it! Besides, I meant it for Carne, as you know jolly well!"

"You—you—you—" gasped the captain of the Remove.

"After all, it will be a bit easier in the Form-room without Quelch!" said Bunter. "You've got me to thank for that! But—but mind you don't say a word, you know!"

"It will be the sack for you if it comes out, you blithering owl! We won't say a word, but we'll jolly well kick you all round the quad!" said Harry Wharton. "Boot him!"

"Yaroooooh!"

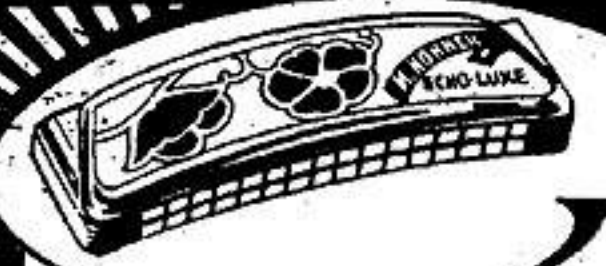
The next few minutes were quite exciting to Billy Bunter.

Mr. Hacker, in his study that evening, smiled.

He was sorry for his chief, no doubt. But it was known now that Dr. Locke, under doctor's orders, would be away from his duties for some weeks. One of the senior members of the staff would be requested by the governors to carry on in his absence. It was between Prout and Hacker—and Mr. Hacker considered that the chances were greatly in his own favour. It was a pleasant prospect to Mr. Hacker. He fancied himself in the role of headmaster—and many little improvements, many beneficial severities, were already occurring to his mind! It was not so pleasant a prospect for the rest of Greyfriars School!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss: "THE STAY-IN STRIKE AT GREY-FRIARS!" the first of a super series of Greyfriars yarns by Frank Richards. You'll find it in next Saturday's FREE GIFT ISSUE of the MAGNET. Take my tip and order your copy to-day.—ED.)



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XX

THE MAN WHO KEPT HIS WORD!

Another Great Instalment of Dicky Nugent's Rib-Tickling Serial: "DR. BIRCHEMALL'S RESOLUTIONS!"

ONE FROSTY MORN!

It was morning, and Jack Jolly & Co., of St. Sam's, were up with the lark.

Strictly speaking, they were up with the owl, for the early, mellancolly hooting of that particular bird was the only sound to be heard as they crept out of the dormitory!

The first grey streaks of dawn had hardly yet appeared in the sky, but the heroes of the Fourth Form were very much awake and full of cheery good yowmour.

"Mark my words, you fellows," said Jolly, as he and his pals clattered down the stairs. "There's going to be some fun this morning. It's as plain as a pikestaff that the masters want us to wake them early so that they can see weather the Head sticks to his New Year resolution or not. If he has a swim before breakfast, then he's keeping his word. If he duzzent—well, he'll lose all the masters' subs to the Distressed Headmasters' Fund!"

"He duzzent want that to happen, anyway!" grinned Frank Fearless. "But how can he possibly go swimming when it's freezing hard? Why, the river will be frozen over on a morning like this!"

"Eggsactly! That's where the fun will start!" chuckled Jack Jolly. "Here's old Lickham's room now. I'll trot in and wake him up."

Without trubbling to knock on the door, the kaptin of the Fourth entered his respected Form-master's room and switched on the light.

"Time to get up, sir!" he yelled in Mr. Lickham's ear, grabbing the Form-master by the hair and yanking his head off the pillow at the same time.

Mr. Lickham gave a feendish howl.

"Yarooooo! Help! Leggo! 'Tain't rising bell!"

"True, sir, but you asked us apeshally to wake you up early this morning."

The master of the Fourth sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Groooo! All serene, Jolly. I remember now. Are the other masters awake?"

"Not yet, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly. "But they won't do much more sleeping when we get bizzy. Sure you're awake now, sir?"

"Ow! Yes!" gasped Mr. Lickham, as the kaptin of the Fourth made another move towards him. And



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TO SUCCEED AT SCHOOL— HAVE A FROZEN FACE!

Says H. VERNON-SMITH

What is it that makes a chap a success at school? Brains? Muscle? Money? Good looks? Not a bit of it!

My own opinion, based on what I've seen at Greyfriars, is that the best thing to cultivate if you want to climb the school social ladder is a frozen face!

It's all on account of a tradition that the Best People conceal their feelings. This happens to be a fact, as you can see for yourself if you study Mauly. Rush up to Mauly and tell him the House is on fire and his grandmother has caught scarlet fever and the Remove have lost a footer match—and what does he do? Does he don sackcloth and ashes and beat his breast and tear his hair? Does he burst into bitter wailing and lamentation? Not he! He just raises his eyebrows an eighth of an inch and murmurs "Yaas?"

That's the dividing line between the Best People and ordinary common or garden people like you and me. And that's what makes the most ambitious schoolboys cultivate a frozen face!

Loder and Walker and Carne of the Sixth, and Hilton and Angel among the lesser fry, are recent examples of what I mean. All last term their faces were getting colder and colder, until they were completely frozen by the time we broke up for the Christmas vac. If they continue at the same rate in the new term, a chap will want a fur coat on before he'll dare go near enough to bid them good-morning!

Speaking for myself, I'm not altogether keen on this frozen face bizney. So long as it's confined to a few it doesn't matter, but I shan't feel at all happy if it spreads in the Remove.

Imagine a time when Bunter will merely eye you with a faint sneer when you offer him a feed!

Imagine Bolsover major walking across the quad with disdainful disregard while fags put their fingers to their noses at him! Imagine Fisher T. Fish greeting a chance to make money with a slight shrug of the shoulders and a face devoid of expression!

I'm dashed sure we shan't have half the fun we do at present if this concealed-feelings idea takes root in the Remove. But all the same, I still believe that, to succeed at school, it's advisable to have a frozen face!

COKER MEANS BUSINESS THIS TERM!

Chuckles TOM BROWN

Holidays put pep into most of us. But what they do to most of us is nothing to what they do to Coker!

When I bumped into him this morning he was like a giddy human tornado.

"I've been looking forward to this term, I don't mind telling you, young Brown!" he roared, beaming ruddily with good health and enthusiasm.

"It's going to be a turning point in my school career. I can feel it in my bones!"

"I've made up my mind to get into the First Eleven. What's more, I'm going to be the star turn in the team!"

in the Sixth that'll be able to stand up to me at public speaking when I get properly into my stride!

"I'm going to make things hum, I can tell you. You wait and see!"

So now you know what to expect. Coker is going to score more goals against his own side than in any previous term. That's my first bet!

He'll be last in the senior cross-country run. That's my second.

He'll raise a bigger laugh in the debating society than they've had for many a long day. That's a safe one!

But he's right about making things hum. Oh, yea, Coker will make things hum, right enough. He always does!

Just wait till Coker gets going! Whoopee!

BUNTER—A TIP-TOP TAP DANCER!

Told by PETER TODD

It is not generally known that Bunter has recently become quite an expert tap-dancer.

He was seized with the craving to learn the art after seeing a couple of pictures featuring Freddy Stayer, the famous dancing film star. Since that time he has been doing an immense amount of secret practice with the aid of a second-hand correspondence course on the subject, purchased from Fisher T. Fish for sixpence-halfpenny, a broken pocket-knife, and a French crib.

At a recent party the old Porpoise astonished the natives.

Having been forcibly dragged away from the buffet bar, and had his tie straightened and jam smeared removed from his lips and shirt front, he consented to give a turn, and I must say he created quite a stir.

Mind you, I'm not saying he was quite up to Freddy Stayer's standard.

Most of the time he was half a bar behind the music and the rest of the time he seemed to be dancing to different time altogether.

If I said he was as graceful as a swan or a fawn, I should admittedly be exaggerating. But graceful he was, anyway. I should say about as graceful as a performing elephant.

His movements were a bit bewildering to an untutored eye. But he was certainly aiming at something all the time. Once he aimed at the drummer in the band and brought down his drums and gadgets with a crash you could have heard a mile away. On another occasion he aimed at Bob Cherry, but Bob dodged in time, and Bunter did a marvellous high kick and landed on the back of



his neck, amid rapturous applause!

Most of the crowd thought that that would finish him. But he came up smiling after a short breather, and finished up his dance in great style, and returned to the buffet with an appetite that broke all records.

Everybody agreed afterwards that it was the turn of the evening.

I heard Colonel Wharton remark that he had fairly brought down the house.

He certainly would have done if it hadn't been jolly substantially built!

Jack Jolly grinned and made for the door.

From Mr. Lickham's room Jack Jolly & Co. went to wake up Mr. Justiss, of the Fifth. After that they turned their attention to Mr. Chas. Tyzer, of the Third, and Mr. Swishingham, of the Second, and then to Monsure Frogg, the French master, and Hair Guggenheimer, the German master. They were not all so easily aroused as Mr. Lickham. Some had to have wet sponges squeezed over them before they became fully conscious, and others had to be dragged out of bed by their feet and bumped. But eventually they all came up to scratch, and a full complement of St. Sam's masters assembled in the Hall.

Mr. Lickham took charge of the proceedings. "Gentlemen!" he said. "We are gathered here this morning to find out the truth about one of the Head's resolutions, viz., that he will go for a swim before brekker every morning."

"Here, here!" "As you are already

aware, gentlemen, a grate deal depends on weather his resolutions or not. To be eggsact, half-a-crown a week each! Once we catch him missing his morning swim, we are releaved of the necessity to pay our promised subs to the Distressed Headmasters' Fund. It's up to us to catch him out—and if I'm not mistaken, gentlemen," said Mr. Lickham, with a leering larf, "this cold and frosty morning is the very morning when we shall do it!"

"By jove, yes!" eggsclaimed Mr. Justiss. "Even an Eskimo mite well hezzitate to go swimming in weather like this!"

"An Eskimo mite not be able to do it even if he felt like it!" chuckled Mr. Lickham. "Because why? Because it's ten to one in doonutts the river will be completely frozen!"

The masters grinned. "Let's trot along to his bedroom and keep watch," suggested Mr. Chas. Tyzer. "It won't half be funny if that stops him. His face will be worth a guinea a box!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" With Jack Jolly & Co. following at a respective distance, the masters skipped away towards Doctor Birchermall's room. They were all as eggsited as Second Form fags at the prospect of the Head breaking his New Year resolutions.

When they got near Doctor Birchermall's apartment they took cover in various doorways and waited to see if the Head turned up. The chums of the Fourth likewise sheltered in a doorway further down the passidge.

Minnits passed and nothing happened. Dawn broke, the skool bell clanged out its morning message, and signs of life began to appear in the Skool House. Still the masters' vigil went unrewarded.

From within the Head's room a loud snoring continued, showing that Doctor Birchermall was still in the land of dreams.

When breakfast-time arrived, Mr. Lickham issued fourth from his place of hiding. "It's all right now, you men," he whispered gleefully. "The Head won't have time to have his morning swim now before brekker, even if

he wants to! I fancy this is where we chortle!"

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!" "I propose, gentlemen, that we all adjorn for breakfast," said Mr. Justiss, of the Fifth, in his pompous way. "This way!"

And the masters all scampered gleefully along to breakfast.

A TEASER FOR THE HEAD!

"Hallo, hallo! Here comes the Head!"

Jack Jolly made that remark as he was finishing brekker that morning.

All eyes turned automatically to the door and there was a gasp from the fellows when they saw that Doctor Birchermall was wearing a gratescoat and fur hat and was carrying over his arm a towel and a bathing costume!

"What the merry dickens—"

"Good-morning, boys! Good-morning, gentlemen!" greeted the Head, cheerily. "Anyone feel like a swim down for a swim?"

Mr. Lickham jumped to his feet, his jaws working feverishly at a half-consumed sossidge. He pointed his fork eggsitedly at Doctor Birchermall.

"It's no good thinking you can get away with this, sir, because you can't!" he said. "It's past breakfast-time now, and you haven't had your swim. So you've broken your New Year resolution!"

"Ho! So that's how things stand, is it?" said the Head, with a cynical smile at the eggsited master of the Fourth. "Well, Lickham, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you appear to be under a complete delosion. I didn't promise to have a daily swim before your breakfast. What I said was that I would have a swim before breakfast. My own breakfast! 'So?"

"Then I suppose, sir, that if you go without breakfast, you neecn't have a swim!" boomed Mr. Justiss.

"Eggsactly! I had already thought of that, Justiss!" grinned Doctor Birchermall. "Unfortunately, however, I happen to have a delicate constitution that needs frekwent nurrishment."

"Oh crums!"

"That being the case, I'm afraid there is no help for it. Come what may, I

shall have to go for that swim!"

Mr. Lickham stuffed the remainder of his sossidge into his mouth and flung down his serviette. His eyes were gleaming with determination.

"In that case, sir, I'll come along to see fare play," he said. "I fancy you may find it more difficult to go swimming this morning than you imagine!"

"Come along by all means, my dear Lickham!"



grinned the Head. "The more the merrier!"

With these words Doctor Birchermall turned on his heel and made for the door.

There was a jeneral move to follow him. The masters were all curious to see what happened when he got down to the River Ripple—especially if it was frozen. As for the boys, they all looked on it as a ripping joak, not to be missed under any circumstances.

The result was that when Doctor Birchermall wended his way down to the river, a grate, jossing crowd followed at his heels.

At last the river came into view. And then, for the first time, the Head's grin vanished. His jaw dropped and a look of dismay appeared in his face.

"Bloss my sole! This is going to be a teaser, after all!" he eggsclaimed. "The river's frozen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd simply shrieked. The eggspression on Doctor Birchermall's fazz was enuff to make a cat larf.

"Look here—" he snorted.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Jevver get left, sir?" "What about that swim now?"

"Chuck it, you cackling idjuts!" growled the Head.

"This is a jolly serious problem. How can I go swimming in solid ice?"

"Is that a conundrum, sir? If so, give it up!"

"If you take my advice, sir, you'll give it up, too!"

Of course, you didn't bargain for this when you made that resolution to go swimming every morning. But weather you bargained for it or not, it has stopped you from keeping your resolution—and that relieves us of the need to pay any more munny to

the Distressed Headmasters' Fund!"

"Hear, hear!"

The Head eyed the frozen river thoughtfully. His brane was working overtime on the problem of a swim in solid ice.

Suddenly his beady eyes began to twinkle again.

"Half a minnit! Suppose I—"

"Suppose what, sir?"

"Suppose nothing! I won't trubble to suppose it—I'll do it!" eggsclaimed the Head. "Boys! Go back to the toolshed at St. Sam's and bring back all the pickaxes you can find! The masters, meanwhile, will stay here and collect firewood."

"What the merry dickens—"

"I'll thaw the river—or, at least, enuff of it to swim in!" cried the Head. "Get bizzy—or I shall get bizzy with a birch!"

The crowd stared dazedly at Doctor Birchermall, hardly able to beleove their ears for a moment. But a threatening step forward from the Head sent them all scuttling away to carry out his amazing orders.

Never in the history of St. Sam's had there been such a strange scene as the seen that followed. First, an army of fellows started hacking away at the frozen

river with pickaxes. Then, under orders from the Head, the masters started two grate bonfires—one on the river itself amid the broken ice, and the other on the bank, where the Head started boiling pails of water!

As the water boiled, it was carried down to the river and poured on to the frozen surffs. What with this and the heat of the other bonfire, the broken ice slowly began to melt. And eventually the fellows had to make a dash to avoid getting a ducking. A pool had been cleared that was quite big enuff for the Head's little dip!

Doctor Birchermall, grinning all over his dial, disappeared into the skool boathouse. He emerged shortly afterwards in his bathing costume, galloped down to the water's edge, and dived gracefully off into the water. He swam round for a few seconds, then climbed up on to terra firma again, shivering like a jolly, but triumphant!

"My win, I fancy, gentlemen!" he leered, as he scampered back to the boathouse.

And Messrs. Lickham & Co. reluctantly had to confess that, for the time being, at any rate, Doctor Birchermall had licked them to a frazzle!

(Don't miss next week's ripping instalment of this laughable serial!)