

Grand Christmas Number.

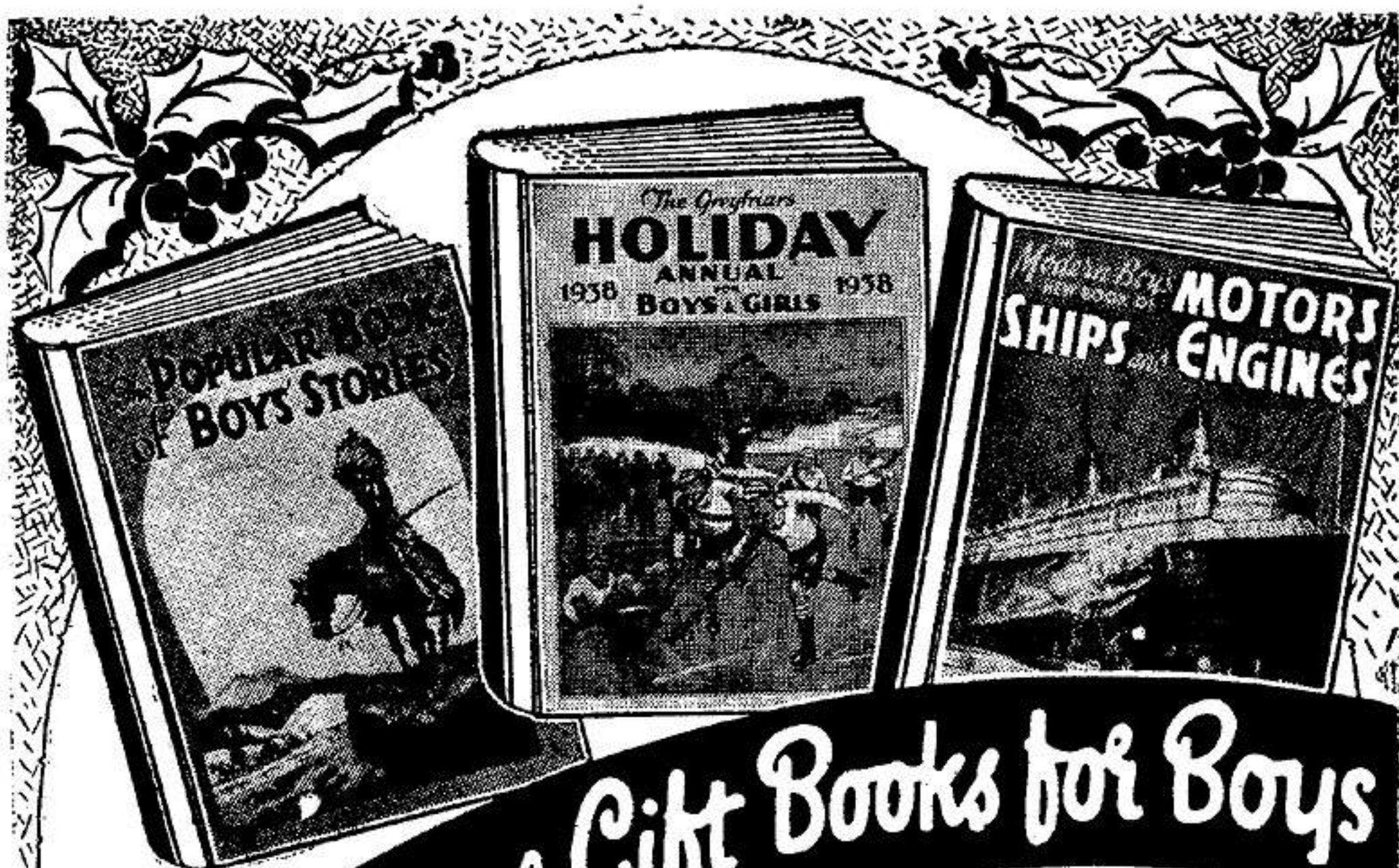
The Magnet 2^d

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



Lord Bunter's Xmas Feast!

The Best of All Presents



Grand Xmas Gift Books for Boys

The POPULAR BOOK of BOYS' STORIES

A volume of humorous and thrilling adventure stories. Hundred and ninety pages of entertainment; stories by famous authors of boys' literature. **2/6**

The Modern Boy's New Book of MOTORS, SHIPS, AND ENGINES

All the latest and brightest facts about Railways, Ships, Motor-cars and Motor Racing, many full-page pictures, and a colour plate—192 fascinating pages. **6/-**

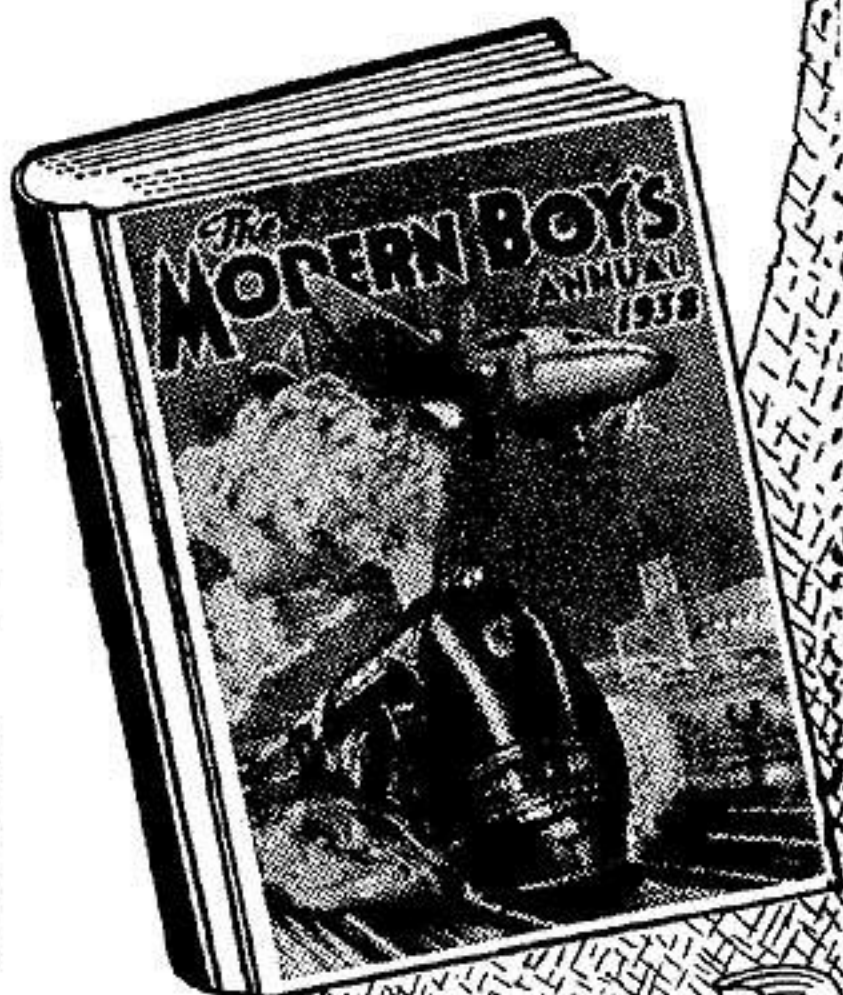
The MODERN BOY'S Annual

Without rival in the favour of boys who revel in stories and articles with a modern appeal. Two Colour Plates, many photographs and drawings. 192 pages. **6/-**

HOLIDAY Annual

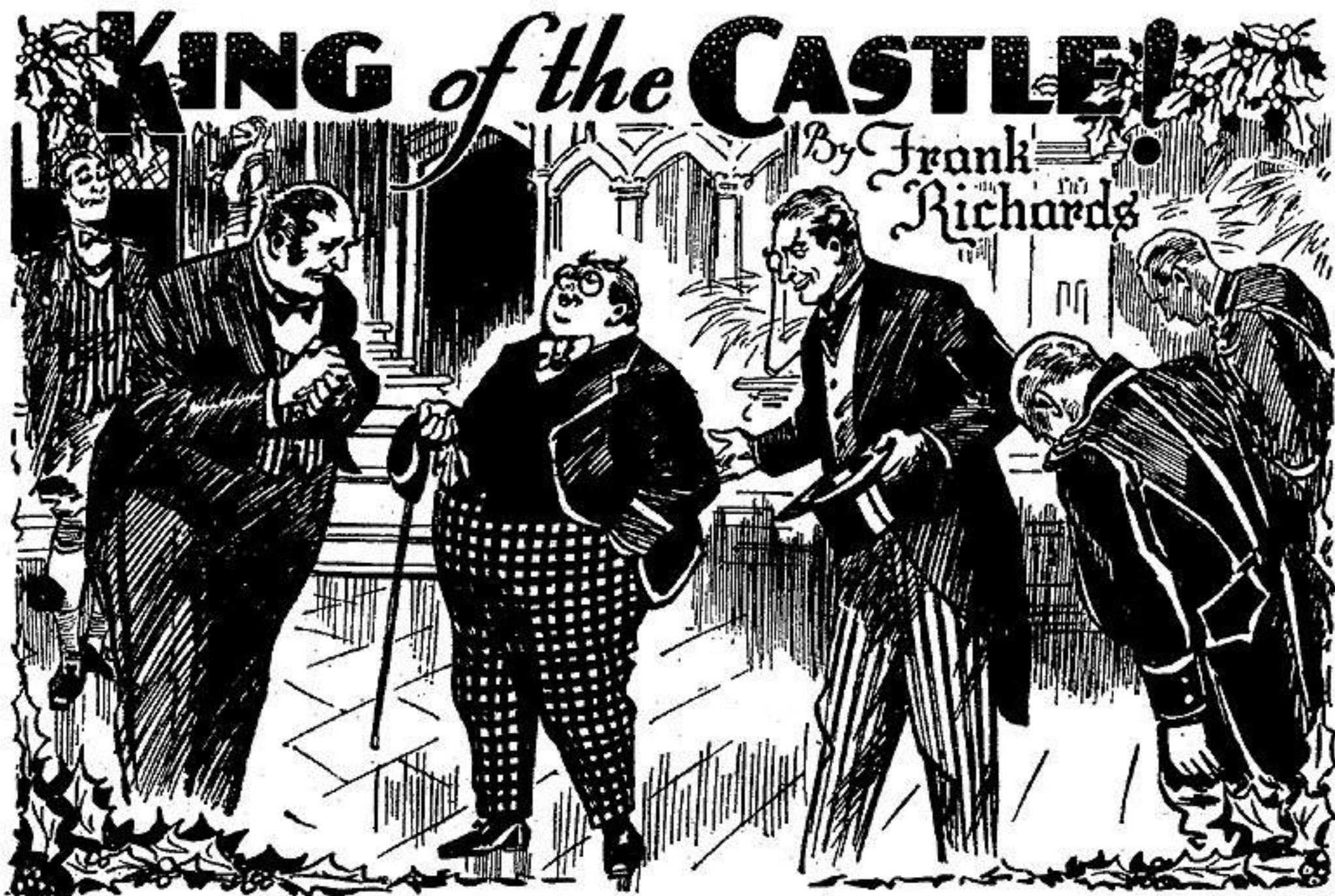
The famous school-story annual, featuring Billy Bunter, Harry Wharton & Co. and other schoolboy characters. Four Fine Colour Plates. **5/-**

Obtainable from all Newsagents and Booksellers.



CHOOSE books for your Christmas presents this year, and if you make your selection from these famous Annuals you will be certain of hours and hours of entertainment—long after ordinary gifts have lost their interest. All these books are strongly bound in coloured covers and packed with splendid features. See them at the Newsagents, to-day!

Feeding on the fat of the land at Reynham Castle and giving orders right and left to an army of liveried funkeys is the ideal Christmas holiday! So thinks Billy Bunter—until he takes over the reins as—



A Magnificent New Long Complete Christmas Yarn of HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREYFRIARS, starring BILLY BUNTER as My Lord of Reynham Castle.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Startling!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

"What—"

"Jolly old Bunter—"

"Bunter—"

"And somebody after him! Look!" yelled Bob. He pointed from the train window.

The other members of the famous Co. stared from the windows, at the road that ran beside the railway embankment.

It was breaking-up day at Greyfriars School. The train to Lantham Junction was crowded—not to say crammed.

At the junction, the Greyfriars crowd was going to scatter to the four corners of the kingdom. But they did not seem likely to arrive there in a hurry. The train was grinding slowly up a steep gradient. Johnny Bull remarked that it was crawling; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh declared that the crawlfulness was terrific.

The Famous Five were in one carriage, with three or four other Remove fellows. Some of them had seats—some hadn't. Bob Cherry, who was one of those that hadn't, was standing by the door, looking out into the wintry landscape.

Thus it was that he spotted the strange and startling scene on the road below.

A handsome Rolls-Royce car, going in the same direction as the train, was speeding along the road. Behind it roared a Ford.

A liveried chauffeur drove the Rolls, sitting like a graven image at the wheel. Inside were two passengers—an old gentleman with a gleam of silver hair under his shining, silk hat, and a fat Greyfriars junior whose podgy little nose was adorned by a big pair of spectacles—no other than Billy Bunter, the fat ornament of the Greyfriars Remove.

Harry Wharton & Co. had not expected to see Billy Bunter again till after the New Year. But there was Bunter—in all his glory.

True, Bunter had asked them to join him for Christmas at Reynham Castle, in Sussex. But as they did not believe that that castle existed outside Billy Bunter's fertile imagination, they had not taken the invitation seriously. They had put it down to Bunter's customary "gammon."

It had been quite a surprise when Sir Peter Lanchester turned up in that magnificent Rolls to take Bunter away.

How Bunter had wangled that, they did not know. But they supposed that the fat Owl of the Remove had wangled it somehow. Wangling was Bunter's long suit.

Anyhow—there was Bunter—sitting beside the tall, old baronet, with a cheery grin on his fat face, under a nice hat that belonged to Harry Wharton.

But what made the Remove fellows stare blankly from the train, was the obvious fact that the Ford was in pursuit of the Rolls.

That was startling, but unmistakable. The Rolls was going fast—but could

have gone faster. The Ford was going all out. The driver, bent over the wheel, was getting every ounce out of it. A man in a slouched hat sat beside him, leaning out a little, with something in his hand that glistened in the wintry sunshine.

Amazing as it was, the fellows in the train knew what that "something" was. It was a revolver!

Crack!

The sound floated up through the clear, frosty December air. It sounded like a whip cracking.

But it was not the crack of a whip. It was the report of a firearm. The man in the slouched hat was shooting at the tyres of the car ahead. In alarmed amazement, the juniors in the train saw a spurt of dust kicked up by the bullet, a yard from a wheel.

"Motor-bandits!" gasped Harry Wharton.

Crack!

The second shot knocked up the dust under one of the whizzing, rear wheels of the Rolls.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Bob. "If that villain gets a tyre, he may wreck the car—with poor old Bunter in it!"

"The awful rotter!" gasped Frank Nugent.

"But what—and why—" stuttered Johnny Bull.

"Goodness knows! He's after Bunter!"

The other fellows in the carriage scrambled across, to crowd at the windows and stare. All along the train, fellows were staring down at the road.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

now. At that point, road and railway ran side by side, and the speed of the cars equalled that of the train. So the strange chase of the Lantham road remained in full view of the Greyfriars crowd.

Crack!

It was a third shot.

The Greyfriars juniors stared down breathlessly. They were thankful to see that it was not a hit. Again the bullet knocked up dust near a whizzing wheel.

"Well, this beats it!" gasped Bob Cherry.

It was really an amazing scene.

There were plenty of motor-bandits, certainly; but it was amazing to see the lawless game thus played openly, in broad daylight, on a public highway.

"Bunter's taking it calmly, by gum!" said Bob.

That was most amazing of all.

At the crack of a revolver, any fellow who knew Billy Bunter would have expected him to bound like a kangaroo.

Instead of which, the fat junior sat tight, taking no heed.

Blinking up the embankment through his big spectacles, he spotted the line of startled faces along the train staring down, and grinned.

He waved a fat hand to the Famous Five.

Evidently Bunter was not alarmed—though how, and why, Harry Wharton & Co. could not begin to understand. They had, they flattered themselves, a good deal more pluck than Billy Bunter; but certainly they would have been alarmed, with a gun-man potting at the tyres of a car in which they were travelling.

And Bunter never turned a hair.

He grinned and waved at the staring juniors in the train, regardless.

But if Bunter was not alarmed, the silver-haired old baronet did not seem so easy. He was seen to half-rise, turn, and stare back from the pane of glass in the back of the car.

Then, no doubt, he spoke to the chauffeur; for the Rolls suddenly leaped into terrific speed.

It shot away like a flash, leaving the straining Ford almost standing.

Crack! Crack! Crack! came rattling from the Ford. The man in the slouched hat was pitching bullets fast. But the Rolls simply walked away from the pursuer, now that the chauffeur was letting it out, and it vanished up the road in a cloud of dust.

The Ford roared on, evidently still in pursuit, though with little chance.

A moment or two more and the road turned from the railway; and the Greyfriars crowd, rolling on to Lantham Junction in the train, lost sight of both cars.

"Well," exclaimed Harry Wharton, with a deep breath, "that beats it!"

"The beatfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, in wonder.

"They're after Bunter!" said Bob. "It isn't the old sportsman they want—it's Bunter. You remember, a few days ago, two blighters bagged him in a car, and we got him away from them. They must be the same two—in that Ford. But why the thump do they want Bunter?"

"Looks like kidnapping—" said Frank Nugent.

"But why should anybody kidnap Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull. "Bunter's not worth anything to anybody."

"It's a blessed mystery!" said Harry Wharton. "There can't be any doubt that they're after Bunter—though why, is a puzzle."

"He's all right now, anyhow!" said Bob. "They'll never get anywhere near

that Rolls again. But what the dickens can it all mean?"

Nobody could answer that question. The Famous Five could not even guess at an answer. It looked as if Billy Bunter was likely to have an exciting Christmas holiday—but what it meant was a deep mystery. The chums of the Remove had to give it up.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Brave Bunter!

"**B**RAVE lad!" said Sir Peter Lanchester.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"Eh?" he remarked.

"I do not think," said the old baronet, beaming, "that I have ever witnessed such courage, such steady nerve, in a boy before."

"Haven't you?" gasped Bunter.

"Never!" said Sir Peter. "I wish—ah, how I wish!—that my ward, Lord Reynham, had the same iron nerve; then it would be unnecessary for you to spend your Christmas holidays at Reynham Castle."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"But he has not," said the old baronet, shaking his head. "It would be quite impossible for him to go through it."

Billy Bunter was glad to hear it.

"Such steady, unshaken courage is really remarkable," went on Sir Peter.

"I see that I was not mistaken in you. Courage is required, for the part you have to play at the castle; but you have enough, and to spare."

Bunter could only blink.

What the silver-haired old gentleman was talking about was a puzzle to him.

Bunter, certainly, was brave enough, when there was no danger about. In the absence of peril, a lion had nothing on Bunter, for courage.

With danger in the offing, it would have been a different story to tell. But, so far as Bunter could see—even with the aid of his big spectacles—there was no danger in the offing.

Sitting in a luxurious car by the side of a baronet, behind a liveried chauffeur, resting comfortably on soft cushions, while the Rolls ate up the miles, suited Bunter. He was glad that a crowd of Greyfriars fellows had seen him from that passing train. It jolly well showed them that Bunter's tall tales of titled and wealthy connections were not all "gammon."

But where was the danger? Bunter had heard a sharp popping behind. He had taken it for a motor back-firing.

There was nothing alarming in that, so Bunter had not been alarmed.

Why old Sir Peter was praising him for his courage was, therefore, quite a mystery to Bunter. Still, it was quite agreeable. Bunter liked to fancy himself a doughty fellow who feared no foe.

Nobody at Greyfriars had ever praised him for his pluck. That made it all the more agreeable to hear it from Sir Peter Lanchester.

"I cannot say that I felt equally easy in my mind," went on Sir Peter.

"Had a tyre burst—"

"Eh? The tyres are all right, aren't they?" said Bunter.

"Quite! But had a bullet struck one of them—"

"A—a—a bib-bub-bullet?" stuttered Bunter.

"Yes; in that case, the car cer-

tainly would have overturned," said Sir Peter. "I was far from easy. My chauffeur, Denham, has been through the War, but he was not easy. Yet you, a schoolboy, sat through it with perfect coolness. Such courage and nerve are very unusual."

Bunter blinked at him blankly.

Apparently, from what Sir Peter said, they had passed through some danger. Billy Bunter had not been aware of it. He did not even know what it was—yet.

Sir Peter Lanchester, of course, did not guess that. He supposed that Bunter knew what had happened. And the fat junior had not even turned his head, when the man in the Ford was loosing off bullets at the tyres. The cheery grin on his fat face had not changed. No wonder Sir Peter was impressed by his nerve.

"It is clear," went on Sir Peter, "that I was watched, coming to the school for you to-day. I had no doubt of it—and this is proof. That Ford was waiting to follow us when we left Greyfriars."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. This was the first he knew of the Ford.

"I had little doubt that we should be followed on the road," said Sir Peter. "But certainly I did not look for such a desperate act as shooting at our tyres."

Bunter jumped.

"The villain fired half a dozen shots—fortunately without result. But had one struck a tyre—"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He understood now.

He squirmed round and blinked back along the road. To his immense relief, there was no sign of a car behind.

He sat down again, gasping for breath.

"We have dropped them," said Sir Peter. "I have no doubt that they are still following us, but I shall take care that they get no opportunity to try such a trick again. Let them follow to Reynham Castle, if they like."

Bunter breathed more freely.

He realised now that what he had taken for some car back-firing had been the firing of a revolver. His fat heart fairly quaked at the thought of the danger the Rolls had been in.

But having thus, accidentally, as it were, acquired credit, Bunter was not the fellow to throw it away. With the danger over, and no harm done, there was nothing the matter with Bunter's nerve. If old Sir Peter made such mistakes, Bunter was not the man to set him right.

Billy Bunter's private opinion of Sir Peter Lanchester was that he was rather an old donkey. This incident confirmed him in that opinion.

That, however, was really all to the good. Only an old donkey could have thought so highly of Billy Bunter as Sir Peter did.

"I am glad that this has happened," continued Sir Peter. "It proves that, in selecting you to play the part of Lord Reynham at the castle, I have made no error of judgment, my boy."

"Oh, yes; quite!" said Bunter.

"You will be in incessant danger and—"

"Eh?"

"But you will face it with perfect coolness—"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter. "The—the fact is, I—I rather like danger. A—a—a spot of danger makes a thing really enjoyable."

"I am glad you take that view,"

said Sir Peter. "That desperate act shows of what the villains are capable. And yet"—Sir Peter paused a moment—"my dear boy, brave as you are, do you clearly understand what you are about to face? I should be deeply disappointed if you decided to withdraw, and yet—"

Sir Peter broke off as the car suddenly rocked at a quick jamming of brakes.

Ahead of the Rolls, where the Lantham road ran between deep, dark wintry woods, a lorry had pulled out from a side lane across the road, completely blocking the way.

The lorry was piled with logs. It pulled right across the road. A bicycle could hardly have got by. The Rolls had to brake and halt. It halted, quivering from the sudden brakes.

Sir Peter gave a gasp.

"Trapped!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter Keeps Cool!

BILLY BUNTER suppressed a squeak of terror.

The log-laden lorry barred the way. Behind, somewhere out of sight, but coming on fast, was the Ford, with a desperate gunman in it. Next time Bunter heard that revolver banging, he was not going to take it for a car back-firing. He shivered with apprehension.

Sir Peter Lanchester clenched his hands.

"Trapped!" he repeated. "All my plans laid for trapping those scoundrels; but I did not foresee that they would act so quickly. So near the school—before we are anywhere near Reynham Castle—"

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet.

Like the old baronet, he had no doubt that this was a trick of the kidnapers. That lorry had been timed to pull out in front of the car and stop it—placing it at the mercy of the pursuers. As the enemy knew that they were heading for Sussex, it was easy enough to lay an ambush on the road ahead. This was it.

Billy Bunter had one idea in his fat head at that moment. Christmas at Reynham Castle ceased to appeal to him, all of a sudden. His one idea was to jump out of the car and out.

That, certainly, would cause a quick change in the old baronet's belief in his indomitable courage. But that could not be helped. Dangers in the distance Bunter could face with unshaken nerve. Dangers close at hand were rather too much for him. He was getting away—and getting away just as fast as he knew how.

But, as his popping eyes blinked at the lorry ahead, he saw the lorry-driver staring round, and his terrors vanished.

That lorry-driver was old Joyce, the woodcutter—an ancient character well known to all Greyfriars fellows. Old Joyce was doing a great business in the last days of December, with logs for Christmas fires.

Recognising old Joyce, Bunter knew at once that it was all right.

That villain, the "Smiler," might have planned an ambush on the road; but certainly honest old Joyce was not the man to have a hand in such a thing.

That lorry had—Bunter knew it as soon as he saw old Joyce—nothing whatever to do with the rascals in the Ford behind. Old Joyce was there on his lawful occasions—trundling away a load of Yule logs

Realising that, Bunter sat down again.

Sir Peter was twittering rather like a startled chicken. He, of course, knew nothing of the local woodcutter of Friardale. He had no doubt that this was a trap. Really, it looked like it, to an old gentleman who was expecting dangers all along the road to Sussex. Bunter, who knew better, sat and smiled.

That lorry was old, cranky, and heavily laden. It moved slowly and reluctantly. It was likely to keep the road blocked for several minutes; but it was not going to stick there till the Ford came up. Sir Peter supposed that it was. Bunter knew that it wasn't. Sir Peter twittered; Bunter took it all coolly and calmly. He could afford to.

hidden by that stack of logs, and were about to leap down and surround the car.

Bunter's coolness simply amazed him.

"Keep cool, sir!" said the fat Owl cheerfully. "If this is a trap, you see, we're in it, and that's that! Leave it me! I'll handle that gunman all right! You'll see!"

As Bunter knew that old Joyce would get out of the way as fast as he could with that creaking old lorry, and that the Rolls would be speeding on again long before the Ford could come up, he could afford to take the situation calmly. And he did.

"The fact is, sir," rattled on Bunter, "I'd just as soon come to close quarters with the rotters! Leave it to me!"

"Good gad!" repeated Sir Peter.



"Trapped!" repeated the old baronet. "I might have foreseen something of the kind—but I did not!"

Once more Bunter was confirmed in his belief that Sir Peter Lanchester was an old donkey.

"All my plans laid—a trap laid for the scoundrels in Sussex—but, here, we are at their mercy!" groaned Sir Peter. "They will get you—we shall not get them, as I had planned. My boy—"

"All serene, sir!" said Bunter cheerfully. "I'm not afraid of them! There's only two men in that Ford, if—if they come up. You and the chauffeur can tackle one of them—"

"What?"

"And leave the other to me," said Bunter.

Sir Peter stared at him.

"A desperate man—armed—" he stammered.

"That's all right, sir!" said Bunter reassuringly. "I'm not afraid of his gun! I fancy I can handle him all right!"

"Good gad!" gasped Sir Peter.

He could only stare at Bunter. The road ahead was blocked—the Ford was coming on behind. It had been dropped—but it was certainly coming on, though at a considerable distance in the rear. Six or seven minutes would be enough—ten at the outside.

Shifting that lorry was impossible. Indeed, Sir Peter had little or no doubt that some of the kidnapping gang were

Denham, the chauffeur, was shouting to the lorry:

"Here! Clear the road! You staying there all day, grandfather? You going to shift that lorry?"

Old Joyce looked round at him for a moment, but did not trouble to answer. He had plenty to do, handling that heavy old creaking lorry.

It grunted, it creaked, it puffed and it blew; but slowly it obeyed the driver, and drew lengthwise along the road.

The Rolls stirred again.

Sir Peter Lanchester blinked.

"Good gad! They are clearing the road!" he exclaimed, in infinite relief. "Is it possible that this is not a trap after all?"

Billy Bunter winked at the back of the baronet's head, as Sir Peter stared in great surprise at the lumbering lorry—lumbering slowly out of the way.

Evidently, it was not a trap. Sir Peter realised now what Bunter had realised immediately he recognised old Joyce.

The Rolls sped on, passing the lorry and its stack of logs. Denham let it out, and it whizzed. There was still no sign of the Ford in the rear.

Sir Peter Lanchester sat down, gasping for breath.

He was immensely relieved to get clear before the Ford came into the picture again. So was Bunter, for that matter!

Sir Peter did not speak again till the

car had passed Lantham, and was speeding away to the west. He glanced several times at Bunter, however. The fat junior's cool self-possession, during those trying moments on the Lantham road, had been another surprise to him. That Bunter knew the lorry driver, and knew, therefore, that it was all right, did not occur to him. Bunter did not think of mentioning it.

"I am more than satisfied," said Sir Peter, when he spoke again at last. "Twice to-day you have proved your courage, my boy."

"My pluck's fairly well known at Greyfriars," remarked Bunter. "The fellows generally select me if there's anything a bit risky on hand."

"I have no doubt of it. And yet, what you are going to face at Reynham Castle might make even a brave boy hesitate," said Sir Peter. "It is true that I hope to trap the rascals, but I may not be successful. We are dealing with a desperate gang, I fear."

He paused.

"But I can rely on you, William. I shall call you William, my boy, as that is my ward's name."

"That's all right, sir!" said Bunter. "It's my name, too—William George."

"You will be careful, William, not to allow a single indiscreet word to pass your lips at the castle. The whole thing depends upon the utmost secrecy being observed," said Sir Peter. "Even to my nephew Rupert I have said nothing. No one at the castle will dream, for a moment, that you are not the real Lord Reynham. But a single careless word—"

"Rely on me, sir!"

"I do! I do!" said Sir Peter. "Nevertheless, be very careful. Everything depends on those scoundrels taking you for the real Lord Reynham. It is four or five years, my boy, since the first attempt was made upon my ward—and ever since he has been in danger. Only by placing him at a distant school, under an assumed name, have I secured his safety. How they discovered what I had done, I cannot even guess—but they have learned that much—though, very fortunately, they do not know the name of the school, or the name taken by my ward there."

He paused again.

"My visit to Mr. Quelch gave them the impression that he was at that school," he went on. "It was very fortunate that you heard, by accident, my conversation with Mr. Quelch, and learned how matters stood, as it led you to make the generous offer to play the part required. And yet—"

Once more Sir Peter paused.

"At Reynham Castle," he said, "you will draw the fire of that gang of scoundrels. If only my ward were a boy more like you—But he is not—he is in delicate health, with a weak nervous system—I dare not expose him to such a strain. He must remain in safe concealment till that gang of rascals is dealt with. No one there has seen him for four or five years—and almost anyone could play the part, so far as that goes—but in view of the danger, only a boy of uncommon pluck and nerve—"

"A fellow like me!" said Bunter modestly.

"Exactly!" said Sir Peter. "Exactly, William! Mr. Quelch doubted whether I should be able to find any boy with courage and nerve to play the part of Lord Reynham, to draw those rascals into the open, and give the law a chance of securing them. But I have found you."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

"Just pie to me, sir!" said Bunter breezily.

"You will be in constant danger, William, now that I have made them believe that you are Lord Reynham—that my ward was placed at Greyfriars School under the name of Bunter—"

"I rather like danger, sir."

"You will be exposed to incessant attacks while you are at the castle."

"That will make the hole a bit lively."

Sir Peter smiled.

"Well, well, evidently you are the boy I require," he said. "I should have been glad to let you bring a party of your schoolfellows with you, but, in the circumstances, that, of course, is impossible. Boys who have known you as Bunter could not be present where you are to be known as Lord Reynham."

Billy Bunter made no reply to that.

The prospect of a gorgeous time at Reynham Castle, playing the part of a peer of the realm, feeding on the fat of the land, and giving orders right and left to an army of liveried flunkies, appealed to Billy Bunter strongly.

But the prospect of incessant danger did not appeal to him the least little bit.

For that reason he had asked the Famous Five to stay with him for the Christmas holidays, as well as Bolsover major and Skinner of the Remove.

With a crowd of Greyfriars fellows round him, Bunter calculated that he was going to be quite safe at the castle in Sussex.

But as this was not in accordance with Sir Peter's plans, Bunter sagely did not mention it.

Once he was received and acknowledged at the castle as Lord Reynham, it would be too late for Sir Peter to back out. Then Bunter's bodyguard could come along; and if Sir Peter did not like it, Sir Peter could lump it!

Such were the thoughts in Billy Bunter's fat mind, as the Rolls ate up the miles; and if Sir Peter Lanchester could have guessed those thoughts, certainly his estimation of William George Bunter would have been considerably lowered.

Fortunately for Bunter, Sir Peter was no thought-reader!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

His Lordship Comes Home!

"JASMOND!"

"Sir Peter!"

"Lord Reynham!"

Sir Peter was a tall gentleman, and a little slim. Jasmond, the butler at Reynham Castle, was nearly as tall as Sir Peter, and twice as wide.

Jasmond was plump, portly, and impressive. Butler at a peer's castle, he looked the part.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

Now that he stood in the vast hall of Reynham Castle, Bunter was rather glad he had made a careful selection of several other fellows' best clothes.

He realised that he had to dress his part, as much as possible, in these magnificent surroundings.

The December dusk was falling on the hills and woods of Sussex, when the car had rolled in at the immense gates, and followed a drive that seemed, to Bunter, endless, before the castle was reached.

Battlemented walls and turrets loomed up through the winter gloom as the car arrived.

Bunter had expected something on a

large scale. Sir Peter Lanchester was a wealthy gentleman: and his ward, the boy peer, was heir to an enormous fortune when he came of age. So Bunter looked for something imposing. But the old Sussex castle was far beyond his expectations.

The mere idea of staying in the superb establishment for weeks, playing the part of lord and proprietor, was dazzling to Bunter's fat mind.

It was worth a little risk. Indeed, it was worth a lot. Obviously, in such a place, the grub would be all right. If the grub was all right, everything was all right. Bunter was going to sample some, as soon as he could. He had arrived hungry. He was not thinking of danger now. Blow danger!

The massive form of Jasmond bent a little, in respectful salute to his lordship.

That nobody at the castle had seen the real lord since he was a little kid of eleven or so, Bunter knew. After four or five years on from that age the change in a fellow would naturally be very great. Almost any fellow of a suitable age could have taken up the part. Nevertheless, it seemed to Bunter doubtful whether Sir Peter's numerous staff would really take him for Lord Reynham. It seemed to him too good to be true, in fact.

But his doubts were relieved now.

Clearly the massive Jasmond had no doubts. How could he, when his master himself brought the schoolboy into the castle as Lord Reynham? Sir Peter could not have been imposed on by any impostor. That he was deliberately passing off someone as his ward, was not an idea that was likely to occur to anyone.

"May I respectfully welcome your lordship home, after your lordship's long absence?" said Jasmond, in a deep, throaty, fruity voice. "The whole staff, my lord, will rejoice to see your lordship."

Bunter beamed on Jasmond.

He liked this.

He seemed to grow about an inch taller on the spot.

Indeed as Sir Peter was presenting him as a lord, and the butler receiving him as a lord, and a dozen or so footmen standing in the hall respectfully regarding him as a lord, Billy Bunter began almost to believe that he really was a lord.

"Oh, quite!" said Bunter, airily. "Glad to see you again, Jasmond."

"Your lordship does me the honour to remember me?" asked Jasmond, with an air of great gratification.

"Oh, perfectly!" said Bunter. "In fact, I've often mentioned you to the other fellows at Greyfriars."

"Your lordship has honoured me!" said Jasmond.

"Not at all, my good fellow!" said Bunter, kindly.

"His lordship's apartments are prepared, Jasmond?" said Sir Peter.

"Everything, sir, is in perfect order," said the butler. "His lordship's valet is in attendance."

Bunter caught his breath. He had not thought of that.

It was a joke in the Greyfriars Remove that Lord Mauleverer, who had a valet when he was at home, had wanted to bring his "man" to Greyfriars when he came. That had put it into Billy Bunter's fat head to tell the Remove fellows that he had a "man" at home at Bunter Court! Now, however, he really was going to have a "man"—his lordship's man. This was better and better. He wondered what those boasts, Harry Wharton & Co. would say, when they arrived and found

him with a "man". They would not be able to make out that Bunter hadn't a valet now.

"I will take you to your rooms, William!" said Sir Peter.

"Go it!" said Bunter, cheerfully.

"Eh?"

"I mean, certainly, Sir Peter!"

Bunter followed the old baronet up one side of a vast double staircase, into a still more vast oak gallery that surrounded the hall on three sides.

Jasmond stood respectfully gazing after him as he went. So did the twelve footmen. What they thought of his lordship was not expressed in their faces. Billy Bunter had had some refreshments on the way down to Sussex, and it was possible that the staff had

Bunter. "After all, I've only been away from home a few years."

This was for the benefit of the respectful young man—evidently the valet.

Sir Peter blinked at Bunter.

Certainly, he desired that the "spoof" should be kept up, and believed in by everyone in the castle. Unless Bunter was believed to be the young lord, the kidnapping gang would give him no attention—and Bunter, as the young lord, was to be the bait to draw the rascals into the trap. So the better Bunter played the part, the better it was for Sir Peter's deep-laid scheme.

Yet the old gentleman did not seem quite pleased by Bunter's breezy self-assurance.

Deluding a gang of kidnappers was a

pression on him. Now, perhaps, he was getting a little clearer insight into the fat Owl.

Still, even if it irked him, he could hardly complain of a fellow throwing himself into a part which he had selected him to play. But he turned from Bunter a little abruptly to speak to the respectful young man.

"James!"

"Sir!"

"William, this is your valet, James Anderson."

Bunter gave James Anderson a nod.

"Dinner is at eight, William!" said Sir Peter, turning to leave the apartment.

"Right-ho!" said Bunter.

He sat down in the armchair by the



Billy Bunter sat down in the armchair and blinked at the valet through his big spectacles. "You may take off my boots, George!" he said. The respectful young man obeyed the order and then encased the fat junior's hoofs in a pair of slippers.

not expected to see a peer of the realm with a smear of jam round his extensive mouth. That smear was very evident, though Bunter had wiped off some of the jam on the sleeve of his coat.

From the oak gallery opened an immense corridor, into which Bunter rolled after the old baronet. A big oak door stood open, and the glow of a log fire came from within. Bunter rolled in with Sir Peter.

A young man who was sitting in an armchair by the log fire, bounded to his feet, at the sound of footsteps, and stood at respectful attention as they entered—looking as if he had never sat in his master's armchair in his life.

That room was immense. Bunter guessed that it was a state apartment of the castle. Sir Peter, in treating him as Lord Reynham, was going the whole hog, so to speak.

"The King's Room, William!" said Sir Peter.

"I remember it perfectly!" agreed

justifiable stratagem. But there was a spot of deception in such a scheme, of which Sir Peter preferred not to think. Bunter on the other hand, had no objection to deception. The fat Ananias of Greyfriars, in fact, revelled in it.

"The room seems smaller," added Bunter.

"Eh?"

"It's always so, when a fellow's been away a long time," remarked Bunter. "As a small kid, I thought it immense. Now it seems much smaller."

"Oh!" gasped Sir Peter.

Bunter, undoubtedly, was playing his part well. It was just such an observation as the young lord might have made, after not seeing the King's Room since the age of eleven. From the point of view of acting, it was good business. But it seemed to worry the old baronet a little.

His acquaintance with Billy Bunter was brief. Owing to certain circumstances, Bunter had made a great im-

pression on him. Now, perhaps, he was getting a little clearer insight into the fat Owl.

"You may take my boots off, George!" he said.

"James, sir!" hinted the respectful young man.

"Oh, yes! I never remember servants' names!" said Bunter, carelessly.

James gave a little start. Evidently, he had not expected this from Lord Reynham. Bunter could see that, and he wondered why. Forgetting servants' names seemed, to Bunter, frightfully aristocratic.

"Find me some slippers, Francis!" said Bunter, when the boots were off.

"James, sir!" faltered the respectful young man.

"Oh, quite!" said Bunter.

James brought slippers and encased Bunter's hoofs in them.

"Thank you, Thomas!" said Bunter, negligently.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

James did not tell him again that he was called James. He left it at that.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

All Right for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER blinked at his reflection in a tall pier-glass, and smiled complacently. He was pleased at what he saw.

After a rest and a little light refreshment which had been sent up to the King's Room, Bunter had dressed for dinner—with the assistance of James. He was quite unable to do it without assistance.

That morning, in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, Bunter had dressed unaided. But he had become a lord since then, and that made a tremendous difference. Bunter was now unable to do a thing for himself.

Already Billy Bunter was developing a complete aristocratic helplessness. Moreover, he believed in making servants work. The more trouble he gave them, the more they would be impressed—that was Bunter's idea.

Fellows like old Mauly at Greyfriars did not understand that. Lord Mauleverer never gave servants trouble that he could help. Bunter flattered himself that he knew the nobleman business rather better than old Mauly. All of a sudden, as it were, Bunter had become incapable of picking up a pocket handkerchief for himself.

With James' industrious assistance, Bunter was now in "full fig." Looking into the glass, he could hardly help being pleased.

What he saw was a handsome, well-set-up fellow, in evening clothes—whose spectacles rather added to his distinguished appearance. Probably that was not what James saw.

James, in fact, saw a fat, self-satisfied fellow, with a conceited smirk on his podgy face. However, he did not mention that to Bunter, and Bunter remained happily satisfied with what he saw.

"You can go, James!" said Bunter carelessly; and James went rather gladly. Bunter had tired him a little.

Bunter was not in need, for the moment, of his "man." And he wanted to get shut of James for a bit, while he explored his new and palatial quarters. He did not want James to watch him investigating.

His quarters were all that Bunter could have desired.

The King's Room was an immense sitting-room, with a Persian carpet worth hundreds of pounds, beautiful leather armchairs that it was a luxury to sink into, a radiogram, a telephone, and everything else that Bunter could possibly need, or fancy that he needed.

Adjoining it was a bed-room on an equally magnificent scale. Adjoining the bed-room were dressing-room and bath-room. At the last-named Bunter gave only a careless glance. He had not a lot of use for it.

But he examined with great keenness and interest the contents of wardrobes and drawers. Bunter's measurements having been supplied from the school outfitters, an ample supply of every kind of garment had been prepared for him at the castle.

He was able to discard, with contempt, the garments he had bagged from the Famous Five at Greyfriars. They could have their mouldy old things back as soon as they liked.

Sir Peter had, Bunter admitted, made his preparations with a liberal hand.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

The only thing he seemed to have forgotten was pocket-money. Bunter was going to remind him of it.

After all, it was up to the old bean to treat a fellow liberally, when a fellow was running such fearful risks for him—or, at all events, he fancied that a fellow was.

Bunter was not going to run risks if he could help it. He had asked Harry Wharton & Co. to the castle, to see him safe. He had asked Skinner and Bolsover major chiefly because they had fed him and pulled his fat leg—still, the more fellows he had round him, the safer he was going to be.

Considering Sir Peter's views on this subject, Bunter realised that he had to break this rather gently to the old bean. All the fellows were not coming in a bunch. Bunter's idea was to let them trickle in, as it were, one or two at a time.

Still, it seemed to Bunter now that there was no hurry about that. He felt safe enough in that crowded castle. He could phone them up when he wanted them.

The old bean, no doubt, would want him to go out and about, taking risks, to draw the attack of the secret gang who were after Lord Reynham. Bunter had his own ideas about that.

Meanwhile, he was surely safe in the

READERS PLEASE

NOTE!

The next issue of the
MAGNET will be on sale
Friday, December 17th.

castle! The Smiler and the Ferret, and the rest of the gang, could hardly get at him there. It was as good as being in a fortress. At least twenty-five servants, too—and his own man, with a room on this corridor. Safe enough.

Feeling so thoroughly safe, Bunter was less keen to see the Famous Five arrive. He was going to have them there—he had asked them, and he was a fellow of his word. But he jolly well wasn't going to hurry about it—in fact, he rather thought he would leave it over for a few days, to keep them on tenterhooks. That would serve them right. Finding himself so absolutely safe in the ancestral home of Lord Reynham made rather a difference to Bunter's views on this matter.

They had been cheeky—making out that they didn't really believe that he was going to Reynham Castle for Christmas—indeed, making out that they didn't really believe there was such a place.

Billy Bunter grinned, and rolled back towards the doorway from his bed-room into the King's Room. He was going to ring up Wharton on the telephone, and tell him where he was.

There was a sound of movement in that apartment.

Bunter frowned.

He had told James that he could go. Distinctly he had told James that he could go. James had no business to come back unless rung for. It was very annoying to Bunter, to think that a manservant's eye might have been upon him while he was rooting through wardrobes and drawers, gloating over his plunder. He resolved to tell James off on the spot. The sooner that manservant understood that his lordly

master was going to stand no nonsense, the better.

Frowning indignantly, Bunter rolled into the King's Room.

"Look here, James—" he rapped. In his wrath, he quite forgot to forget James' name.

He broke off, in surprise. James was not there! He was certain that he had heard somebody, and had taken it for granted that it was James. But it was not James—nor anybody else. Nobody was there.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

He blinked round the immense apartment. Half a dozen electric lights were on, and the log fire sent out a ruddy gleam. Nobody was to be seen. Certainly, there was plenty of cover for anyone to hide, among so many massive articles of furniture. Still, James could not be supposed to have hidden himself behind the radiogram, or under one of the big armchairs. Bunter concluded that he had got out quick by the door on the corridor—or perhaps it was a falling log in the fire he had heard, and not a movement at all.

Anyhow, nobody was there—his blink round revealed only the light reflected on the walls and on polished furniture.

Dismissing the matter from his fat mind, Bunter rolled across to the table on which the telephone stood, and sat down to it.

Grinning cheerfully, he asked for "trunks," and gave the number of Wharton Lodge.

As he waited to get through, a sound fell on his fat ears, and he blinked round angrily. If that man James was butting in when he was going to speak on the telephone—

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter, in surprise.

He was certain he had heard some sound in the room. But there was no one to be seen. He almost wondered whether Reynham Castle was haunted.

However, a voice came through over the wires. He had got his number, and he gave his attention to the telephone.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Harry Wharton!

"MASTER HARRY!"

"Yes, Wells!"

"The telephone, sir!"

"My uncle—"

Wells coughed.

"No, sir! Master Bunter."

"Oh, all right! I'll come down!"

Harry Wharton turned off the wireless in his "den" at Wharton Lodge. He gave Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh a smile, and the Nabob of Bhanipur grinned.

Wharton Lodge had not its usual festive aspect of Christmastide. Colonel Wharton and Aunt Amy were away, and Harry Wharton was only home for a day or two, before going on with Hurree Singh to Cherry Place.

True, all the Co. had, in a hilarious spirit, accepted Bunter's invitation to the castle in Sussex. But they were not expecting to hear any more of Bunter's castle.

The captain of the Remove was not surprised, however, to get a ring from Billy Bunter. As Wharton Lodge was to be shut up over the holidays, even Wells, the butler, going away to his relations, Bunter did not want to plant himself there. But Wharton had no doubt that he would gladly have planted himself on any other member of the Co.

"Jolly old Bunter, Inky!" he remarked. "Come down and hear what

he's got to say. I dare say you can guess."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh chuckled. "The guessfulness is preposterously easy," he answered. "The esteemed castle has fallen through, and the absurd Bunter would like to see his old pals at Christmas."

Harry Wharton laughed:

"That's it, I fancy," he said. "The old porpoise would like to roll in here, and go along with us to Cherry Place—if he rolled in there on his own, Bob would most likely boot him! Come on!"

The two juniors went downstairs. The receiver was off the telephone, and Harry picked it up.

The nabob, with a dusky, grinning face, stood close to hear what came through.

"Hallo! Is that you, Bunter?"

"Yes, old chap!"

"You got away from those sportsmen in the Ford all right?"

"Oh, yes, rather."

"What the dickens were they after you for?"

"Kidnapping, old chap! They've heard of my wealth—"

"Bow-wow!"

"What—"

"Well, I'm glad you got away, whatever they wanted. But if they were after your wealth, why not give it to them, and have done with them? It will only cost you a few bob."

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter from Sussex. "If you're going to be cheeky, Wharton, I shall jolly well wash out that invitation I gave you!"

"I shan't mind!" said Harry, laughing.

"I fancy you'd be jolly glad to spend Christmas at a magnificent castle, crowded with servants, and feeding on the fat of the land."

"Oh, quite! But it would have to be a real castle!"

"You fathead! I'm speaking from Reynham Castle now!" roared Bunter.

"I don't think!"

"Where do you think I'm speaking from, then, you ass?"

"Bunter Villa—alias Bunter Court."

"Beast!"

"Is that the lot?"

"No! I'm at Reynham Castle now—it's an immense, splendid place, bigger than Bunter Court—"

"Bigger than Bunter Court! It must be twenty feet long, then!"

"You—you—you blithering idiot!" howled Bunter. "The castle alone covers acres. The grounds are immense. I've got the King's Room here—you could put Wharton Lodge in the middle of the floor, and walk round it. I've just dressed for dinner—"

"Whose clobber have you pinched?"

"Beast! If you don't believe me—"

"Hardly!" chuckled Wharton.

"What do you think I was doing in Sir Peter Lanchester's car, you fathead? You saw him fetch me away from Greyfriars."

"I've wondered! I can't make out how you touched that old bean for a lift!"

"I came all the way to Sussex with him in that car. I'm at the castle now. It's magnificent. I haven't rung you up just to make you green with envy, of course—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"But I bet you've never seen such a place in your life. I've got a valet here named James. I usually call him George, because I can't remember that his name is James—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" yapped Bunter. "I can't be expected to remember servants' names, being accustomed to such

immense numbers of them. It's different with you, in your poor little place. I dare say you always remember your butler's name. I never can remember that it's Wells—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" came a hoot over the wires. Bunter did not seem pleased by the merriment at the Wharton Lodge end.

A rather peculiar expression came over Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's dusky face, as he listened-in. He was beginning to wonder whether there really was a Reynham Castle, and whether Bunter was there.

"Well, just hear this," went on Bunter, with a snap. "I've asked you here, Harry Wharton—"

"Thank you for nothing."

"You ungrateful beast! I've a jolly good mind to wash it right out!"

"Do!"

"If you fancy I want you, you're mistaken!" hooted Bunter. "It's not dangerous, as I thought it was going to be—I mean to say, I'm not a fellow to be scared by a little danger, and if you think I want you to protect me, you're jolly well mistaken, see?"

Harry Wharton stared blankly at the telephone. Then he looked at Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What on earth does the fat ass mean by that, Inky?" he asked. "I suppose there can't be a word of truth in his gas, can there?"

"The esteemed goodness knows!" said the nabob.

"I'm safe enough here," went on the fat voice over the wires. "They can't get at me in a castle like this, crowded with servants. And I can jolly well tell you that I'm not going out looking for danger. I'll watch it! So if you fancy I want you, you can go and eat coke, see!"

"Well, my hat!" said Harry Wharton, blankly.

"And you can tell the other fellows the same, when you see them," yapped Bunter. "Fat lot I want you looking after me—as if I can't look after myself!"

"This beats it!" said Harry.

"The beatfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

It was difficult for the chums of the Remove to make head or tail of what Bunter had to say over the phone.

But one thing, at least, was clear—the fat Owl was not, as usual, looking for a chance to land himself for the holidays. Wherever William George Bunter was, he was content to stay there.

"Got that?" jeered the fat voice. "Mind, I'm not turning you down! I'll have you here for a few days, as soon as I can arrange it with Sir Peter. But not unless you're jolly civil about it! See?"

"You fat ass!"

"And if you're going to be cheeky, Wharton, I can jolly well say plainly—Oh! Owl! Yow-wow! Help! Help! Help!"

"Wha-a-a-t!"

Wharton fairly bounded, as that yelling voice came through over the telephone.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh jumped.

"Bunter—what—" gasped Harry.

"Help!" came a howl, in fainter tones—evidently farther from the mouth-piece at the other end. Dead silence followed.

Wharton's startled eyes met Hurree Singh's. The nabob's face was grave. It sounded as if Bunter had been suddenly seized and dragged away from the telephone, and yelled for help as he was dragged. But how could such a thing be possible?

"Bunter!" Wharton fairly shouted into the transmitter. "Bunter! Answer me, you fat ass! Are you trying to pull my leg, or what?"

No answer.

"Bunter!"

Dead silence!

The instrument at the other end, evidently, had cut off. From wheresoever Billy Bunter was telephoning, and for whatever reason he had ceased to speak, he was finished with telephoning now.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, both utterly amazed, looked at one another with startled eyes, in silence.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Alarm in the Castle!

"HELP!" shrieked Billy Bunter—seventy-five miles away from the two startled juniors at Wharton Lodge.

Scared out of his fat wits, the Owl of Greyfriars struggled and howled.

Only a few moments ago he had been burbling on the telephone, "gassing" to his fat heart's content, in the belief that, quite safe in Reynham Castle, he did not, after all, need any protection. But now—

It was like an awful nightmare to Billy Bunter.

Who had grasped him, from behind, he had not the remotest idea. The grip that was suddenly laid on him was like iron. He had heard no footstep—whoever had crept behind him, had crept on tiptoe on the soft carpet, and grabbed him as he sat at the telephone.

(Continued on next page.)

PIANO ACCORDIONS

BY ALL THE MOST FAMOUS MAKERS



Bonelli, Steldeni, Vissimio, Pandotti, Hohner, Crucianelli.

£4.4.0 value for 42/-

Piano Finished Cabinet by Steldeni. Metal bound Bellows, triple Chord Action. Complete with shoulder Strap. 21 Piano Keys, 8 Basses. Cash Price 42/- or 2/- first instalment, balance 4/- monthly until 48/- is paid. Elaborate Tutor. Also Superior De Luxe Model at 52/6, same terms. List of models with 25 Keys, 12 Bass; 25 Keys, 24 Bass; 34 Keys, 48 Bass; 41 Keys, 120 Bass, on terms.—J. A. DAVIS & CO. (Dept. A.G.48) 54/104 DENMARK HILL, LONDON, S.E.5.



"Hey, you chaps!"

3/- DOWN brings immediate delivery of a Riley 'Home' Billiard Table, carriage paid on 7 Days' Free Trial. Balance monthly. Tell your dad THAT'S the way to keep you at home! Write for Free Art List.

E. J. RILEY, LTD., Belmont Works, Arington, or Dept. 30, 147, Aldersgate St. London, E.C.1.

32 FREE BILLIARD TABLES. Write for details.



LIBIA PKT. FREE. Large Libia pictorial, Boy King (Portrait), over 55 different, Philippine Islands, pictorial Italian Commem., Scarce Canadian Mountie. Postage 2d.; request approvals.—ROBINSON BROS. (A), MORETON, WIRRAL.

Who—what—could it be? Whoever it was, whatever it was, it was—danger! Only too well the terrified fat junior knew that.

The Smiler and the Ferret had been left a hundred miles away in the Ford—but even had they been at hand, it was unimaginable that either of them could have penetrated within the battlements of Reynham Castle. But a grip of iron was on the fat junior, who had arrived at the castle as Lord Reynham—a grip in which he crumpled helplessly. He was in an enemy's grasp!

He let out a series of sharp, wild shrieks, before he could be silenced. But a hand clapped over his mouth from behind stifled his cries.

Billy Bunter had no more chance in that powerful grasp than a rabbit in the coils of a serpent. He could not even turn his head to see who it was that had attacked him.

A sinewy arm gripped him like a band of steel—a hard hand was pressed on his spluttering mouth, and he was dragged backwards.

Hardly knowing what he did, in his frantic terror, the fat junior kicked out behind him.

By great good luck, that sudden hack landed on a shin.

Bunter heard a gasp of pain behind him, and the grasp of his unseen assailant relaxed for the moment.

That moment was enough for the frantic Owl.

He tore himself away from the relaxing grasp, and bounded.

Nobody, seeing Billy Bunter at that moment, would have suspected that his movements were generally modelled on those of a tortoise. He fairly flew!

His feet hardly touched the floor, as he whizzed for the door on the corridor.

He did not even glimpse his assailant; but he heard, behind him, a leaping footstep and a panting breath as he flew. He felt a fierce grasp just miss his fat shoulder from behind.

Then he tore the door open and bounded out of the room.

"Help! Help! Help!"

He shrieked wildly as he bounded.

"My lord!" came a startled exclamation. James appeared in the corridor.

"Help! Help! Help!" roared Bunter.

"Your lordship—"

"Help! Help! Keep him off! Help!"

Bunter, in his terror, was unaware that he had not been pursued beyond the doorway. His mysterious assailant did not show up. Bunter, by almost miraculous luck, had escaped from his grasp, and it was too late to seize him again, with help at hand and startled servants hurrying to the spot. But the fat junior, in his terror, yelled and yelled.

"What—what—what has happened, my lord?" stuttered the astonished James.

"Help!" yelled Bunter.

Many footsteps sounded in the gallery over the hall and the corridors that branched therefrom. The groom of the chambers, three or four footmen, and several other menservants arrived from various directions. More slowly, but with as much haste as was consistent with his portly dignity, Jasmond arrived. More swiftly than any of them came Sir Peter Lanchester. With Sir Peter came a rather hard-featured man with sharp eyes, dressed in black. Bunter had not seen him before, but the household knew him as Mr. Tomlinson, the baronet's new secretary.

"What—" exclaimed Sir Peter.

"Help!" roared Bunter.

"James, what—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

"Really I do not know, sir!" gasped James. "His lordship suddenly rushed out of his lordship's room calling for help, sir—"

"William—"

"Help!"

"My dear boy!" exclaimed Sir Peter. He grasped Bunter by the shoulder.

"Tell me what has happened at once!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. He pulled himself together a little as he realised that he was in the midst of a crowd and that the danger was past.

"Oh lor! Oh crumbs! I say, keep him off!"

"Him! Who?"

"He collared me from behind!" gasped Bunter.

"Who did?"

"He did! I didn't see him; he got me from behind while I was sitting at the telephone!" spluttered Bunter.

"He's in my room now! Oh crikey!"

"Good gad! Impossible! What—"

"I tell you he got me!" roared Bunter. "He's there now! Tell the servants to collar him! James, go into that room at once and bag that beast! Do you hear me?"

"Yes, my lord!" gasped James.

Bunter's man went at once into the King's Room.

Sir Peter Lanchester gave Bunter a searching look, then he turned to his secretary.

"Tomlinson, search at once!"

The hard-faced, hawk-eyed man stepped quickly into the room after James. Sir Peter rapped orders to the clustering menservants. They gathered round the door of the King's Room and the door of the adjoining bed-room. If any stranger was in either room his escape was cut off; and as he had not followed Bunter out into the corridor, he was still there—if he had been there at all.

Then the old baronet stepped into the room.

Bunter rolled as far as the doorway and blinked in after him; he did not mean to enter until that mysterious assailant was secured.

Swiftly the room was searched.

There was a good deal of space to cover and a great many massive articles of furniture to look under and behind, but in five minutes Mr. Tomlinson had scanned every inch of space.

There was a slightly sarcastic expression on Mr. Tomlinson's hard face.

"No one is here, Sir Peter," he said.

"Really it seems impossible," said Sir Peter.

"Quite!" said Mr. Tomlinson.

"Don't talk rot!" roared Bunter.

Mr. Tomlinson gave a sort of convulsive jump and stared round at Bunter.

"What did you say?" he ejaculated.

"I said don't talk rot!" hooted Bunter. "That man's got to be found!"

"No one is here—"

"Rubbish!"

"Please address Mr. Tomlinson more respectfully, William," said Sir Peter.

"Mr. Tomlinson is my—my secretary."

"I don't care who he is! He's talking rot!"

"Really, William—"

"That man's got to be found!" roared Bunter.

The baronet made a gesture to James, who left the apartment.

Billy Bunter, still no farther in than the doorway, glared angrily through his big spectacles. Obviously—to Bunter—the mysterious assailant was still there, and he had to be found.

Sir Peter looked inquiringly at Tomlinson. The sarcastic expression had returned to Mr. Tomlinson's face.

"No one is here, Sir Peter," he said, speaking in a low voice. "The boy has had an attack of nerves."

"You are absolutely certain—"

"I have been a detective for twenty years, and I imagine that I am capable of searching a room," answered Mr. Tomlinson dryly.

"Oh, quite, quite! But"—the baronet spoke in a whisper—"you know my plan, Tomlinson. The boy is here to draw the attacks of the kidnappers; you are here to watch for them and lay them by the heels. If there has been an attack—"

"No one is here!"

"But the boy—"

"Nerves!" said Mr. Tomlinson sarcastically. "He fancies there is danger, and he has fancied an attack!"

"On previous occasions he has shown remarkable courage and presence of mind, Tomlinson."

The detective fixed his keen, hard eyes on the fat, scared face in the doorway for a moment, then he shrugged his shoulders.

"He does not look it!" he said dryly.

"Perhaps not at the moment, but certainly he has shown great courage this very day," persisted Sir Peter. "I can hardly believe that he has been frightened at nothing."

"No one is here, sir!"

"It is inexplicable," said Sir Peter; and the detective, with another shrug of the shoulders, walked out of the King's Room, Billy Bunter giving him an inimical glare as he went.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Means Business!

"**B**OW the thump did he get away?"

"My dear boy—"

"He must have nipped through the bed-room—"

"But—"

"And dodged down the corridor!" said Bunter.

"Really, William—"

"That must be it, as he isn't here now," said Bunter.

Even Billy Bunter was satisfied at last that there was no extraneous person in his rooms. Having been over the whole ground himself, he could trust the evidence of his own eyes and his big spectacles.

No one was there. Bunter could only suppose that when he ran yelling into the corridor the assailant had cut through the bed-room and escaped by the door on the corridor farther along.

In that case, it was extraordinary that James had not seen him; but as it was the only possible explanation, to Bunter's mind, he settled on it.

Sir Peter Lanchester had a very doubtful look, however. James had been drawn to the spot at once by Bunter's yells. Surely he would have seen a stranger in the corridor! Besides, if the man had got clear from the King's Room where was he? Rooms and corridors up and down and round about were searched by innumerable servants without a sign of anyone being found.

Sir Peter inclined to the opinion of Mr. Tomlinson. That gentleman was an experienced detective, engaged under cover of a secretaryship to keep watch and ward in the castle while his "lordship" was there. Bunter was the bait, and Tomlinson was the trap, as it were, and between them Sir Peter hoped to snaffle the mysterious gang who were after his ward; but he had no use for

a false alarm, and he was disturbed and annoyed.

"You say that you were seized from behind as you sat at the telephone," he said slowly. "In that case, how did you get free, William?"

"I hacked the rotter's shins!" snapped Bunter. "You needn't fancy that. I was scared, like that cheeky secretary of yours; I was perfectly cool."

"You did not see him?"

"Think I've got eyes in the back of my head?" Bunter was annoyed as well as Lord Reynham's guardian.

Sir Peter breathed rather hard.

"But when you got loose, did you not see him?"

"I cut for the door. I wasn't frightened, but I thought I'd better get help in handling him."

"There is no sign of him to be found, William."

"What did you say?" gasped Sir Peter.

"I said rot!" retorted Bunter. "I've been attacked. The man's a fool! He ought not to have let that blighter get away if he's a detective. Fat lot of good having a silly ass like that about the place!"

"Listen to me! You know why you are here. I have every hope that the gang of rascals will make an attack upon you, and give Mr. Tomlinson his opportunity. But that can only happen outside the castle. Within the walls you are perfectly safe, and I must tell you plainly that I desire you to show more self-possession, and not to cause unnecessary alarms."

"Think I was going to let that rotter bag me?" roared Bunter. "What good would your silly Tomlinson be if that rotter had got away with me?"

this—I'm going to have some Greyfriars pals here with me."

"Nonsense!" said Sir Peter decisively. "Such a thing is impossible, as I have already told you. In the circumstances—"

"I'm having some friends here!" yapped Bunter.

"Nothing of the kind! I cannot assent to that."

"Well, I mean it," said Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you I mean business!"

"I must point out to you," said Sir Peter sternly, "that much as I am under an obligation to you, you are here under my instructions and orders."

"Oh, am I?" said Bunter defiantly. "Perhaps you'd rather I went?"

"That is impossible now. You are perfectly well aware that now that matters have gone so far it is impossible!" exclaimed Sir Peter.

From HARRY WHARTON, Esq.,
Form-Captain.

Here's to us and everyone,
May we all enjoy the fun
Of good old Christmas while it's
here
And friendship through the coming
year!

From FISHER TARLETON FISH,
Esq., of New York, U.S.A.

Say, you guys, a merry greeting,
Happy Christmas and the rest,
May your Christmas fun want
beating,
May it be the very best!
Sure, you're pretty safe in betting
This child's being paid to write,
Twenty cents a line I'm getting,
And I'm working here all night—
(The remaining 848,366 lines of
this greeting have been omitted
owing to lack of space.—ED.)

From PETER TODD, Esq., of Todd,
Todd & Todd, Solicitors.

WHEREAS, upon December
twenty-five
The FESTIVAL OF CHRISTMAS
will arrive,
The nineteen-thirty-seventh year
returned,

Greyfriars Greetings

NOW BE IT KNOWN, to everyone
concerned,
I, Peter Todd, do BY THESE
PRESENTS send
My CHRISTMAS GREETING
unto every friend,
May he (or they) a RECORD
CHRISTMAS find,
This given upon my Hand and
Seal, and signed!
PETER TODD.

From HORACE JAMES COKER,
Esq., Fifth Form.

May you share a jolly party,
A jolly party may you share,
May the fare be good and harty,
Good and harty may be the fare,
May your phun be verry jolley,
Jolley phun, much jolley phun,
And may everycoun be jolley,
Verry jolley, everycoun!
(1st PRIZE awarded to this effort.
—ED.)

From The Right Hon., the EARL
MAULEVERER.

Yes, begad, I'll add my wishes
If I hit upon a rhyme,
May you have some decent dishes
At this merry Christmas time.
Mind, I didn't mean to write
Anythin' like that, you know;
I'm feelin' rather tired to-night,
And—er—tumpy-tumpy-
tumpy-toe!

(Sorry—can't think of a rhyme.—M.)

From WILLIAM GEORGE BUN-
TER, of no visible means of
support.

I say, you felloes, may you eat at
sile
Enuff to sattisfy yore appetight,
And if yore strong and stout like
me, I frussed
You won't be sattisfied until you
bust!

From THOMAS DUTTON, Esq.,
Remove Form.

What's that? Eh?
What did you say?
Oh, go away!

"I know that. He's got away. And if he comes back again he will jolly well find me ready for him, I know that!" said Bunter, with emphasis. "He's not getting hold of me again, I can tell you!"

"Now, listen to me, William," said Sir Peter quietly. "As you know, I hope that your presence here may lead those kidnapping scoundrels to show their hand, and enable me to deal with them. Mr. Tomlinson, who is here under the name of a secretary, is actually a detective, on the watch for them."

"Then he jolly well ought to be able to snaffle that rotter who collared me!" snapped Bunter.

"His opinion is that there was no one here."

"Then he's a fool!"

"What?"

"You'd better sack him and get a better man."

Sir Peter breathed harder.

"Mr. Tomlinson is a detective of very great experience," he said.

"Is he?" sneered Bunter. "Well, they say experience makes fools wise. It hasn't done so in his case."

"I agree with his opinion," said Sir Peter sharply.

"Rot!"

"That is nonsense! Do you fancy it even remotely possible that even if an enemy penetrated to this room and seized you, he could have got you out of the castle?"

"Oh!" said Bunter.

Really, it did not seem probable.

Billy Bunter certainly had been grasped in that room by an enemy. He knew that, if Sir Peter and the detective did not. But how the rascal had hoped to get away with the supposed Lord Reynham, after collaring him in the King's Room, was quite a mystery.

Obviously he could not have carried a wriggling, squeaking prisoner down the corridors and the grand staircase, and out at the massive double doors.

"You see yourself that it is impossible," said Sir Peter severely. "A trick of the imagination."

"I know I was grabbed from behind."

"Nervousness," said Sir Peter. "Fancy!"

"I'm not a fellow to get nervous!" yapped Bunter. "Was I nervous in the car when that blighter was shooting at the tyres, and then, when that lorry barred the road, and you were jumping about like a hen on hot bricks—"

"What?" gasped Sir Peter.

"You may be nervy!" snapped Bunter. "I'm not. And I can tell you

Bunter grinned. He was quite well aware of that.

Now that he had been shown to the whole castle as Lord Reynham, he had become absolutely indispensable.

This strange game was a game that could be played only once. Obviously Sir Peter could not discard Bunter, and trot out another fellow to be called Lord Reynham—not after all the castle had seen Bunter as his lordship.

Either he had to give up the whole plan, or make the best of Bunter.

"Well, not so much about instructions and orders, then," said the fat Owl independently. "I'm jolly well taking care of myself, I know that. That blighter who collared me got into the castle somehow. He may be one of the servants, for all I know."

"Nonsense!"

"Well, I'm taking jolly good care that he doesn't get hold of me again!" yapped Bunter. "Why, look at the telephone! There's the receiver hanging on the end of the cord! Think I'd have left it like that if I hadn't been collared while I was using it?"

Sir Peter compressed his lips.

"Dinner in a quarter of an hour," he said, and walked out of the King's
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

Room. He seemed to have had enough of Bunter, for the present.

Billy Bunter snorted as the door closed after the baronet. Then he rolled over to the telephone and replaced the receiver.

A moment later the bell rang, and he put the receiver up to a fat ear.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Genuine Goods!

HARRY WHARTON gave a gasp of relief.

"We're through!" he exclaimed.

"Good egg!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

It was an immense relief to both the juniors at Wharton Lodge.

That sudden breaking off of Bunter's call, ending in wild howls for help, had naturally alarmed them.

At a distance of seventy-five miles they could do nothing. If Bunter was, as it appeared, in danger, they could not help him.

All that Wharton could do was to ring up the exchange and ask them to ascertain the number from which he had been called, and put him back on it.

That occupied some time, and even when the number was ascertained by an obliging operator, no answer came. But Wharton learned that the call had come from the Castlewood exchange in Sussex, which indicated that Bunter really had been phoning from that county, whether from a castle or not.

Then suddenly Wharton got through, and, to his great relief, a well-known fat voice came to his ears.

"Hallo! That you, Wharton?"

"Yes!" gasped Harry. "That you, Bunter?"

"You bet!"

"What did you cut off for? What did you yell for?" demanded Wharton. "You made me think something had happened to you, you fat ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Well, what did you mean by it, you fat blitherer?"

"I've been attacked—"

"What?"

"I was grabbed from behind while I was phoning. I should be kidnapped now, and taken goodness knows where, if I hadn't got away."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I can tell you, I'm phoning now with one eye over my shoulder, in case that blighter should show up again! I say, I ain't safe here. I thought I was, but I ain't. I say, old chap, you promised to spend Christmas with me at the castle—you know you did! I want you to come at once. Brink Inky with you."

"Oh scissors! Where?"

"To Reynham Castle, in Sussex, near a town called Castlewood. That's where I am now."

Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked at one another. They knew that Bunter's call had come from Castlewood in Sussex. They wondered dizzily whether there really was a Reynham Castle, and whether Bunter could possibly be there.

"Get here just as quick as you can!" gasped Bunter, over the wires. "I'm in danger every minute, day and night! You ain't the fellow to let a pal down, Harry, old chap. The other fellows can come along as soon as you like. You'll all be together over the hols. But I want some of you quick. Just hop into a car and cut over—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wharton. "Is

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No 1,557.

there really such a place as Reynham Castle, Bunter?"

"You silly idiot!" yelled Bunter. "I'm phoning from it! Come over at once, and ask for Lord Reynham."

"Oh crumbs! Think we can butt in on Lord Reynham without being asked, you fat chump—if there really is a Lord Reynham? What would he say when he saw us?"

"You can be jolly sure that Lord Reynham will be glad to see you! He, he, he! I can answer for that! Look here, you mayn't be able to get a train, and I dare say you've no car available. I'll send one for you."

"Wha-a-t?"

"I'll send you one of my cars from here."

"Your cars!" gasped Wharton.

"Yes, right at once! Look here, I don't know how far it is—about sixty or seventy miles, I believe—to your place in Surrey. I'll tell one of my chauffeurs—"

"One of your chauffeurs!" gurgled Wharton.

"Yes, I'll tell one of my chauffeurs to cut across just as fast as he can, and fetch you over. Some of my cars can do seventy, I fancy—"

"Oh crikey! Only some of them?"

"You'll get here to-night, anyhow. I shall stay up for you. I jolly well shan't go to bed here alone, I can tell you. I might be grabbed while I was asleep. I'll tell the man to go all out. Have your bags packed ready."

Harry Wharton gasped.

"You'll come?" asked Bunter anxiously. "I'm relying on you, you know. You said you'd come for Christmas."

"Yes; but it was all gammon—"

"Look here, you fathead, will you come if I send the car? I'll send a Rolls-Royce with a chauffeur in the Reynham livery! Will that satisfy you, you ass?"

"Oh, yes! But—"

"That's that, then! I shall have to cut off now, or I shall be late for dinner! I don't want to be late for dinner—that's important! You can expect that car under two hours."

"But—" gasped Wharton.

"Mind you're ready—you and Inky when—"

"But—" stuttered the captain of the Remove. "Look here, you fat chump, I can't make out whether you're gassing, or gone off your rocker, or what! But if that car comes for us before bed-time this evening, we'll come over."

"That's all right!" said Bunter. "I shall expect you! I shall be all right at dinner, of course—and after that, I'll keep James with me till you come."

"Who's James?"

"My valet!"

"Oh crikey!"

Bunter rang off.

Harry Wharton put up the receiver and gazed at the dusky face of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Nabob of Bhanipur gazed at him.

"Can you make all this out, Inky?" asked Harry.

"The makeoutfulness is not terrific!" answered the nabob, with a shake of his dusky head.

"Is there really a Reynham Castle, and is Bunter really there?"

"It begins to look like it, my esteemed chum."

"But how—and why—and which and—"

"Perhapsfully the esteemed and idiotic Bunter will explain when we see him," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But we know of our own absurd knowledge that some ridiculous kid-

napper has been after him, so it is not all moonshine."

"Yes, that's so—but—blessed if I can make head or tail of it! Who the thump is Lord Reynham?"

"The esteemed goodness knows."

"If he's got a castle, how the dickens did Bunter barge into it?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his head. He had to give that one up.

"Well, if it's straight, we've got to go!" said Harry. "If Bunter's really in danger, of course, I'd be glad to stand by the fat duffer. We said we'd go to the jolly old castle for Christmas—thinking it was all spoof—but if it isn't, we shall have to play up. But, I suppose if Lord Reynham allows Bunter to send a car for us, we can take it that he's given Bunter permission to ask his friends there. That's all right. But—"

"But—" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But it's all gammon!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I can't make it out—but it's all gammon, or most of it. Anyhow, I shall believe in that jolly old lordship's car when I see it—and not before."

"The seefulness will be the believfulness!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

And the chums of the Remove could only leave it at that.

If one of his lordship's chauffeurs came to fetch them in one of his lordship's cars they had to take it as genuine. But they did not expect that car to arrive at Wharton Lodge.

However, if it came, they were going in it; and they packed their suitcases ready. But they could not help feeling that they were allowing the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove to pull their legs.

After packing, and supper, they sat down to the radio in the hall—not expecting to be interrupted by the arrival of a Rolls from a castle in Sussex—and yet wondering.

At half-past nine, which was bed-time for the Remove fellows at Greyfriars, Wharton shut off the wireless.

"Any good sitting up, Inky?" he asked.

"Let us give his esteemed lordship's chauffeur half an hour!" suggested the Nabob of Bhanipur.

But it was only a few minutes later that the grinding of a car was heard on the drive outside.

Wharton and Hurree Singh exchanged quick glances.

Then Wharton ran to the door, and threw it open. Headlights flashed through the frosty December night. The car halted. It was a Rolls-Royce—a handsome and very expensive car—driven by a chauffeur in livery.

"My only esteemed hat!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton ran out to the car.

The chauffeur touched his hat.

"You—you've called for us?" gasped Harry.

"Lord Reynham's instructions, sir, were to call at Wharton Lodge for Mr. Wharton and Prince Hurree Singh!" said the chauffeur.

"Lord Reynham?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Any message from Bunter?"

"Bunter, sir? I have not seen any gentleman of that name at the castle. My instructions were given me by his lordship, sir."

"Well, that settles it, I suppose!" gasped Harry.

It was settled. In five minutes, the suitcases were on the car, Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh having donned coats and scarves and hats, were



A sinewy hand gripped Bunter like a band of steel and he was dragged backwards. Hardly knowing what he did in his frantic terror, the fat junior kicked out behind him. There was a gasp of pain from his assailant!

sitting in the Rolls—gliding out of the gates of Wharton Lodge.

The car shot away—the headlights glaring through December darkness.

In the car, the two juniors looked at one another in hopeless puzzlement.

"Can you make it out, Inky?" asked Harry.

"Not in the leastfully!"

"Anyhow, we're going to Reynham Castle on his jolly old lordship's instructions! I suppose Lord Reynham knows whether he wants us or not!"

"Probably!" grinned the nabob.

"But it beats me!"

"The beatfulness is terrific!"

And the two perplexed juniors could only wonder as the swift car ate up the miles for Sussex.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Lordly Lord!

SNORE!

"William!"

Snore!

"Really, William——"

Snore!

The lord of Reynham Castle sat, or rather, sprawled, in a large deep arm-chair by the fireside in the great library. The hour was late.

Late as it was, the new lord of Reynham showed no desire to go to bed—and was, in fact, determined not to go to bed. On the other hand, he was sleepy.

Being sleepy, he went to sleep. Being asleep, he snored. The deep and reverberating rumble, that was wont to wake the echoes in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, now woke them in the library of the great castle.

Bunter had dined well. His anticipa-

tions with regard to the food had been realised—more than realised. It was good, and it was unlimited. Dining in state, with a footman behind his chair, suited Bunter—though his attention was given more to the food than to the stateliness. How many courses there were at dinner, Bunter hardly knew; but he knew that he had made a regular meal at every one of them.

After such exertions, he needed a rest. But he was not going to bed—not till his Greyfriars pals arrived. He was not going to be grabbed again—not if Bunter knew it. Harry Wharton and Hurrree Jamset Ram Singh would be at the castle that night, and as soon afterwards as he could, he was going to gather in Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Johnny Bull. With the Famous Five round him, he was going to be safe. And "safety first" was Bunter's motto.

Sir Peter shook him by the shoulder at eleven o'clock. Snores were his only reward.

Sir Peter Lanchester was in rather a difficult position with regard to the new lord of Reynham. One day and evening with Bunter had rather changed his opinion of that fat youth. But he was, so to speak, "for it." Bunter was there for a special purpose—which, without Bunter, could not be carried out. He had taken it for granted that the schoolboy would carry out all his instructions with respectful alacrity. He had learned already that Bunter's idea was to suit himself; and that the fat youth had to be treated with tact.

It was rather awkward. By his own act, Bunter had been recognised as Lord Reynham, owner and master of the castle and the vast estate. True, Sir Peter had authority as guardian,

Still, a noble lord had to be allowed to have a will of his own. And it seemed that Bunter, being for the once a lord, was going to have a full lord's ticket, as it were. Bunter was, in fact, the fellow to take full advantage of the peculiar position in which he was placed.

Shake, shake, shake!

Bunter's eyes opened at last behind his spectacles. He gave the baronet an irritated blink.

"Leggo—lemme alone! Wharrer you wakin' me up for?" he yapped.

"William, it is long past bed-time. It is past my own bed-time!" snapped Sir Peter. "You really must go to bed!"

"Have my friends arrived yet?"

"No!" said Sir Peter, compressing his lips.

"Then I'm not going to bed!"

"I repeat——"

"You can go, if you like!" said Bunter, blinking at him. "I'm not keeping you up, am I? I'm not going till my pals arrive!"

"I had better speak to you plainly, I think," said Sir Peter. "In the circumstances as I have told you, you cannot have your friends from Greyfriars here."

"Can't I?" said Bunter, now fully awake, and giving the old gentleman a belligerent blink. "Well, I've sent a car for them, and they're coming!"

"It was a great shock to me, to learn that you had dispatched the car, William, without consulting me——"

"I suppose a fellow can do as he likes, in his own castle!"

"What?" roared Sir Peter.

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.



(Continued from page 13.)

"You needn't yell at a fellow!" said Bunter coolly. "Am I Lord Reynham or not?"

Sir Peter glared at him.

"I sent that car," went on Bunter, "because I jolly well chose to. If you think I'm going to be grabbed in the middle of the night, you're mistaken. That's plain English! I'd rather clear off this blessed minute than go to bed without some other fellows in the room. I'm prepared to take risks—nothing wrong with my pluck, I hope—but I'm not going to be grabbed while I'm asleep."

"No one could possibly penetrate into the castle—"

"Somebody jolly well did, this evening!"

"That was sheer imagination—"

"Rot!" said Bunter.

Sir Peter Lanchester appeared on the point of choking, for a moment.

Bunter sat up and blinked at him calmly. He was in the strongest of positions; he had, in fact, the upper hand, now that Sir Peter had announced him as his ward, William Lord Reynham.

The baronet could not undo what he had done. Only by throwing up his whole elaborate plan, could he deal with Bunter as he fervently wished to do. And that was not to be thought of.

"I know whether I was bagged or not!" said Bunter. "It's no good talking rot—I've got no use for it! I'm waiting for my friends—"

"I tell you—" roared Sir Peter.

He broke off suddenly as the library door opened. A rather tall and handsome young man in evening clothes came in, smoking a cigarette. "This was Captain Reynham, cousin of the young lord; and the only near relative of Lord Reynham, old Sir Peter being a distant connection.

The young Army man glanced from his uncle to Bunter, and back again to Sir Peter. He could see that he had interrupted some dispute.

A faintly sarcastic and contemptuous smile came over his face as his glance dwelt on Bunter.

Rupert Reynham, like all the other residents in the castle, took Bunter at face value. Sir Peter had brought him there as Lord Reynham, and that was that. Nobody at the castle had seen the real lord since he was a small boy; but Rupert, as it happened, had not seen him since babyhood, having been abroad for years with his regiment. So he had not, naturally, the remotest suspicion of the trick that was being played.

But having met the young lord at dinner, he had not been favourably impressed by him—and now he seemed still less favourably impressed. There were several traces of dinner left round Bunter's mouth, and some splashes on his expansive white shirt-front, which really were not in accordance with the best traditions of the nobility.

The captain took him as Lord Reynham.

ham; but he took Lord Reynham as a fearful "bunder."

"Still up, William?" drawled the captain, lounging elegantly across the room, and leaning on the mantelpiece as he smoked his cigarette.

"I suppose I can stay up as late as I like in my own house!" snapped Bunter.

Bunter sensed, rather than saw, that the elegant young Army man regarded him with a sarcastic and amused eye.

And Bunter was not going to take any cheek from him. The son of a younger son, Captain Reynham was poor, while his Cousin William was rich. And Bunter, just at present, was his rich Cousin William!

With all his Army swank, as Bunter regarded it, the captain was, in point of fact, a hanger-on of a rich relation—it was only as nephew of the young lord's guardian that he had a footing in the castle at all. If he wanted to hang on in Bunter's castle, he was going to be civil about it, or Lord Bunter was going to know the reason why!

"Oh! Naturally!" drawled the captain. "But I suppose you did not stay up till midnight at school?"

"I can do as I like in the hols," said Bunter. "Pretty state of things, if a lord can't do as he likes in his own ancestral halls."

"Oh!" gasped the captain. "Quite!"

"I—I was just suggesting to William that it was time for bed, Rupert," stammered Sir Peter. "Now, my dear William—"

Snore!

Bunter closed his eyes behind his big spectacles, and snored. He was not asleep—but he was going to sleep. Lord Reynham was going to do what was right in his own eyes, in his own castle!

Captain Reynham looked at him, and now that Bunter's eyes were closed, did not take the trouble to conceal his contemptuous scorn. There was, in fact, a striking contrast between the fat, snoring owl, and the tall and elegant young Army man.

"Good gad!" the captain murmured in a low voice that did not reach Bunter's fat ears. "I've wondered a good many times what my noble cousin was like, Uncle Peter, but I never imagined anythin' like this! What a shockin' bunder!"

"The boy has his faults, no doubt!" murmured Sir Peter. No doubt the old gentleman was wishing that he had become rather more closely acquainted with Bunter before selecting him to play this extraordinary part at Reynham Castle.

"He was at Greyfriars, I think you told me!"

"Yes."

"He does not do the school much credit."

Sir Peter made no reply to that. He heard the sound of a distant ring, and left the library hurriedly.

Captain Reynham was left to finish his cigarette, and to regard the sprawling figure in the armchair—and Bunter, opening his eyes suddenly behind his spectacles, was startled by the black and bitter look he unexpectedly spotted on the captain's face.

But that look was gone in a moment, and the captain was smiling affably.

Bunter blinked at him suspiciously.

"Where's the old bean?" he asked.

"The—the what?"

"My guardian!"

"Oh! Sir Peter went out a few minutes ago—I think somebody has arrived—"

"My friends, most likely!" said Bunter, and he heaved himself out of the armchair. "Good!"

"One moment, William!" said the captain softly. "For some reason—I really don't know why, but I could see it easily enough when you told him about the car at dinner—your guardian does not want your Greyfriars friends here—"

"Nothing to do with you!" said Bunter.

The captain seemed to gulp.

"Oh, no! But—I thought of suggesting that you might think fit to regard your guardian's wishes in this matter and—"

"Did you?" said Bunter, blinking at him. "Well, when I want advice from poor relations, I'll ask for it. Keep it till then!"

With that, Billy Bunter rolled away to the door—leaving the captain staring after him, transfixed.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Reception!

"BUNTER?" repeated Jasmond. "He's here, I suppose!" said Harry Wharton. "I do not know the name, sir."

"Oh, my hat!"

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had arrived. The car had stopped at a vast portico. A footman had let them in—but the butler swam up from somewhere. They stood in the great hall—hats and coats taken by deferential hands.

The two juniors had, naturally, expected Bunter to meet them when they came in, as he had been so eager for them to come. Still, the journey had taken time, and possibly the fat Owl had gone to bed. But when the butler stated that he did not know the name, it was something like a knock-down blow. The car from Reynham Castle had convinced them—how could it have come to fetch them, if Bunter was not there? Yet, it seemed, Bunter was not there. It seemed as if mystery was piled on mystery.

"Look here, we expected to see Bunter—a Greyfriars fellow—here!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Isn't he staying here with Lord Reynham?"

"There are no guests in the castle at present, sir, except Captain Reynham, his lordship's cousin."

"Who sent the car for us, then?"

"His lordship gave his instructions personally, sir."

The two juniors looked at one another. If Bunter was not there, they had no business there. But if he was not there, why on earth had Lord Reynham sent the car for them—how, indeed, did his lordship even know of their existence?

They knew nothing of him: and—unless from Bunter—he could know nothing of them! It was quite bewildering.

"Well, I suppose we'd better see Lord Reynham, as he sent the car for us," said Harry. "I suppose he's here."

"His lordship is in the library, sir! I will inform him—"

"You need not trouble, Jasmond!"

It was Sir Peter Lanchester's voice, as he came hurriedly from the direction of the library. "You may leave these young gentlemen to me."

"Very good, sir!"

Jasmond faded out of the picture; and at a glance from Sir Peter, the other menservants faded away. The silver-haired old baronet was left alone with the two new arrivals.

"Master Wharton, and—and Hurree Inkpot Jam, I think—"

"My esteemed name is Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, excellent and ridiculous sir!" purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Sir Peter blinked at him.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Exactly! William has mentioned your name to me, but I did not quite recall—"

"The rememberfulness of my absurd name is not always terrific!" assented the nabob, politely.

"Oh!" gaped Sir Peter again. "Quite! Now, my boys, I—I understand that you have come here on the invitation of a—a—a schoolfellow!"

"That's it, sir!" said Harry. "We expected to find Bunter here—but it seems to have been Lord Reynham who sent the car—"

"Oh, yes! Precisely! Lord Reynham, as I daresay you know, is my ward—" stammered Sir Peter.

"We don't know anything about him," said Harry Wharton. "We've

"If that is the case, Sir Peter Lanchester, we shall go at once," he said curtly. "But please understand that there is no fault of ours in the matter. We had a telephone call from Bunter, a chap we know at Greyfriars, and he told us he was telephoning from this house."

"Yes, yes, but—"

"We should not have come here on that alone!" snapped Wharton. "But when the car came, and the chauffeur told us that he had been sent by Lord Reynham to fetch us here, what were we to think?"

"It is very—hem—very unfortunate. I am truly sorry!" Sir Peter was confused, compunctious, but resolute. "Naturally, it is too late for you to return home to-night, I understand from William that you come from Surrey—but there is an excellent hotel in Castlewood, and the car shall take you there

There was a fat squeak, and a fat figure rolled into the hall!

Billy Bunter, with a beaming, fat face, rolled to greet his Greyfriars pals.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stared at him in sheer stupefaction.

They had been told that Bunter was not there; and, of course, had supposed that he wasn't. And here he was—blinking at them through his big spectacles, and beaming on them, with obvious gladness to see them.

Sir Peter Lanchester bit his lip hard. He had hoped to carry this through without Bunter coming on the scene till the juniors were gone—hoping that the fat Owl was asleep again in the library. Bunter had appeared at a very awkward moment for him.

The two juniors stared at Bunter—stared at the old baronet—and stared at Bunter again. If they had been

GEORGE WINGATE.

My most exciting Xmas was when I was a kid. On Christmas morning I climbed a forty-foot elm and was sitting on the top when the branch slowly broke in halves. Never before or since have I crowded so much thought into twenty seconds. Why I wasn't killed I don't know. I hit the ground with no more damage than a dozen hefty bruises, and spent Christmas Day in bandages.

MR. PROUT.

Christmas, 1886, found me in the Rocky Mountains. I had trailed a grizzly bear to a narrow defile between two rocky crags, when it suddenly turned. And at that moment I realised my gun was jammed. Figure the position yourself. What did I do? (A bunk!—ED.)

DICK PENFOLD.

From out a circus, years ago,
A lion once broke free;
But what occurred, I do not know—
I didn't wait to see!

HARRY WHARTON.

One year at Mauly's place, we sat
up on Xmas Eve to watch for a

Exciting Xmas

Greyfriars Celebrities recall
thrilling times.

ghost, and caught a burglar. Next time we'll watch for a burglar, and perhaps we'll catch a ghost!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER.

Wun yeer, Bunter Court cort fire in the middel of the nite. With wreckless heroism I fort the flames, while the distinguished gents crouched at my feet, wimpering to be saved. "Coucherds!" I cride scornfully. "Why not follo my egg-sample and have a littel pluck!" My burning elokwence pooled them together, and they helped me to fling buckits of water on the blasing manshun and put the fire out. Then my pater, with tears streamming down his face, said: "Willum, you have saved the antsistral home of the

Bunters. Brave, devoted lad!" But I just larfed and went back to bed. (And woke up!—ED.)

WILLIAM WIBLEY.

When I played Hamlet at the Remove Breaking-Up Concert, the lights in the hall were put out, and on the brilliantly lit stage I held them spellbound. Not a sound could be heard as I gripped them with my words. When the lights went up, I saw they had all gone—probably at the beginning of the act—but that doesn't alter the fact that I would have held them spellbound if they'd been there.

LORD MAULEVERER.

Three Christmases ago. I had a nightmare.

HORACE JAMES COKER.

Wun yeer I took George Potter on the back of my motor-bike, and the rodes were slippury and we skidded a good deel. It was grate fun! (There's no need to ask George Potter which was his most exciting Xmas—nor why he is going grey.—ED.)

only seen you twice, sir, when you called at Greyfriars before break-up. We had never heard of Lord Reynham at all, except from Bunter."

"Yes! Precisely! Now, I am sorry—truly sorry—I fear that it may seem inhospitable—but—but—there is an error in this matter," stammered Sir Peter. "Owing to—certain circumstances, it would be very inconvenient to Lord Reynham to entertain guests here this Christmas."

"Oh!"

"In these circumstances, it was—was really an error for the car to be sent for you!" explained Sir Peter. "The truth is, that—that William—my—my ward, Lord Reynham—acted without consulting me, as his guardian—"

The nabob's dusky features expressed nothing; but he looked very keenly and curiously at the old gentleman.

"I apologise profoundly!" said Sir Peter. "I cannot sufficiently express my regret, that this—this mistake should have arisen. But—but it is actually impracticable for you to stay here."

Wharton compressed his lips. His chief desire, at the moment, was to kick Billy Bunter, and kick him hard, for having placed him in a position like this.

—all expenses will be met by me, and to-morrow the car shall convey you back to your home—"

"We want nothing of the kind!" snapped Harry Wharton. "We came here believing that Bunter was here, and that the master of this place had sent specially to fetch us. If it's a mistake, the sooner we go, the better—and we can look after ourselves, and certainly we shall accept nothing at your hands, or at Lord Reynham's, either."

"My dear boy—" said Sir Peter. "I cannot say how sorry—" His face was red with discomfort and contrition; but he was quite determined that Lord Bunter was not going to have his way, if he could prevent it.

"Never mind that," said Wharton, "come on, Inky! We can walk to the town and put up somewhere for the night. I'm sorry not to see Lord Reynham before I go, that's all. I'd like to tell him what I think of him, for playing a rotten trick like this on fellows he doesn't even know."

"The rottenfulness of the trick was terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "but the rapid departfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed chum."

"I say, you fellows!"

bewildered before, they were doubly bewildered now.

Bunter grinned at them cheerfully.

"I say, you fellows, I'm jolly glad to see you!" he chirruped. "I've sat up to wait for you, though I jolly nearly fell asleep. Had a good run in the car, what?"

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton. "You—you—you're here!"

"The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!" stuttered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Eh? You expected to see me here, didn't you, when I phoned to you to come?" asked Bunter. "What are you goggling at, as if a fellow was a ghost?"

"The butler told us you weren't here—he didn't even know the name!" howled Wharton.

"Oh! He, he, he! That's all right!" said Bunter. "Don't you worry about that! He, he, he!"

"And Sir Peter Lanchester has just told us to get out, because Lord Reynham hadn't his leave to send the car for us!" hooted Wharton. "And we're going—and you can go and eat coke, you fat fraud!"

"What?" roared Bunter.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

"My dear William—" gasped Sir Peter.

"You're turning my friends out?" roared Bunter. "Who the dickens are you to turn my friends out?"

"Boy!" gurgled Sir Peter.

"If they go, I go!" roared Bunter. "Got that? My hat! Of all the cheek—taking it on yourself to turn my friends away from the door! Wharton—Inky—don't go! It's all right, old fellows! Don't take any notice of that old jesser!"

"Wh-a-t?" gasped Wharton.

"Stick here!" said Bunter. "I want you! I've asked you! You're my guests! Why, if you let me down, I may be kidnapped this very night, or murdered in my bed very likely! You've got to stand by a pal! I say, you fellows, it's all right!"

"But—" gasped Harry, hopelessly bewildered. "If Sir Peter Lanchester isn't in authority here, who is?"

"I am!" retorted Bunter.

"You!" yelled Wharton.

"Yes; me."

"You howling ass! Look here, where's Lord Reynham?"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you fat image?"

"Oh, nothing! He, he, he! Come up to my rooms and I'll explain!"

"Don't be a silly ass! We can't stay here without being asked by the master of the place, you blithering bloater!"

"That's all right—"

"It isn't, you fathead! Look here, why doesn't Lord Reynham show up and say a word for himself? The silly ass sent a car for us—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Anyhow, if this old gentleman is his guardian, it's for him to say—and he's said! We're going!"

"You're not!" roared Bunter. "Look here, Sir Peter Lanchester, I'm fed-up with this! I refuse to stay here without my friends! If you can't be civil to my friends, I'm done with you! I say, you fellows, if you go, I'm coming with you! I'm not staying here to be kidnapped in bed!"

Sir Peter gasped for breath.

He could not let "Lord Reynham" walk off with the two Greyfriars juniors, that was clear. And it was plain that Billy Bunter was in deadly earnest. As a matter of fact he dare not remain the night at the castle unprotected, after his awful experience that evening.

"I—I—I—" stammered Sir Peter. "I—I—please remain, my boys! In the—the circumstances—I—I consent—"

"That's not good enough!" said Harry Wharton curtly. "I don't know how Bunter got here—but do you think we're the fellows to barge in where we're not wanted? Unless the master of the house asks us to stay, we can do nothing of the kind. And as he doesn't choose to show up and say a word, it's pretty clear what he wants."

"The clearfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, hold on!" squeaked Bunter, in alarm. "I say, come up to my rooms and—and I'll explain."

"Please do!" gasped Sir Peter, only anxious for this extraordinary scene to be ended. "Please go with—William, my dear boys, and—and—I assure you that personally, on your own account, I am delighted to see you here."

The two mystified juniors exchanged glances.

"I say, you fellows, come on!" urged Bunter.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

"Please go with—with William!" gasped Sir Peter.

Utterly bewildered, unable to begin to make head or tail of what it all meant, the two juniors followed "William" up the staircase. And Bunter, with great relief, led them into the King's Room.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

An Astonishing Secret!

"JAMES!"

"My lord!"

"Have you carried out my instructions about the beds?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Is everything ready for my friends?"

"Perfectly, my lord."

"Then you can cut," said Bunter. "I shall not want you again to-night, James!"

"Very good, my lord!"

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh listened to this like fellows in a dream. They stood dumbfounded, while Lord Bunter dismissed his valet.

The door closed on James. As it was nearly midnight, no doubt James was glad to be dismissed. He had been yawning his head off while he waited for his lordship.

Billy Bunter turned to the two astounded juniors with a cheery grin. He had not been a lord long, but he was very glad to show off his lordliness to his guests.

"What does this mean, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, finding his voice. "Why did that chap call you 'my lord'?"

"He, he, he!"

"The lordfulness of the esteemed Bunter is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "What is the absurd meaning of this?"

"Sit down, you men!" said Bunter breezily. "Jolly comfy armchairs here—warm your toes by the fire—help yourselves to the tuck. I've had some stuff left up here, in case I should get peckish in the night. Have some cake—or biscuits—or apples—or candied fruits—or peaches?"

"Never mind that," said Harry; "we want to know what this means, Bunter. What sort of idiotic humbug are you up to here?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"What does it mean? Where is Lord Reynham?"

"He, he, he!"

"Are you going to explain or not?" demanded Wharton.

"Won't you sit down, old chaps?"

"No! If we're staying here, we're going to bed, as it's hours past bedtime. But we're not staying unless we understand what's up. What did that man James call you 'my lord' for?"

"You—you see—"

"I don't!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the two astonished and irritated juniors. It was, Bunter realised, rather a difficult matter to explain.

In his keenness to have a sort of bodyguard round him to defend him from hidden dangers, he had rather overlooked that difficulty. But he had to face up to it now.

All the castle accepted him as the young lord. But fellows who knew him quite well were hardly to be taken in.

The Smiler and his gang knew that Lord Reynham had been placed at a school under an assumed name. They had no doubt that that school was Greyfriars, and that assumed name

Bunter. But it would not have been of much use to spin such a yarn to Wharton, who knew that he was Billy Bunter, and knew his brother Sammy in the Second Form, and his sister Bessie at Cliff House.

Bunter had no strong leaning towards the truth—but even Bunter had to tell the truth sometimes, and only the truth was of any use to him now. Still he was going to tell as little as he could.

"Well, look here, you fellows!" he said. He gave a cautious blink round, and lowered his voice. "I couldn't say anything downstairs, where a lot of servants might hear—and, you see, I've got to be jolly careful. That man James might have his ear at the keyhole, for all I know."

"Is his name Bunter?" asked Harry.

"Eh? No."

"Then I don't suppose he's got his ear to the keyhole."

"You cheeky ass—"

"Are you going to explain or not?"

"Yes, you beast! Just listen!"

Bunter gave another cautious blink towards the various doors of the great apartment. Like many people, Bunter measured others by his own measure; and his own fat ear was very often near a keyhole. So he lowered his voice to a whisper:

"The fact is, you fellows—"

"Oh, let's hear the fact!" snorted Wharton. "I can tell you that we're not stopping here unless we see Lord Reynham, and he asks us to."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at, you blithering owl?"

"You see," breathed Bunter, "I'm him!"

"What?"

"I'm him!"

"Him! Who? What?"

"Lord Reynham!" whispered Bunter. Wharton and the nabob gazed at him. They looked concerned. For one dreadful moment they feared that Billy Bunter had gone completely off his rocker.

They had not known what to expect; but most certainly they had not expected anything like this.

"I mean, I'm him, temporarily!" explained Bunter.

"Have you gone potty?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"If you're not wandering in your mind, or trying to pull our legs, what the dickens do you mean, you fat idiot?"

"Don't shout!" yapped Bunter. "Don't I keep on telling you that there are keyholes to the doors? It's an awfully deep secret."

"What is?" roared Wharton.

"Don't yell!" Bunter whispered again. "I'm here as Lord Reynham. See? Now do you understand?"

"No. You can't have spoofed that old bean, if the chap is his ward—"

"He asked me to do it, you ass!"

"Rubbish! And if you're really spoofing to that extent, do you think that we're going to have a hand in it? Are you off your dot?"

"Will you shut up and let a chap explain?" hissed Bunter. "I'm going to tell you how the matter stands. I don't want to tell all the castle, you ass! Young Lord Reynham is hidden away somewhere by his guardian, because he's in danger of kidnappers. He's some sort of a weedy, seedy merchant, and old Peter is afraid of his nerves breaking down if he goes through it. See?"

"But—" gasped Harry.

(Continued on page 20.)

"Stacks of gifts and hours of fun;
All good things for everyone—" says—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL.

(1)

The kitchen's full of appetising steam,
To hungry schoolboys it must surely seem
That working here is like a lovely dream,
Devoutly to be wished!
But cooking for so many hungry boys
Means WORK—a thing which nobody enjoys,
As in the busy clatter, heat and noise,
Good things are cooked and dished.



AFTER SCHOOL HOURS

Breaking-Up Night!

We're off for the vac,
And we're not coming back
Until Christmas is done and the New
Year begun,
And it's fun and frivolity,
Joking and jollity,
All the way home in the morning!
For Christmas is coming and holly is green,
And Greyfriars is humming with happiness keen,
So pack your portmanteau, your hamper and bag,
And come to the concert we hold in the Rag.
We'll sing the old strains
Of the Christmas refrains,
Till lumps of the wall break asunder and fall,
We'll sing 'em unwearily,
Happily, cheerily,
All the way home in the morning!
The Owl is unfolding a plan to the Form,
A supper he's holding to-night in the dorm.
For once he discovers he's really in luck,
We all give him money to purchase the tuck.
He scuttles away very nimble
To interview poor Mrs. Mumble,
Then smuggles in pastries and pop and mince pies,
And joins us in eating the tasty supplies.
Then stories are told
Of the spectres of old,
Which make our flesh creep as we go off to sleep.
To-morrow we're verily
Travelling merrily
All the way home in the morning!

The Kitchen.

(2)

Upon the Christmas puddings and mince pies
Collected here, poor Bunter turns his eyes
Like Peri at the gates of Paradise,
And longs to make a swoop!
Alas, he very swiftly meets his doom,
A busy cook, with still more busy broom,
Soon chases Master Bunter from the room,
His farewell word—"Yareop!"

(3)

On Break-up Day the staff work overtime
Preparing extra dishes so sublime
That all words fail me—not to mention rhyme!
Ah, turkeys, puddings—come!
Come hither, oh, ye morsels of delight,
I would devour the whole of ye on sight,
Lay waste among your army, left and right,
And leave no single crumb!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

WILLIAM GREENE,

Coker's studymate in the Fifth Form.

G is for GREENE—I beg to state
He's merely Coker's studymate,
And having got that off my chest,
I'll now ignore him. For the rest,
I wish to say I'd like to know
Where all my Christmas presents go.
My Uncle Bill, so they relate,
Went out and purchased 38!



And if he'd only thought of mine
He would have purchased 39!
My Uncle Joe has sent away
A hundred presents, so they say,
To all the beastly family,
Except, of course, his nephew—ME.
If I lived out in Timbuctoo
I might expect a gift or two,
But while I spend my Christmas here
They'll all forget me once a year!



A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

CHRISTMAS CHUCKLES

"Birds are intelligent creatures," says a Nature book. You wouldn't believe the number of local turkeys who have committed suicide to save the farmer a job!

Christmas comes but once a year,
And Bunter's glad of that!
If Christmas came but twice a year,
He'd soon be twice as fat!

Stewart of the Shell is a boon to his relations. His birthday is on Christmas Day, so they only have to give him one lot of presents!

Bootles' Fertiliser Makes Plants Grow Like Wildfire! Having heard this, Fishy bought a bottle—and a packet of Christmas-tree seeds! (They're selling at five bob each!)

Christmas waits, who sang "Christians Awake!", under Sir Hilton Popper's window, wished sincerely they'd left him asleep!

Loder said yesterday he was just going to "slip down to the village." But he was wrong, because our slide didn't go as far as that!

We wish "breaking-up" included Quelch's canes!

Fisher T. Fish has been collecting empty match-boxes. After all, everyone has to give Christmas-boxes, including Fishy.

Somebody sent Gosling a bottle of cherries-in-brandy the other day. He didn't care much for the cherries, but he was grateful for the spirit in which they were sent.

A Chinese visitor to Wun Lung some time ago called on Quelch, and bent over in a polite bow. Fortunately, Mr. Quelch recollected himself just as his hand closed on the cane.

Fisher T. Fish, walking in the quad, found a shilling, another shilling, and yet another shilling. His beaming smile lasted till he discovered the hole in his trousers pocket.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

"They've been after him for years—goodness knows why, but there it is! He's packed away at some school under another name!" whispered Bunter. "Old Peter's got me to come here and take his name, to draw them."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The idea is that the kidnappers will get after me, and he's got a detective in the house to nab them, if they do. See?"

"Great pip!"

"When they're snaffled, the young lord will be safe. That's the game! Old Peter's picked me out for it because I'm so jolly plucky—"

"Oh crikey!"

"They're taken in all right," went on Bunter. "You saw them after me, in the car. What I thought was a motor back-firing was a beast shooting at the tyres—"

"Ha, ha, ha! So that was why—"

"What I mean is, I knew that that beast was shooting at the tyres, and never turned a hair! You know my pluck!" said Bunter. "And so does old Peter! And one of the gang got after me again this evening, just before dinner, when I was phoning you. I had an awfully narrow escape. Old Peter thinks I fancied it—so does that silly detective of his—but I suppose I know whether a beast grabbed me round the neck or not. I'm not chancing it again, I can tell you!"

Wharton and the nabob looked at Bunter—and looked at one another.

They were utterly amazed; but they realised that this was—and must be—the truth, strange as it was.

James had called Bunter "my lord"—and that was explained now—Bunter's presence in the castle was explained—and the fact that "Lord Reynham" had sent the car to Wharton Lodge. But the explanation was really more staggering than the mystery.

"You—you—you fat spoofer!" gasped Harry at last. "You've made that old bean believe that you've got a spot of pluck somewhere, and—and—"

"Precious few fellows would have the nerve to do it, I think," said Bunter warmly. "You jolly well wouldn't, and chance it! Or Inky! I'm taking all the risk—just to oblige old Peter, and to save a chap I've never seen from danger. Plucky and generous, I call it. Facing fearful dangers—"

"Then what do you want us here for?"

"Oh, the—the fact is I—I want to give you a good time! Don't you fancy you're here to protect me! It's nothing of the kind! Being in clover like this, I'm taking you up—"

"Are you?" said Wharton grimly. "Well, you can keep your clover all to yourself, and we'll cut—"

"I—I—I mean, I—I want you here, old chap— Don't be a beast! Look here, I've had beds put in my room for you—one on each side of my bed—and—and—and— I say you can't let me down! Stick to a pal, old chap!"

Swank departed from Bunter on the spot at the prospect of being left alone. His fat face was deeply anxious.

"Look here, I dare not go to bed alone!" he breathed. "I—I say, you fellows, you can't leave a chap to be kidnapped! I say, stick to a pal, you know!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"If you put it like that—" he said.

"I do, old fellow!" gasped Bunter.

"Stick to me!"

"We'll stick to you for to-night, anyhow, and think it over in the morning," said Harry. "What do you say, Inky?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

"The stickfulness is the proper caper!" agreed the nabob.

Really, the chums of the Remove had little choice, for, amazing as the state of affairs was, there was no doubt that Bunter was in danger at Reynham Castle. True he had, according to his own account, come there to face danger; still, the juniors did not want to leave him to it.

So for that night, at least, it was settled, and Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh turned in, in the beds that had been specially placed in his lordship's room for them; and Billy Bunter, in the middle bed of three, was able, at long last, to settle down in safety and snore in comfort.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Booting a Nobleman!

BRIGHT wintry sunshine glimmered on the ancient walls and turrets and battlements of Reynham Castle.

It was a fine winter's morning when Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh walked out after breakfast.

They had not been up early that morning. But though they rose rather late, for once, they left Lord Bunter still in bed when they came down. James was called up to sit by his bedside till it pleased his lazy lordship to turn out. His lordship was not going to be left alone—neither was he going to turn out till the spirit moved him to do so.

At a rather late breakfast the two juniors had met Captain Reynham, whom they had found civil, but not particularly cordial. They had not seen Sir Peter Lanchester yet.

What they were going to do, in these strange circumstances, and exactly what they ought to do, the chums of the Remove did not quite know. The situation was so extraordinary that it was a little difficult to get their bearings.

"Jolly here, Inky!" Harry Wharton remarked, as they sauntered by a path in the frosty park. "No end of a show!"

"Terrific!" agreed the nabob.

"What are we going to do about it, old chap?"

"Goodness knows."

"That fat ass Bunter wants us here. I suppose he has a right to ask fellows here if the boss of the show has set him up as master of the place. But—that old bean doesn't want us."

"Hardly!" grinned the nabob.

"We can't stick on where we're not wanted. It's a queer bizney, and if that old ass has turned Bunter into a lord, to suit himself, he really ought to let the fat duffer have the game as well as the name. But—"

"The butfulness is terrific."

"That fat chump must have spoofed the old bean somehow to make him think he had the pluck for such a game. If he hasn't the nerve to carry on he will have to chuck it, that's all. We can't stick here on his account, looked on as intruders by the man who's really boss of the show. We'd better tell him so when he gets up—if he ever does."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded his dusky head. He was in full agreement with his chum.

Bunter evidently had taken on a thing beyond his powers. He was, in fact, hedging. The glorious prospect of playing the part of a lord in a magnificent castle had dazzled him and blinded him to the danger. Now that the danger had

accrued he wanted to dodge it. That, of course, was Bunter all over!

But it was not good enough for the Co. They had seen him through the dangers of the night—if any—and now it was time to clear. It was up to Bunter to stay and face the danger he had so lightly undertaken to face, or to clear off also. To remain where they were unwelcome was impossible—to fellows who did not resemble William George Bunter.

Having come to that decision, the two juniors walked back to the castle. In the vast gardens that lay between the park and the castle they spotted the tall figure of Sir Peter Lanchester. The old baronet was coming towards them, and they guessed that he was looking for them. No doubt he preferred what he had to say to be said outside the castle, safe from listening ears.

Wharton's lips set a little.

"Here's the old bean, Inky!" he said. "We may as well tell him what we've decided on and relieve his mind!"

"The soonerfulness is the betterfulness!" agreed the nabob.

They capped the old baronet politely as he came up.

Sir Peter gave them a nod and a very thoughtful and worried look.

"Good-morning, my boys!" he said.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Harry. "We're just going in to tell Bunter that we're leaving this morning, and he will have to decide for himself what he is going to do."

Sir Peter looked more worried than ever.

"Please do not act in haste," he said.

"I presume that William has explained to you how matters stand here. No one was to be told; but as you are his school-fellows, and know him so well, it was unavoidable—since you are here, and—"

"You need not fear that we shall say anything about it," said Harry quietly. "It is no business of ours, and we know how to hold our tongues about matters that do not concern us."

The old baronet scanned the two youthful faces keenly. He seemed to be satisfied with his scrutiny.

"I am sure of it," he said. "You must, of course, have been very much surprised."

"Very!" said Wharton dryly.

"I must explain a little, my boy. My ward is a lad in feeble health, and has never quite recovered from the shock of attempts to kidnap him when he was a mere child—a boy of eleven. In some manner I do not understand, his enemies have discovered that he has been concealed at a school under an assumed name. If they should find him I dread the result for him. It is for that reason that I have laid this plan to entrap them."

Sir Peter paused.

"They fully believe that Bunter is Lord Reynham. If nothing is said they will continue to believe so. Their attacks will be directed against him—and sooner or later, I have not the slightest doubt, they will be caught in the act, and the law will be able to deal with them. Extraordinary as this plan may seem to you, it is the only means of protecting my ward—he will never be safe till his enemies are discovered and sent to prison."

"I understand, sir!" said Harry. "We shall not say a word of what we have been told when we leave here."

"Now that you know so much," said Sir Peter, smiling, "it is unnecessary for you to leave. I am sure you will excuse my inhospitality last night—it was due wholly to my desire to keep the secret. Now that you know the secret I

should greatly prefer you to remain."

Harry Wharton smiled faintly. He could understand that Sir Peter preferred to keep them under his eye now that they knew.

"You can trust us, sir!" he said.

"I am sure of it. But please forget what I said to you last night—now that I have explained my reason. Please accept my invitation to remain at Reynham Castle for the Christmas holidays," said Sir Peter in a stately manner. "I had only one objection to your coming, which I have now explained. That objection has now disappeared. I shall be delighted if you will remain here as William's guests."

"Oh, certainly!" said Harry at once. "If you look at it like that, sir, we shall stay, of course."

"The stayfulness will be terrific!" concurred the nabob.

Sir Peter smiled.

"I am glad!" he said, and, with a stately bow, the old gentleman passed on, evidently relieved in his mind.

"Well, we're landed, Inky!" said Harry, as they walked on to the castle. "Looks as if we're going to be the guests for Christmas of Lord Bunter."

The nabob chuckled.

"But what will the esteemed old bean say when the other fellows blow in?" he asked. "Bunter has asked Bob and Franky and Johnny—as well as the esteemed Bolsover and the absurd Skinner."

Harry Wharton whistled.

"Goodness knows!" he said.

They found Bunter in the library when they went in. As it was getting near lunch-time, his lordship was down at last.

"I say, you fellows, where have you been all this time?" asked the fat Owl peevishly. "I don't expect you to go clearing off like this, and leaving a fellow alone. If that's how you're going to behave—"

"Fathead!"

"I don't want any of that, Wharton. You'd better remember that you're not in the Remove passage at Greyfriars now," said Bunter severely. "And you'd better call me my lord, too. I prefer it."

Harry Wharton looked at him thoughtfully.

"We've just told the old bean that we'll stay," he said. "We seem to be booked. But don't be cheeky, Bunter."

"Call me my lord, please," said Bunter. Evidently the terrors of the night being over, swank was supervening again. "If you can't be respectful, Wharton, I shall have to consider whether I can allow you to stay in my castle."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That doesn't depend on you, old fat bean! We've been asked by the boss of the show, and, as he makes a point of it, we're staying on. You can go and eat coke!"

"What?" roared Bunter.

"Coke!"

"Now let's have this clear, Harry Wharton," said Bunter, with a glare of wrath and scorn. "I'm taking you up, and I'm going to give you a good time; but it's got to be understood, right at the start, that you've got to treat me in the right way. I insist on that!"

"Well, if you insist—"

"I do!" said Bunter firmly.

"All right. If you ask for it, why shouldn't you have it?"

The captain of the Remove grasped Lord Bunter by the collar, and twirled him round.

Bunter gave an apprehensive yell.

"Ow! Beast! Wharrer you up to?"

"Treating you in the right way."

"Look here, if you kick me, I'll— Yarooop!"

Thud!

Wharton's boot landed on his lordship's trousers. His lordship roared, and rolled over on a costly Persian rug.

"Yow-ow-yoop!" roared Bunter.

"Have another, my lord?" asked Harry.

"Pule" Be "Tide" with these Greyfriars teasers

A MERRY Christmas and a HAPPY New Year To All. Which gives us Puzzle No. 1—a simple word ladder. Can you change **HAPPY** into **MERRY** in four moves, altering one letter at each move?

No. 2. CHRISTMAS IN THE COUNTRY.—The blank spaces in the following little essay can be filled in with Greyfriars names to make sense. For instance, it begins "The **WALKER** in the country—" Now try the others.

The — in the country finds the grass still —, but should he — off the dead leaves which — underfoot, the earth is — like a tract of — from the plough. He may see a bird with a — perch on a — of the leafless — tree and start to — If the farmer has forgotten to — the gate of the — where he keeps his savage —, he may become a — and have to — over the hedge, but if the creature has other — to —, he will not chase him at any —.

No. 3. "FOR READING HEALTHY YARNS."—Add the letters **ILAU** to this slogan, rearrange the whole lot and make the title of a book to which the words would apply.

No. 4. Another little rearrangement puzzle. The following groups, rearranged, will make the names of things familiar at Christmas. The hyphenated pairs make one word each, the others two words. **SPICE MINE. TRUE-SKY. SPARE-IT. AT PERHAPS. STOLE-TIME.**

No. 5. Which Greyfriars fellow wears cherry-coloured shoes, rose-coloured handkerchiefs and gold-coloured collars?

No. 6. BURIED FRIARS. The names of eight well-known Greyfriars characters are buried in the following four lines. Can you dig them up? (Example—"A **CAP** perched on his head.")

He stood upon the stairs in ghastly gloom.

"Go, along your hook!" the rotter said to me.

"My erstwhile chum, I'm blessed if I shall go, For there's no opportunity, you know!"

(The solutions to these puzzles will be found on page 25.)

"Beast!"

"Lots more, if your lordship likes."

"Yah!"

Bunter rolled wrathfully away. His lordship, it seemed, did not want more.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Has To Walk!

"YOU fellows had better come."

"Oh, all right!"

Another morning had dawned on Reynham Castle. That morning Billy Bunter was up unusually early—it was only eleven o'clock when he rolled out on the steps of the great entrance.

But Bunter had his reasons for early rising that morning. Guests were coming to the castle that day. Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were booked to arrive

at Castlewood Station, and Bunter was going to fetch them in a car.

What old Sir Peter thought about it, and how Bunter fixed it with him, Wharton and the nabob did not know. It meant two more fellows in the secret, which could hardly have pleased the strategic old gentleman. But whatever Sir Peter thought, Lord Bunter had his way.

Matters were not going quite according to Sir Peter's plans. Sir Peter had an idea of lonely walks for his lordship, shadowed by Tomlinson under cover. That was the way to entrap the kidnappers.

Bunter's ideas were quite different. Lonely walks had no appeal for him whatever. No kidnappers for Bunter.

So far, he had not been out of sight of the turrets; and even in a walk in the frosty gardens, he required his two pals to walk with him, one on either side. This was not giving the Smiler and his gang much of a chance.

Indeed, Lord Bunter was liable to yap and snap, if his pals were out of his sight for a quarter of an hour. He couldn't, and didn't, forget that iron grasp that had fallen on him from behind on his first evening in the castle.

Nothing had happened since. Bunter had been in no danger, unless it was the danger of bursting at the well-spread board.

But he did not feel safe, all the same. He was going to feel much safer when he had more pals round him.

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were coming together; Johnny Bull, who was up in Yorkshire, was coming later. Having been informed that Wharton and Hurree Singh were at the castle, and, having ascertained that it was a fact, they had agreed to come.

Bunter's invitation had been backed up by notes from Sir Peter, and the juniors, of course, could not guess in what frame of mind the guardian of Lord Reynham had written those notes. Sir Peter, having landed himself with Lord Bunter, had, in fact, to toe Lord Bunter's line. Bunter was going to have his pals with him—and that was that!

His fat and fatuous lordship rolled out into the fine and frosty morning, arrayed in fur-collared coat and top hat. Wharton and the nabob followed him out cheerfully. They had no objection to a run in the car, and they wanted to meet their chums at the railway station. Matters had to be explained to the newcomers, of course; and, with so urgent a secret to keep, it was better for the explaining to be done out of doors, and at a distance from all other ears.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1.557.

To their surprise, the juniors found Captain Reynham sitting at the wheel of the Singer car that was waiting at the steps. There were several cars, and several chauffeurs at the castle, and though they had noticed that the captain had a car of his own, they had not expected him to bring it round to take them to the station.

Rupert Reynham gave them a pleasant smile and a nod. The young Army man was not always pleasant. The juniors had seen him several times in a gloomy, and far from cordial, mood. But he could be agreeable when he liked—and he liked now.

"Hop in, my lads!" said the captain cheerfully. "Ripping morning for a run—what?"

"Fine!" said Harry. "Are you taking us to Castlewood?"

"That's it—if my Cousin William will let me take him in my car," said Rupert, with a cheery smile at Bunter.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I told Jasmond to send round Denham in the Rolls," he said.

"Oh, quite!" agreed the captain.

"If you prefer it, of course, I will return to the garage, and send Denham. But I should be delighted to drive you, William, if you will do me that honour."

"Oh, I don't mind!" said Bunter graciously.

He grinned as he packed his ample person in the car. The captain was making himself agreeable in the belief that he was dealing with his rich relative, Lord Reynham. It rather entertained Lord Bunter.

Wharton and the nabob followed the fat Owl in. The Singer shot away down the drive—more than half a mile to the great gates—and turned into the Castlewood road.

It was only three miles to the little Sussex town—a quick run in a car. The juniors expected to arrive in good time for the eleven-thirty, by which Bob Cherry and Nugent were coming.

But they were not destined to arrive so soon as they had expected.

Half the distance had been covered, when the car came to a jarring halt.

Captain Reynham stepped down, and opened the bonnet, with a knitted brow.

Billy Bunter gave him an irritated blink.

"I say, what's up?" he snapped. "What are we stopping for?"

"Engine trouble, I'm afraid," answered the captain.

Bunter snorted.

He felt that it was like any man's check to have engine trouble when he was carrying so important a passenger.

"Well, don't keep us hanging about," he said. "It's too jolly cold for hanging about in this weather."

"Oh, quite!" drawled the captain.

Harry Wharton and the nabob waited patiently—Bunter impatiently. But as minute followed minute, and the captain was still tinkering with the engine, they began to feel worried. Bob and Nugent expected to be met at the station, and it was close on half-past eleven now.

"I'm awfully sorry," said the captain at last apologetically. "I'm afraid this needs a more skilled hand than mine. Perhaps you boys had better walk on to Castlewood. It's hardly over a mile—"

"I'm not going to walk!" yapped Bunter.

"We can't keep Bob and Frank hanging about at the station, fathead!" said Harry. "The train's due now."

"I'm not going to walk," said Bunter positively. "Think I'm going

to walk a mile and more?" He gave the captain an inimical blink. "Why the thump did you bring us on this rotten car?"

"Shut up, you ass!" breathed Wharton.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter.

"I'm really sorry—" said the captain.

"Fat lot of good that is, after landing us here, miles from everywhere!" yapped Bunter. "Catch me letting you drive me again! Look here! As you've done it, you can jolly well walk back to the castle, and send another car, see?"

Harry Wharton glanced uneasily at the captain. He half-expected the young man to box Bunter's fat ears.

Captain Reynham's eyes gleamed at Bunter for a second. But he answered quietly:

"That is only fair. I will walk back at once. Perhaps you two boys will walk on to the station, while William remains in the car."

"Yes, that's a good idea," said Harry.

"I say, you fellows, you're not going to leave me here alone!" roared Bunter.

"Suppose those kidnappers turned up?"

"Really, William, in broad daylight?" said the captain, shrugging his shoulders.

"You mind your own bizney!" said Bunter.

The captain looked at him; and then, without making any rejoinder, turned and strode away in the direction of Reynham Castle.

"You fat ass!" said Harry, when he was gone. "I wonder that chap didn't yank you out of the car and smack your cheeky head!"

"Yah! I'm not standing any cheek from him—a poor relation!" sneered Bunter. "Like his dashed cheek to bring us here and strand us! I shouldn't wonder if he's done it on purpose!"

"You fat ass! Why should he?"

"Well, he doesn't like me!" said Bunter. "He can be as jolly civil as he likes—but I jolly well know he doesn't like me."

"And you're such a likeable chap!" said Harry, laughing.

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

"Yah! Anyhow, I'm not going to be left alone here!" snapped Bunter. "It's a beastly lonely road—that silly ass had to choose the very loneliest spot to break down in. You fellows will have to stay with me till the other car comes along."

"You can jolly well walk!"

"Shan't!"

"You fat chump, we can't keep Bob and Frank hanging about at the station!"

"Blow 'em! I'm not going to walk!" roared Bunter.

"Then you can jolly well sit there on your own, and be blowed to you!" exclaimed the exasperated captain of the Remove. "Come on, Inky!"

"I say, you fellows!" roared Bunter. "I tell you you're to stop with me—I'm not going to stay here alone! Beasts! Hold on. I tell you—wait a minute—I'm coming!"

Owing to lack of space the football article by our International Coach has been held over for this week.

And Bunter came!

Snorting with wrath, the fat junior rolled out of the Singer, and rolled after the other two fellows. He had to walk, or be left alone—and he was not going to be left alone. His only consolation was to walk at a snail's pace, and the more his companions were annoyed thereby, the more the fat Owl was consoled.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bagging Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Shan't!"

"You fat ass!" said Harry Wharton. "We've done about a quarter of a mile since we left the car—and it's past twelve—"

"I'm tired!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Will you buck up?"

"No, I won't!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned. Harry Wharton looked, as he felt, intensely exasperated.

It was still a mile on to Castlewood; and already his chums' train had been in half an hour. There was no sign of another car coming on behind. Rupert Reynham had a couple of miles to walk back to the castle; and it was quite probable that he was not hurrying himself on William's account.

Wharton, looking back in the hope of seeing the car from the castle, saw nothing but a bare, frosty road.

Wharton tramped on again, suppressing his angry irritation. Bunter was no walker—and he had several breakfasts to carry, as well as a heavy, fur-lined overcoat. Bunter modelled his pace on that of an old and fatigued snail, and the other two crawled in company.

A little farther on, the road dipped between high banks thickly clothed with dark fir-trees. As the three juniors trailed down into the dip, there was a rustle in the thickets on the bank at the roadside, and a figure leaped out suddenly into view.

Another second, another figure leaped out behind them, and it was followed by a third.

The startled juniors halted.

Billy Bunter gave the man in front one surprised blink, and uttered a yell of terror.

"Owl! Help! Save me! Help! Oh crikey! It's the Smiler! Help!"

"What?" gasped Wharton.

"My esteemed hat!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton and the nabob stared at the man who had so suddenly appeared before them.

They, like Bunter, knew the hard, cold face, and the gleaming slits of eyes. It was the Smiler—the rascal who had attempted to kidnap Bunter before breaking-up at Greyfriars.

The Smiler gave one swift glance up and down the road. Not a soul was in sight in either direction.

Evidently the rascals had picked the loneliest spot for their ambush. Though how they could have known that Bunter would be on the road that morning was a mystery, if the juniors had had time to think of it! Clearly they knew, for they were there—on the watch for him!

But, lonely as the road was, the Smiler had no time to waste—and he wasted none.

"Quick!" he rapped. "Ferret—Ratty—quick!"

He leaped at Bunter, and grasped the fur collar of the overcoat.



"Quick!" snarled the voice of the Smiler, as he dragged Bunter away from the lodge. "Quick—and be silent, if you value your skin!" The ambushed juniors stared as the kidnapper dragged the quaking Owl along the snowy path.

The fat junior struggled and yelled.

Wharton and the nabob had no chance to go to his help. The other two rushed at them at the same moment. The burly Ferret grasped Harry Wharton, and bore him back, with a crash, to the earth. "Ratty," seized the nabob, and they struggled furiously.

"I say, you fellows, help!" Bunter yelled and roared. "I say—Oh crikey! Gerroff, you beast! I ain't Lord Reynham! Help!"

The Smiler tightened his grasp on the fat Owl's shoulder. Leaving his two confederates still struggling with Wharton and the nabob, who resisted desperately, he dragged Bunter up the steep bank beside the road.

In a few moments the fat junior would have been dragged out of sight among the dark, shadowy fir-trees.

Wharton and Hurree Singh were giving their assailants plenty of trouble. Bunter was not the fellow to give much trouble in a scrap, especially in such desperate hands as those of the Smiler.

But terror sharpened Bunter's fat wits. As the Smiler dragged him up the steep bank by the collar of the coat, the fat junior suddenly squirmed out of the coat.

The Smiler, dragging with all his strength, suddenly found himself dragging at an empty overcoat, and pitched over by his own momentum. He gave a yell of rage as he tumbled headlong in among the firs, with the fur-lined overcoat empty in his grasp.

Bunter, yelling, rolled down the bank. He bumped in the road—and bounced up again like a ball. Hitherto, since leaving the car, Bunter had crawled like a snail. Now he went up the road like a streak of lightning.

Any Greyfriars fellow who had seen

Billy Bunter at that moment, would have considered that he had a healthy chance for the school 100 yards.

He flew. He fairly whizzed!

The loss of that tremendous fur-lined overcoat was a relief to his movements. His top-hat flew off in the wind—and clattered, unregarded, behind him. Bunter was not likely to stop for his hat. He would not have stopped at that awful moment for the treasures of Golconda!

He ran and ran!

Down the bank came the Smiler, with a leap, his hard face convulsed with rage. Wharton and the nabob, still struggling, were pinned down by the Ferret and Ratty—resisting as hard as they could. The Smiler did not waste a glance on them. He shot like an arrow in pursuit of Bunter.

He could have little doubt of running the fat junior down. But Bunter's escape from his hands, and sudden flight, spelled danger for the kidnapper. Lonely as the road was, cars or pedestrians might come along at any moment.

Such a game needed swiftness—the Smiler had calculated on dragging Bunter into the wood, out of sight, in a few seconds, whilst his associates dealt with the other two. Certainly he had not calculated on Bunter slipping out of his overcoat and taking to his heels. It quite disconcerted the Smiler's plans.

He raced after Bunter.

Bunter charged madly on.

He heard rapid, scuttling footsteps behind him. The sound spurred him on to frantic efforts. Cold as the December day was, the perspiration streamed down Bunter's fat face. He gasped, he gurgled, he puffed, and he blew. But he pounded desperately on.

Patter, patter, patter, came the run-

ning feet behind. An outstretched grasping hand touched Bunter's fat shoulder.

As if the contact electrified him, the fat junior shot on out of reach, scudding on in a frantic spurt.

The Smiler, gritting his teeth, raced after him.

Again the outstretched clutching hand touched Bunter. This time it hooked on. And the frantic Owl, as he was grasped and dragged to a halt, let out yell after yell of frantic terror.

"Owl! Help! Wow! Help! Help! Help! Yaroooh!"

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry to the Rescue!

"**B**ALLO, hallo, hallo!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"That's Bunter—" exclaimed Frank Nugent, in wonder.

"But what—"

"Look!" gasped Frank.

The two juniors were tramping along the frosty road, swinging their suitcases.

More than half an hour ago, the train had landed them at Castlewood Station, where they had expected to be met by a car from the castle, with their friends in it. But there was no car—and no sign of their friends; and after waiting about for ten minutes or so, they decided to walk. If the car was coming, there was no doubt that they would meet it on the road—anyhow, they expected to see something of their friends before they arrived at the castle.

But what they certainly did not expect was what they saw—Billy Bunter, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

coatless and hatless, charging up the road from the distance, like a runaway bull.

They stared at him blankly.

Why Bunter was charging along at that rate, without his hat, was a mystery—for a moment. But the next moment the mystery was explained as they saw the Smiler charging after him.

Even as they stared, the pursuer clutched the panting fat Owl from behind, and dragged him backwards and over.

Bob gave a gasp.

"Come on, Franky!"

He tore down the road at top speed. Frank Nugent tore after him. They were a good hundred yards off when they sighted the chaso. They covered those hundred yards in record time.

Bunter, squealing frantically, crumpled up in the Smiler's iron grasp—a grasp as resistlessly powerful as that which had been laid on him in the King's Room a couple of days ago. Helpless in the kidnapper's hands, and with no second chance of slipping out of them, Bunter was dragged bodily to the roadside, and up the bank to the shadowy wood.

In his haste and breathless hurry to get his prisoner out of sight, the Smiler probably had not observed the two running figures approaching.

Swift as they were, Bob and Nugent were not quick enough to collar the Smiler before he got Bunter off the road.

But, as the kidnapper dragged the hapless fat Owl up the bank, Bob Cherry reached the spot, panting. He swung up his suitcase, and hurled it.

It was rather a heavy object to use as a missile. But Bob's right arm was strong and sinewy. With a powerful swing, he sent the suitcase hurtling at the kidnapper, and it struck the Smiler in the middle of the back, just as he reached the trees with his prisoner.

Crash!

There was a gasping yell from the Smiler. That crash in his back knocked him spinning. He let go Bunter, and crashed to the earth.

Bunter, released, rolled down the bank again. Bob's suitcase rolled after him.

He landed in the road, yelling. The suitcase clattered down, bumping.

The Smiler dragged himself to his feet, twisting painfully. His back had a severe pain in it.

He leaned on a tree, gasping, and glared down into the road. Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent faced him with clenched fists, ready for him if he came back. Bunter sat and yelled.

But the Smiler did not come back. He could hardly have handled the two juniors together. His game was up.

After a savage glare at them, he dis-

appeared into the wood—twisting painfully as he went. It was likely to be some time before the Smiler forgot that bang on his backbone.

"Ow! Wow! Yow! Help!" Bunter was roaring.

"All serene, old fat man!" said Bob, with a cheery grin. "You're all right now, old porpoise!"

"Right as rain, old fat bean!" said Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter blinked at them dizzily.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Ow! I say, you fellows—oh crikey! I—I—I say, that beast—the Smiler—has he gone? Oh dear!"

"He's gone!" said Bob. "Stick with us, old grampus, and we'll see you through! Where's Wharton and Inky? Didn't they come out with you?"

"Eh? Oh, yes! The other beasts collared them—"

"What?" howled Bob. "Where are they, then?"

"Back along the road somewhere! I say, you fellows, don't you leave me here!" yelled Bunter, as Bob and Nugent started at a run down the road. "I say, stop for me—I say—Beasts!"

Bob and Nugent fairly flew. They were not likely to linger when they heard that "other beasts" had collared their chums back along the road.

Bunter had covered a good distance before the Smiler clutched him. There was a bend in the road, shutting off from sight what was farther on. Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent ran as if they were on the cinder-path—and Billy Bunter, in panic terror that the Smiler might show up again, rushed after them, panting.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" panted Bob, as he tore round the bend of the road. "Here they are!"

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were still resisting manfully. But both of them were pinned down—the Ferret had a knee on Wharton's chest, and Ratty a knee on the nabob's.

The two rascals were holding them secure, until the Smiler had got away with "Lord Reynham"—and the juniors, quite understanding what was intended, made desperate efforts to free themselves.

But their efforts were in vain. They could not help Bunter—they could not help themselves.

They were still struggling, in vain, when Bob Cherry and Nugent came speeding up—and at the sight of them, the Ferret and Ratty promptly released their prisoners, darted up the bank, and vanished into the fir wood.

Wharton and the nabob scrambled to their feet, panting for breath. They did not realise for a moment why they had been so suddenly released. Then, as they saw Bob and Nugent panting up, they understood.

"Bob!" gasped Wharton. "Franky, old man! Oh, thank goodness! Bunter—"

"Here he comes," grinned Bob.

"Oh, good!"

Billy Bunter came spluttering up.

"I—I—I—I say, you fellows," gurgled Bunter. "I say, let's get back to the castle—quick! I say—oh crikey! Oh lor! I say, they nearly

had me this time—oh crumbs! Come on!"

"All right now, fathead!" said Harry. "They won't tackle the lot of us together!"

"Come on, I tell you!" roared Bunter. "Where's my hat? Gimme my coat! Look here, you beasts, you come on, see? I'm not going to hang about here to be kidnapped! I say, you fellows, come on!"

Billy Bunter started. It was doubt-tackled the whole bunch of them—but full whether the kidnappers would have Bunter was not taking chances. His little fat legs fairly twinkled down the road to Reynham Castle—and the grinning Co. had to step out—to keep pace with Bunter.

"But what," asked Bob Cherry, "does it all mean? Those jolly old kidnappers are after Bunter—this is the third time! You fellows got the faintest idea why?"

"Oh, yes—we know now!" said Harry, laughing.

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

"Give it a name, then!" said Bob.

"It's a dead secret," said Harry Wharton. "You fellows must be told, as you're coming to the castle—but mind, not a word, not a whisper."

"You're jolly mysterious!" grinned Bob. "Cough up the deadly old secret!"

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent stared blankly when they were told. They blinked at the captain of the Remove.

"You're not pulling our leg?" gasped Bob.

"Honest Injun!"

"Well, my hat!" said Nugent.

"Not a syllable at the castle, even among ourselves, in case walls have ears!" said Harry. "Even Lord Reynham's cousin doesn't know—nobody's been told. His lordship's own cousin takes Bunter for his lordship!"

"But why on earth did the old bean pick out Bunter?"

"His pluck—" said Harry, with a chuckle.

"His whatter?" yelled Bob.

"He must have pulled the old bean's leg somehow! Anyhow, there it is! Mind you keep it awfully dark!"

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter, "here's the car!"

Reynham Castle was in sight before Denham was seen in the Rolls. The captain seemed to have taken his time about sending out that car.

Bunter packed himself in it with great relief.

"Get in quick, you fellows!" he said.

"Let her out, Denham!"

"Yes, my lord."

"My lord!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"My hat!"

Billy Bunter blinked uneasily from the windows of the car until it passed in at the great gateway of the castle. Then, as it glided on up the drive, the fat junior was easy in his fat mind at last.

He was quite himself once more when he rolled out of the car at the steps of the castle door. He gave Bob and Nugent a cheery blink through his big spectacles.

"Welcome to my castle, you fellows!" said Bunter graciously.

"Thanks no end, my lord!" gasped Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Remove followed Lord Bunter into Bunter's castle.

ARE YOU AN AMATEUR' TEC?

You'll Need This Periscope!

This wonderful all-metal, chrome plated Periscope is urgently needed by all amateur detectives. Enables you to see, without being seen, over fences, walls, around corners, etc. See your local footer matches free.

Can be extended to 21 ins., and folded instantly to slip into pocket. Mirrors adjustable to any angle. Makes an ideal Xmas Gift, and costs only 1/- Post Free.

BARNES STORES (Portsmouth) LTD. (Dept. B),
78, New Oxford Street, London, W.C.1,
and 48, KINGSTON ROAD, PORTSMOUTH.



THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Hand of the Enemy!

"ANCESTOR of yours, my lord?" asked Bob Cherry. And the other fellows grinned.

Billy Bunter was showing his guests over his quarters. They were palatial quarters, and Lord Bunter naturally expected the guests to be impressed.

But Bunter, as a nobleman, seemed to appeal chiefly to Bob Cherry's sense of humour.

Bunter had, in vain, requested Wharton and Hurree Singh to address him as "my lord." But he did not need to make that request to the hilarious Bob. Bob addressed him continually as "my lord," and seemed to derive great amusement from so doing.

Looking round the spacious King's Room, Bob stopped in front of an ancient portrait let into the wall in a heavy metal frame. It was the portrait of an ancient monarch, and certainly bore no resemblance to Lord Bunter—except in one respect. The figure had a very extensive circumference. It was, in fact, a portrait of King Henry the Eighth, whose royal figure had been built somewhat on Bunter's lines.

"Oh, really, Cherry!" grunted Bunter. "If you're going to be a funny ass—"

"Leaving that to you, my lord. You do it better than I do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's a portrait of King Henry the Ninth, I think," snapped Bunter. "The room's named after him. He stayed in this castle the day before the battle of—of Waterloo—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Or—or Trafalgar; I forget which," said Bunter hastily.

"Not the battle of the Somme?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, anyhow, the old blighter stayed in this castle, and that's why this is called the King's Room," said Bunter. "I think he was the king who let the cakes burn in the neatherd's hut—"

"Oh crumbs! Wasn't that Alf?"

"No, Henry the Ninth, I think," said Bunter. "You don't know much about history, old chap!"

"It's Henry the Eighth, fathead," said Nugent, "the sportsman who cut off his wives' heads."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Bunter. "I know a good bit of history. He cut off his wife's head, and she never smiled again—"

"Oh crikey!"

"James!" yapped Bunter.

"Yes, my lord?"

"Have the beds been placed in my room, as I instructed you, George?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Very good, Frederick! Come and look at the bed-room, you fellows."

The juniors followed Bunter through the communicating doorway into the adjoining bed-room. Two more bedsteads were there now.

Bob and Nugent looked at them in some surprise.

There was a huge canopied bed—the historic bed in which that ferocious old gentleman, Henry Tudor, had slept some hundreds of years ago. It stood in state at some distance from the walls. Hitherto there had been a bed on either side of it. Now there was a bed at the head and a bed at the foot, also. The state bed, which was Bunter's, was quite surrounded.

"What's that game?" asked Nugent. "Are we all camping in this room, or what?"

"That's it!" grinned Bunter. "Lots of space! This room is jolly nearly as big as the dorm at Greyfriars. If that blighter comes in the night he will find you fellows all round me, see?"

"I see!" gasped Bob. "Jolly glad to be useful to you, my lord!"

"When Bull comes I'll have another bed shoved in for him, too," said Bunter. "They won't get at me if I can help it, I can tell you."

"I don't see how they could get at you at all here," said Nugent.

"Well, one of them did, the day I got here," answered Bunter. "I'm not taking chances of that happening again. Now, you fellows had a pretty good lunch, I hope."

"Fine!" grinned Bob. "Your lordship's prog is A 1."

"I dare say you'd like a rest after it. You can sit up here while I have a nap, see?"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter rolled back into the King's Room, and disposed his fat limbs in a deep armchair before the fire.

The four juniors looked at one another, smiling.

They were quite prepared to camp in Bunter's room, and guard him from dangers, real or imaginary, but they were not prepared to sit around in the afternoon, listening to his lordship snoring.

The early December dusk was falling, but it was still light enough for a ramble round the castle, and the frosty air appealed more to them than frowsting indoors over a fire.

"Good-bye, my lord!" said Bob.

Bunter blinked round.

"I say, you fellows, stop here, will you? I shan't want more than an hour. You'd better not talk. I don't like jaw when I'm going to sleep. Just sit round."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"What are you cackling at?" hooted Bunter.

"Your little joke, my lord! Come on, you men," said Bob. "Lots of time for a trot round before dark."

"Beasts!" roared Bunter, as the juniors headed for the door.

"Oh, my hat! Are the nobility all as polite as that?" asked Bob.

"Look here, wait till I ring for James, then!" hooted Bunter. "I'm not going to be left alone, see? I'm in danger here when I'm left alone."

"Oh, all right; buck up, my lord!"

Bunter rang, and James appeared. There was a patient, long-suffering expression on James' smooth face. A few days of his lordship seemed to have made James tired.

SOLUTIONS TO
PUZZLES ON PAGE 21

1. HAPPY — HARRY —
HARRY — MARRY — MERRY.

2. Walker, Greene, Rake,
Russell (Rustle), Brown, New-
land, Red-wing, Twigg, Cherry,
Singh, Locke, Field, Bull,
Trotter, Hop Hit, Fish, Fry,
Price.

3. THE GREYFRIARS HOLI-
DAY ANNUAL.

4. MINCE PIES. TURKEYS.
PARTIES. PAPER HATS.
MISTLETOE.

5. Most fellows — because
there are black cherries, white
roses, and white gold!

6. Dupont, Singh, Gosling,
Trotter, Myers, Mumble, Fish,
Snoot.

"Stay here, Frederick, while my friends are gone out!" said Bunter.

"Yes, my lord."

"You may sit down," added Bunter considerably. "Sit down, Herbert."

"Thank you, my lord!"

James sat down in a far corner of the vast apartment.

"You fellows can cut now!" said Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. cut, and his lordship was left to repose. They did not need a rest after lunch. His fat lordship did, having exerted himself at that meal much more than the other fellows. A minute after they were gone his lordship's snore awoke the echoes of the King's Room.

And in five minutes more James rose softly to his feet, stepped softly across to the sleeping beauty, and peered at him in the thickening dusk, and then softly trotted out of the apartment.

The December dusk thickened in the great apartment, only the red gleam of the fire cast an uncertain wavering light. Light and shade danced on Billy Bunter's slumbering face, and the gleam was reflected from his big spectacles. His snore rumbled.

If there was another sound in the dusky apartment, Billy Bunter did not hear it.

A slight sound was not likely to wake Billy Bunter.

The sleeping fat Owl did not know that another shadow stirred, among the shifting shadows of the dusky room. He did not hear a stealthy footfall.

He did not awaken—till a sudden grasp was laid on him: and then it was too late!

As his eyes opened behind his spectacles, and his mouth for a startled yell, a thick cloth was pressed over his face, stifling his cries. With a muffled squeak of terror, the hapless fat Owl felt himself dragged bodily from the armchair.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Struck Down!

BOB CHERRY grinned.

"James Frederick George Herbert seems to have got fed up!" he murmured.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the old oak gallery, over the great hall of Reynham. They were looking from a tall window, over the gardens and the far-stretching park. Snow was falling—the first snow of Christmas. Thick dark clouds were banking over the park, blotting out the red glimmer of the setting sun.

Looking out into the falling snow, the juniors were debating whether to go out for a ramble, regardless of the weather, when Bob's eye fell on the neat, dapper figure of James, emerging quietly from the broad corridor on which the King's Room opened.

James passed on his way and disappeared, and the chums of the Remove grinned.

No doubt Lord Bunter had a right to command his "man" to remain while he slumbered. On the other hand, it was not surprising that James was very soon fed up with listening to his lordship's snore. No doubt he had learned, by this time, that his lordship, once asleep, was not likely to awaken in a hurry and miss him.

"Well, let's get out, you fellows!" said Bob. "Who cares for a little snow?"

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

Hurree Jamset Ram Sing gave a shiver.

Bob was glad to see the snow: but the delight of a northern winter had a different effect on the junior from India's coral strand.

"The freezefulness is terrific!" remarked the nabob.

"I'll warm you up with a few snowballs, old chap!"

Hurree Singh grinned.

"You fellows go outfully, and I will remain under the shelter of his lordship's ridiculous roof!" he said. "I will turn on the idiotic radio while you are gone."

"Right-ho," said Bob. "Come on, you chaps!"

Three of the Co. went down the staircase; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, for whom a snowfall had no attraction whatever, walked up the corridor again to the King's Room.

The radiogram was not likely to awaken his lordship—if that mattered. Nothing short of a thunderclap—and a very hefty one—was likely to awaken Lord Bunter, when he was once safe in the embrace of Morpheus.

Hurree Singh turned the door-handle, and opened the big oak door of the King's Room.

The interior was deeply dusky, with only a dancing beam from the log fire, crackling on the wide, ancient hearth.

The nabob expected to hear Bunter's snore, as he opened the door: but there was no sound of snoring in the room.

But, as he looked in, the Indian junior heard a faint muffled gurgle.

He was feeling for the lighting-switch, which was near the doorway, when he suddenly stopped, and stared, as if petrified.

Against the red glow of the fire, was a moving mass of shadow. Dumb-founded, Hurree Singh stared. Dim as it was, he could see what was happening.

Billy Bunter with a cloth twisted round his head, gurgling faintly and wriggling like an eel, was being dragged out of his armchair, in the grasp of a dark shadowy figure.

Even as the nabob stared, blankly, at the startling and unexpected vision, Bunter was dragged across the room, towards the wall where the King's portrait glimmered in its heavy frame.

But only for a second did the nabob stand amazed. Then he woke to sudden and vigorous action.

He shot across the room, like an arrow, and a dusky fist shot out, with all the force of a strong arm.

All he could see of Bunter's assailant was a dim, dark outline: but it was enough to guide his blow.

There was a sharp, savage howl, as his knuckles crashed on the side of a head.

Bunter, suddenly released, rolled on the floor.

Instantly, he tore the wrapping cloth from his face, and yelled. He yelled frantically, on his top note.

"Help! Yarook! Help! I say, you fellows! Help!"

The dark figure turned on Hurree Jamset Ram Singh with tiger-like swiftness. The dusky junior was grasped, in a grip of iron.

That grip was twice or thrice too strong for him; but the nabob gave grasp for grasp, and struggled manfully.

"Help!" he panted. "Help!"

"Help!" roared Bunter

He scrambled to his feet. Too terrified even to realise that one of his friends was there, struggling with his unseen enemy, the fat junior bolted for the door.

He barged into the corridor, and flew.

In a split second, Billy Bunter was doing the oak gallery at about 50 m.p.h., and scuttling down the staircase, in a series of wild, kangaroo-like jumps. At every jump, he let out a yell.

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

The four juniors were in the hall below. They had been about to go out, when Bunter happened.

They stared up blankly at the fat figure bounding down the stairs. Jasmond, who was in the hall, stared up, with raised eyebrows. Sir Peter Lanchester came hurrying from the library—and Captain Reynham emerged from the smoke-room, with a cigarette between finger and thumb.

"What—" exclaimed Sir Peter.

"What the dooce—" drawled the captain.

"Bunter—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"You fat ass, what's up?" yelled Nugent.

"Help! Yarook! Help! He got me!" yelled Bunter, as he staggered from the stairs into the hall. "I say, you fellows—yarook! He got me! Ow!"

"You absurd boy!" exclaimed Sir Peter. "Does this mean that you have had another fanciful attack of nerves—"

"You old ass!" yelled Bunter.

"Wha-a-t?"

"I tell you he got me! Oh crikey! He had a bag or something over my head, and was dragging me away!" gasped Bunter.

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you he did!" shrieked Bunter. "That beast James must have left me alone—I'll sack him—oh crikey!"

"Calm yourself, my boy!"

"Yarook!"

"Inky went to Bunter's room," gasped Bob. "He can't have been larking with the fat chump, surely!"

"I say, you fellows, was it Inky? Somebody came in. I think, I—I think he's fighting with that beast now—"

"What?" yelled Wharton.

The captain of the Remove bounded up the staircase.

After him flew his chums.

The bare possibility that the nabob was in an enemy's grip was enough for them. After them, more slowly, went the old baronet. Bunter remained spluttering in the hall. Captain Reynham with a shrug of the shoulders, went back into the smoke-room.

Harry Wharton & Co. fairly flew along the oak gallery, and up the corridor to the King's Room.

"Inky!" shouted Harry, as he reached the door. It stood wide open—and the room was dark—only the firelight glimmering within.

"Inky!" yelled Bob.

But there was no answer from the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Wharton groped for the switch, and flashed on the light.

The next moment there was a cry of horror from the Greyfriars juniors as they crowded in.

On the Persian rug, at full length, lay Hurree Jamset Ram Singh—unconscious. In the light, his face was set and still, as a face of bronze.

"Inky, old man!" panted Nugent.

Harry Wharton ran to the nabob, and lifted his head.

There was a dark bruise under the dark hair, where a savage blow had been struck. That blow had stunned the Nabob of Bhanipur. His head rested on Wharton's knee—his eyes closed.

"Knocked out—poor old Inky!" gas-

ped Bob Cherry. Then—then—then there was somebody here—"

"Look for him!" panted Harry. "I'll look after Inky—you look for that villain!"

The three juniors began a hurried search.

But the mysterious assailant had had ample time to get clear. That some enemy had reached Bunter was certain now—Hurree Singh's unexpected return to the King's Room had saved him. Bunter had escaped—and the nabob, struggling with the kidnapper, had been struck senseless, while the rascal fled. There was no sign of him to be discovered.

"What—" exclaimed Sir Peter, as he strode into the King's Room. "What—why—what has happened here?" He stared down in horror at the nabob's still face.

"Nobody here!" said Bob, coming back from the bed-room. "The brute's got away. But how the thump did he get in at all?"

"Inky's coming to!" breathed Wharton, as the nabob's eyes opened, with a wild stare. "Inky, old fellow—"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh blinked in the light. His hand groped at the bruise on his head. He tried to speak.

"Ow! My esteemed napper!" were his first words. "Ow!"

"What has happened here, my boy?" exclaimed Sir Peter Lanchester. "It is clear that you have been attacked—but how—who—"

"The ludicrous rascal had hold of Bunter!" gasped the nabob. "He gave me a terrific rap on the head while I was struggling with him—"

"But who?" gasped Sir Peter. "Did you see him?"

"Not clearly, esteemed sahib, but I think it was that ridiculous rascal called the Smiler—"

"Good gad! But how—" stuttered Sir Peter helplessly. "One of the kidnappers—here—in the castle! Good gad!"

Leaving the nabob to his friends, he hurried from the room, in quest of Tomlinson. This was a matter for the detective to deal with.

"You think it was the Smiler, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton.

"The thinkfulness is terrific!"

"That means," said Harry quietly, "that they have a confederate inside the castle. He could not have got here without that—he could not even have known which room Bunter was in. This means that somebody inside Reynham Castle has a hand in the kidnapping."

There was no doubt about that in the minds of the Greyfriars fellows. But who, in a numerous household of forty or fifty persons, was the confederate of the Smiler and his gang, they had no means of guessing—and it was probable that Mr. Tomlinson was equally at a loss.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Bait!

SIR PETER LANCHESTER rubbed his hands.

His ruddy face wore a beaming smile.

It was a cold and frosty morning. Wintry sunshine gleamed on a white carpet of snow all round Reynham Castle. Standing at the great doorway which was wide open, the old baronet beamed at the wintry weather.

Captain Reynham, who was smoking an after-breakfast cigarette in the hall,

glanced at him once or twice curiously, but did not speak.

Harry Wharton & Co. came out of the breakfast-room, with cheery faces. Billy Bunter rolled after them, equally cheery. Meals always had a cheering effect on Bunter.

Sir Peter glanced round from the doorway, smiling.

"Ready for a walk, my boys!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather, sir!" answered Bob Cherry. "Ripping morning!"

"I should like to show you the old hunting-lodge in the park!" said Sir Peter. "It is about half a mile—a pleasant walk in the snow—"

"I say, you fellows, don't all of you go out!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I say, don't you leave me alone here."

"You are coming also, William!" said Sir Peter. "Get your coat and hat on! I insist! A walk will do you good!"

And as the Co. donned coats and hats, to walk out with Sir Peter, Lord Bunter unwillingly did the same.

He grunted as he rolled out with the cheery party. They followed a path through the frosty park, and the trees hid the castle from sight, except the tall turret dark against the steely sky.

"Christmas is close at hand now, my boys!" said Sir Peter. "I hope that we shall have a merry Christmas at the castle—a very happy Christmas." The old gentleman beamed on the juniors. "If all goes well, my ward will be able to join us at Christmas, and we shall be a very happy party."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked at the smiling old gentleman.

The other fellows grinned at the expression on his fat face. They did not need telling that Lord Bunter was far from keen to discard his borrowed plumes, when the time came for the real Lord Reynham to show up in his ancestral halls.

"If we are successful this morning," continued Sir Peter, "it will be unnecessary for Bunter to play the part of Lord Reynham any longer."

"Oh!" repeated Bunter.

The juniors realised that Sir Peter had some plan on hand—though they could not guess what it was. That walk in the frosty park had some special purpose.

"From what has happened," went on Sir Peter, "there is no doubt that my ward's enemies keep watch on the boy they believe to be Lord Reynham—I should not be surprised if we are watched at this very moment."

"I—I say, hadn't we better go back?" gasped Bunter.

"I am relying on your courage, William!"

"Oh! Ah! Yes! But—"

"And your nerve—"

"Oh! Yes! Certainly! But—"

"I have no doubt whatever," went on the beaming old gentleman, "that when William remains alone in the old lodge in the park—"

"Eh?"

"He will be seized by that rascal who bears the odd name of the Smiler—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"And all will be well!" said Sir Peter. "Once that scoundrel is in the grasp of the law, I shall not fear for my ward. That villain—that dastard—has been seeking to kidnap him for years—for what reason, I do not know—it is a mystery—but once his teeth are drawn, my ward will be safe. William will remain alone in the old hunting-lodge—"

"Look here—" roared Bunter in alarm.

"You need have no fear, my boy!"

said Sir Peter reassuringly. "Tomlinson is already concealed in the lodge, keeping watch. He will be on the spot. You will be in no real danger. You will simply be the bait to draw the dastard into the trap, as I planned when I brought you here under my ward's name."

"Oh crikey!"

"It's up to you, Bunter!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

Between Ourselves

WELL, chums, another Christmas is close upon us, and another round of festivities will shortly commence. Of all the good things you sample this festive season this splendid Christmas Number of the *MAGNET* will certainly be one of the best!

My staff and I wish every "Magnetite"

A MERRY CHRISTMAS!

May you have all you wish yourselves, and may the festive board groan under the weight of good things!

At Christmas-time I never fail to think of the vast army of *MAGNET* readers scattered all over the world, and wonder how they are spending their Christmas. I'm looking forward to enjoying myself this Christmas, and I sincerely hope that all of you will enjoy yourselves every bit as much. Have a good time, and remember that Christmas comes but once a year—so make the most of it! Be jolly—make others jolly—let the spirit of peace and good will be with you.

Meanwhile, you can look forward to another topping number of the *MAGNET* next FRIDAY, in which, together with our usual programme, you will find some more Christmas features. The special Greyfriars yarn is entitled:

"THE WRAITH OF REYNHAM CASTLE!"

and tells of Harry Wharton & Co.'s further exciting adventures during the Christmas vac. And you'll meet the ghost of Reynham Castle, too! Fun and thrills abound in plenty in this seasonable story, chums. Take my tip and order your copy to-day! By the way, if you've not yet got your copy of the "Holiday Annual," see your newsagent about it at the same time.

YOUR EDITOR.

Sir Peter Lanchester took Bunter's fat arm.

"Come!" he said. "We are close on the lodge now! You other boys please walk back."

"I say, you fellows, don't you leave me!" howled Bunter.

But there was no help for Bunter now; and he disappeared past the frosty trees with Sir Peter Lanchester.

The old hunting-lodge lay in a thick, secluded corner of the park. It was surrounded by thickets of evergreens, and

the leafless branches of trees almost met over it. It was partly in ruins, and only one room retained a roof, with a doorless aperture where a door once had been.

It looked dark and dismal and dreary to Billy Bunter as the hapless fat Owl arrived with Sir Peter.

"I—I—I say—" stammered Bunter. "This is the place!" said Sir Peter, unheeding. He led Bunter in at the doorway.

There were two or three benches, but no other furnishings in the interior, which was dim and dusky. Snowflakes, blown in by the wintry wind, were scattered on the mossy stone floor.

Sir Peter glanced round.

"You are here, Tomlinson?" he asked in a low voice.

"Here!" came the rather acid tones of Mr. Tomlinson, and Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles.

There was an aperture in the old stone wall—a deep, dark alcove. From that recess came Mr. Tomlinson's voice, but the detective was not to be seen.

"Very good!" said Sir Peter. "Now, you may sit down on one of these benches, William, as if you were staying here to rest after your walk. I have a newspaper here; you may read it while you wait. Do not stir from this spot for an hour. If the rogue is on the watch he will find you before that time."

"It's kik-kik-kik-cold—"

"Never mind that!" said Sir Peter cheerily.

Bunter breathed fury. He did mind it.

"Understand me," said Sir Peter, with a touch of sternness, "I rely upon you, William! You are here for a certain purpose! If you fail you are, of course, no use to me, and you may as well leave the castle at once."

"Beast!"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean, I'm ready!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I've got pluck, I hope."

"I hope so," said Sir Peter. Possibly he was beginning to have doubts on that point. "I trust you! Mr. Tomlinson is watching over you! I will leave you!"

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter, as the old baronet walked out of the lodge and disappeared.

Bunter did not sit down. He did not read the newspaper. He moved about the old lodge restlessly like a fat rabbit in a cage.

Again and again he was tempted to cut. But that meant throwing up the part he was playing at Reynham Castle!

And, after all, the kidnapper might not appear. And Tomlinson was parked in the alcove only ten feet from him. Alternating between hope and terror, the unhappy substitute for Lord Reynham blinked incessantly at the doorway, and when, a quarter of an hour after Sir Peter had departed, there was a stealthy footstep on the snowy path outside, he gave a squeak of terror.

A stocky figure blocked the doorway; a cold, hard face, with a pair of glinting icy eyes, looked in at Bunter.

Bunter blinked at him, speechless.

Sir Peter, after all, had calculated well. They had been watched in the park. It was the Smiler!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Co. Take a Hand!

"**Q**UIET!" whispered Harry Wharton.

"Mum is the esteemed word!" breathed Hurree Singh.

THE *MAGNET* LIBRARY.—No. 1,557.

Four juniors crept softly and cautiously through the thickets that surrounded the old hunting-lodge.

Sir Peter Lanchester, walking back to the castle after leaving Bunter as bait for the kidnapper, had seen nothing more of the Greyfriars fellows. No doubt he thought that they had gone for a ramble if he gave them any thought at all.

But Harry Wharton & Co., as a matter of fact, were not far away.

While admitting that old Sir Peter had a right to expect Bunter to play up in the part he had undertaken, they were not disposed to leave the hapless fat Owl to it.

If Bunter, as bait, drew the kidnapper into the snare, and the detective got the handcuffs on him, it was all right. But if it did not work out like that it was all wrong. And, in the latter case, the Co. decided unanimously that they had better be on the spot.

Harry Wharton had already seen the old hunting-lodge, during his days at the castle, and he knew his way about. He led the way, and his comrades followed him to the thickets in the rear of the old lodge.

Then, with great caution, they worked their way through the thickets to a spot where they had a view, between the frosty twigs, of the path that led to the doorway of the lonely lodge.

It was cold, it was damp, and it was unpleasant, standing ankle-deep in snow, with frosty twigs brushing their faces and flakes dropping on them from branches above.

But they stuck it out manfully.

As it happened, they had not very long to wait. There was a soft footstep on the path on the other side of a mass of snowy laurels.

Harry Wharton put his finger to his lips.

Suppressing their breathing, the four juniors watched and listened. They glimpsed a stocky figure in overcoat and cap passing, and it stepped into the doorway of the lodge.

"Was that—" whispered Nugent.

"Blessed if I know! Listen!" whispered Harry.

From the direction of the lodge they heard a voice in cool, mocking tones:

"Good-morning, Lord Reynham!"

"Oh lor!" came a faint squeak.

"Is your lordship taking a little rest?" went on the mocking voice. "A somewhat dismal place for your lordship. Perhaps you will be kind enough to accompany me, and I will find you somewhat better quarters. I have a car not very far away—quite a short walk, your lordship!"

"I—I say— Oh crikey!"

The ambushed juniors exchanged quick glances. They heard every word distinctly from the old lodge. It was the kidnapper—there was no further doubt about that.

"My lord—" went on the mocking voice of the Smiler.

He broke off suddenly. There was a sudden tramp of feet, a sound of a fierce struggle and a fall.

The juniors listened breathlessly. Evidently the detective had weighed in. He was at grips with the kidnapper. A clink of metal reached the ears of the juniors in the thicket.

Bob Cherry gave a gasp.

"He's got him! That's the handcuffs!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's it! No need for us to barge in, if he's got him—I don't suppose he'd be fearfully pleased to see us. He wouldn't be flattered at our thinking he might have made a hash of it."

Bob chuckled.

"Not likely! But— Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look!"

An overcoated figure emerged from the doorway of the lodge. Its grip was on a fat arm, dragging Lord Bunter out.

"Quick!" snarled the voice of the Smiler, no longer mocking, but savage and threatening. "So you were watched, you fat fool—much good it has done you! Quick—and be silent, if you value your skin!"

"Oh crikey! Ow!"

For a second the four juniors stared blankly through the frosty thickets.

Evidently it was not the detective who had got the upper hand in that brief struggle.

But only for a second they stared, as the Smiler dragged the quaking fat Owl along the snowy path.

"At him!" yelled Bob.

He burst out into the path, followed by his chums. Three or four fists hit the astonished Smiler at the same moment, and he went staggering, letting go Bunter.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles. "I say, you fellows— Oh crumbs!"

"Collar him!" roared Bob.

"Bag him!"

The Smiler staggered over; but as the juniors rushed down on him, he leaped to his feet. He sprang back and dodged the rush, and for a second he glared at the Greyfriars fellows, evidently more than half-inclined to spring at them. But the odds were too great, and he knew it—and he turned and bounded away.

"After him!" gasped Harry.

"I say, you fellows—"

Unheeding Bunter, the juniors dashed after the kidnapper. But the Smiler ran like a deer, and in a few moments he had vanished among the trees.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter.

The Smiler was gone.

Harry Wharton & Co. hurried back to the hunting-lodge.

Mr. Tomlinson met their eyes. His face was crimson—and a crimson stream was flowing down from his nose. His hands were joined together in front of him. The juniors wondered why for a moment. Then they saw that he had handcuffs on.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Greyfriars fellows roared. Really, they could not help it. Sir Peter had left his fat bait for the kidnapper, nothing doubting that Tomlinson would get the man if he showed up. Instead of which the detective met their eyes, handcuffed with his own handcuffs!

"When you have done sniggering," said Mr. Tomlinson, in a grinding voice, "perhaps you will kindly help me out of this!"

And Harry Wharton & Co., suppressing their sniggering, kindly helped him out of it. Without wasting time in expressing thanks, Mr. Tomlinson stalked out of the hunting-lodge, and stalked away. And the juniors did not chuckle again till he was gone.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo hallo! Ready for lunch?"

"Blow lunch!"

"Wha-a-t?"

Bunter was frowning darkly.

He had frowned all the way back to the castle. He had frowned ever since.

"I'm fed-up!" said Bunter, as he went in to lunch. "I'm jolly well chucking it! That silly old ass—that blithering old chump—that fathheaded old josser—if he jolly well thinks I'm going to be left spotted about to be snaffled, he's jolly well mistaken! I'm going—after lunch!" added Bunter.

But as he sat down the frown disappeared from Bunter's fat brow.

He gave an appreciative sniff.

"I say, you fellows," he breathed, "it's turkey!"

And Bunter smiled again.

It was turkey for lunch.

Billy Bunter forgot narrow escapes, and kidnappers, and impending perils. Turkey filled his fat thoughts—and was soon filling his fat circumference. Bunter beamed.

Lord Bunter did not chuck it up!

Really, it was too good a thing to be lightly chucked up. On second thoughts—proverbially the best—Bunter decided to carry on. Turkeys and Christmas puddings weighed more in the balance than kidnappers and perils—and it was going to be a Merry Christmas!

THE END.

(The next yarn in this grand Christmas series is entitled: "THE WRAITH OF REYNHAM CASTLE!" Watch out for it in next Friday's MAGNET!)



BILLIARDS

Perfect Reproduction Full-size Tables. Leather Covered Pockets, Rubber Cushions, adjustable Feet. Complete with 2 Cues, 3 Balls, Marking Board, Rules, Level and Chalk.

Size	Weekly	Cash	Snooker Balls
3ft. 2ins. ...	20 @ 1/-	18/-	11 ... 12/-
3ft. 8ins. ...	20 @ 1/3	19/6	11 ... 12/6
4ft. 2ins. ...	20 @ 1/6	25/-	11 ... 15/-
4ft. 8ins. ...	20 @ 1/10	29/6	11 ... 17/-
5ft. 2ins. ...	24 @ 2/-	39/6	11 ... 22/6
5ft. 4ins. ...	32 @ 2/-	52/6	11 ... 24/6

Complete with Triangle

1/- Weekly

SEND FOR FREE ART ILLUS. LIST.

GEORGE GROSE LTD LUDGATE CIRCUS

NEW BRIDGE ST LONDON, E.C.4

STAMMERING

Speech disorders. Cure yourself as I did. Particulars sent FREE.—H. GOWERS, 269, SHAKESPEARE ROAD, LONDON, S.E.24.

STAMPS

300 DIFFERENT, incl. Airmail, Beautiful Commemorative Stamps, Postals, Colonials. Price 6d. (Abroad 1/3).—WHITE, ENGINE LANE, LYE, WORCS.

JOKES! JOKES! JOKES!

GREAT FUN FOR WINTER PARTIES.



Sneezing Powder, Explosive Cigarettes, Water Squirt, Novelties, Joke Matches, Platelifters, Dribbling Glass, Black Face Soap, Black Eye Joke, etc., etc. Special Sample Parcels—2/-, 3/6, 5/- and 7/6; post 3d. (Colonial 9d.).

HERBERTS & CO. (Dept. L.35),
48, Clapham Park Road, LONDON, S.W.4.

HASTOLAND, Set 5 Latvia, Martinique, Boy King stamps, 5 Estonia, 32 all different, including Jubilee and Coronations. Just send 2d. postage and request approvals.

LISBURN & TOWNSEND (U.S.), LIVERPOOL.

All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THE MYSTERY OF JOLLY LODGE!

First Instalment of a Rib-Tickling Xmas Serial.

By DICKY NUGENT

I.
Me-ow-ow! Yeow-ow-owl!
"Grate pip! What's that?" asked Jack Jolly, starting up from his chair at the fireside in the library of Jolly Lodge.

"Sounds like a cat concert!" remarked Frank Fearless.
"Either that or a radio set oscillating!" grinned Merry.

"Maybe it's some ferocious wild animal that has lost its way in the snow!" said Bright, with a slight shiver. "There might easily be wolves about on a wintry mite like this!"

"Ha, ha! I think not!" chuckled General Jolly, Jack's bluff and hearty pater. "Even though it's doubtful weather, it's doubtful whether it's doubtful enough to bring out wolves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The chums of the St. Sam's Fourth laughed heartily at their host's little joke.

Larfter came easily to their young lips now that they were at Jolly's ancestral home for the Christmas holidays. The snow lay thick in the eggshells grounds of Jolly Lodge and a wintry wind howled and whistled round the towers and turrets of General Jolly's mansion; but all was merry and bright in the flickering light of the fire in the old library.

Even the Rajah of Bhang seemed to have caught the holly-day spirit. This distinguished prince, who had been a friend of

General Jolly's in India, usually wore a fierce frown on his face; but he allowed himself to smile slightly, as he listened to the cheery chatter of the Fourth-Formers.

"Our young friends like well to be away from school, is it not, yes, no!" he cried, as he fingered the glittering diamond pin which adorned his tie—a jewel reputed to be worth a fortune. "It is relief to them to be free from burden of school-master sahib, no, yes!"

"Yes, rather, rajah!" laughed Jack Jolly. "Our Head, Doctor Birchmell, is one of the biggest tyrants that ever lived. It's a load off our minds to know that we've left him behind at St. Sam's."

Yeow-ow-owl! Me-ow-owl!
"My hat! There's that awful noise again!" exclaimed Frank Fearless. "Is it possible that it's a yewman being in pane?"

"Perhaps it's a ghost," said Merry, with a nervous glance over his shoulder. "I've been told that in a hysterical mansion like this there's always a haunted wing!"

"Somebody has been pullin' your leg, my boy!" laughed General

Jolly. "I'll wager my life it's only a cat on the front doorstep. It's a feline howlin' that's harrowin' our feelin'!"

"Yeow-owl! Me-ow-owl! Yeow-ow-owl!"

"Ye gods!"
"Can't something be done about it?" asked Bright, with a shudder.
"It's—it's garstly!"



"I know one certain way of stoppin' it, by gad!" grinned General Jolly. "Open the front door suddenly so as to take the dashed animal by surprise an' throw a bucket of water over it!"

"Good idea, by Jove!"

"It won't be very plezzant for the cat on a cold nite like this, but we've simply got to do something," said Jack Jolly, rising. "This way, you fellows!"

weeping quietly against the School House steps.

Then we ran into Coker. The great man of the Fifth was wearing a frown on his noble brow.

"Blow the Christmas hols!" he snorted, when we timidly touched on them. "I'm interested in reforming the Fifth just now—not Christmas hols. And a man can't reform the Fifth when the Fifth are scattered far and wide all over the country, can he? Christmas be blowed!"

And Coker went his way snorting loudly.

Finally, there was Loder of the Sixth.

"Of course, I'm not keen on goin' home for Christmas!" he leered, when we looked round the door of his study to ask him about it. "I'm far too keen on Latin prose an' Roman history an' mathematics an' what not to want to leave the dear old school."

And Loder lit a fresh cigarette and returned to his task of marking a pack of playing-cards to the accompaniment of a roar of laughter—mirthless laughter, we concluded.

So there you are! Fellows are not all so keen on holidays as you'd think, and some of them are nearly breaking-down when it comes to breaking-up!

"Without Quelch?" we yelled incredulously.

The Bouncer nodded moodily.

"How can I enjoy myself, do you think, when I've no Quelch to listen to my cool insolence and caustic wit? Without Quelch to work up into a daily fury, I shall feel like a lost soul!"

We crept away, leaving Smithy

WHEN THEY BREAK UP THEY BREAK DOWN!

Fellows Who Don't Like Holidays

You might think the Christmas hols would be greeted with delight by Greyfriars chaps.

Nothing of the kind, old pals, we assure you!

Touring the school with breaking-up day in the offing, we found quite a number of fellows bordering on tears at the prospect of going home. Bolsover major, for instance, was in a state of utter dejection.

"Holidays! Don't talk to me about holidays!" he groaned, when we tried to console him. "What can I do on holiday, for goodness' sake? No arms to twist, no noses to tweak, no ears to pull, no trousers seats to kick, no—"

We fled, leaving Bolsoy still reeling off his list of "noes" to the air of the quad!

Our Special Yuletide Number of the "Herald"

The GREY FRIARS HERALD

No. 271.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

December 18th, 1937.

STOP PRESS NEWS

HERE'S FUN FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON!

Chortles HAROLD SKINNER

If there's one thing I like better than any other it's the sound of happy laughter at Christmas. That's why I got in touch with a pal who's a scientific genius and very obliging. I wrote and asked him if he could design certain models I had already worked out in the rough. He could and did—

and, boy, am I going to enjoy this Christmas!

I'm taking home with me the niftiest little bunch of surprises a fun-lover could wish for. When I get busy with them on Christmas Day I can imagine the laughter will fairly make the welkin ring!

First, I've a rather unusual Christmas pudding. It's just an ordinary common-or-garden Christmas pud. to look at; but wait till somebody takes a dig at it! He'll get the shock of his life when it blows to pieces in front of him!

I've also got some nice mince pies. Nice to outward appearances, at any rate. What they're like to eat I shouldn't like to say. I shall never know, either. I'm going to take good care not to allow my molars anywhere near them.

You see, these mince pies are made in such a way that as soon as anyone attempts to eat them a hidden spring jumps into action and shoots out an iron paper-grip that gives the biter a nasty tweak on the nose!

These brainy little gadgets my pal has made for me don't stop at articles of food, by the way. I've provided fun for the party as well as the meal. There are half a dozen of these inflating squeakers, for instance, that blow soot back into the user's face as soon as he blows into them!

As for the Christmas tree, that's going to be a regular mine of fun. If I have my way, there won't be a present on it that doesn't squirt ink or give an electric shock as soon as it's touched!

Oh, yes, there'll be fun for the festive season with a vengeance when I take home my little bag of tricks this Christmas!



He'd be too Blown Out!

We refuse to believe the yarn that Bunter mistook Peter Todd's football for a Christmas pudding and ate it before he realised his mistake. That's too much to ask any man to swallow.

The rest of the company nodded and followed their leader. They didn't quite like wetting a cat on a cold winter's nite, but something had to be done to put an end to this torcher, anyway!

Jack Jolly went down to the kitchen to fetch a pail of water, and then the quartette crept stealthily across the hall to the massive front door of Jolly Lodge. Fearless turned back the handle and prepared to fling open the door.

"Ready!" whispered Fearless. Jack Jolly poised his pail and nodded.

The next instant, Fearless flung open the door and Jack Jolly herded the contents of his pail through the open doorway.

SWOOOOOOOSH!
"Yaroooo! Yoooop! Help!"
"What the merry dickens!" gasped Fearless.

Instead of the feline squeal he had expected to hear, it was the bellowing of a yewman voice that came from the porch—and a yewman voice that was very familiar! "The Head!" gasped Fearless. "Grate pip! So it is!"

The chums of the Fourth gazed out on to the porch in sheer amazement. It was Doctor Birchmell, the revered and majestic headmaster of St. Sam's, who was standing before them—not a cat!

"You silly yung asses!" he roared. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Sorry, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly. "We thought we were throwing water over a cat!"

The Head goggled water out of his eyes and glared.

"Do you imagine for one moment, Jolly, that I should allow a cat to remain on a doorstep where I was singing carols?"

"Sus-sus-singing carols, sir?"
"Yes, singing carols!" snorted Doctor Birchmell. "Surely, you heard me? I was singing 'Good King Wences' Lass.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Dashed if I see anything to laugh at!"

"No, but we do, sir!" grinned Frank Fearless. "We thought it was a cat carolling—not a yewman being!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
There were footsteps in the hall. General Jolly and the Rajah of Bhang appeared from the direction of the library. The gallant general fairly blinked, as his eyes fell on the unguessed visitor.

"Gad, sir!" Surely it's Doctor Birchmell or his dubble!

"It's me!" replied the Head, with his usual faultless grammar. "Eggsauce my watery appearance, general; your son has just emptied a bucket of water over me! How the mistake arose fairly beats me. I was singing a carol on the door-

step before ringing the bell to tell you I had come to spend Christmas with you, when he mistook me for a cat!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" yelled General Jolly. "Gad, sir, that's what I call funny! Haw—"

Then the general broke off in the middle of his larf.

"What was that I heard you say?" he cried. "Somethin' about spendin' Christmas here?"

"Right on the wicket!" grinned Doctor Birchmell. "I have decided to pay you the grate honour of staying with you over the hollerday!"

"Help!" murmured Fearless. "Oh, gad! Awfully kind of you, I'm sure, Birchmell!" gasped General Jolly. "But I really feel we've done nothin' to deserve such an honour. Can't you honour someone else instead?"

Doctor Birchmell shook his head.
"No, general; my mind is made up, so it's no good of you argewing about it! I know your natcheral modesty makes you think that others are more worthy of this grate honour; but I shall bestow it on you all the same and stay at Jolly Lodge right through the Christmas. ATISHOO!"

"Oh, gad! Well, if you must, you must!" sighed the general. "You'd better come inside an' dry your clothes before you catch cold!"
"Thanks, awfully!" beamed the Head. And he accepted the invitation.

Doctor Birchmell had come to stay!

II.

The Head soon made himself at home at Jolly Lodge. When Jack Jolly & Co. came down to breakfast on the following day, it was to find him already in the breakfast-room wading into eggs and bacon with a ravenous appetite.

Forchuntly, however, their first fears that he might interfere with the full enjoyment of their Christmas soon vanished. The stony-hearted tyrant who ruled them with a rod of iron during the term turned out to be a horse of a different culler when he was on hollerday.

As soon as breakfast was finished, Doctor Birchmell was the first to suggest a run down to the frozen lake for skating. He proved to be an awful duffer on the ice. While the juniors were cutting figgers of eight he was cutting a very comical figger. But he took it all in good part, and the juniors had to confess that the Head possessed redeeming fetchers they had never noticed before.

After an enormous lunch, he accompanied the youngsters in General Jolly's Rolls-Rice to the nearest

town for a visit to the pictures. In the evening, while the boys and Mrs. Jolly and the rajah listened in to the wireless, he played snooker in the billiards-room with General Jolly.

It was here that a really bright wheeze occurred to the general, when he was watching the Head tuck his beard under the table before taking a difficult shot.

"I've got a rippin' idea, by gad!" he cried gleefully. "It's Christmas Eve an' I've been rackin' my branes to think of a suitable man to dress up as Santa Claws an' take round the presents. Birchmell! You're just the man for the job!"

The Head jumped.
"You mean you want me to go round in the dead of the nite, filling up people's stockings?"

"Eggsactly!" cried General Jolly. "With your long white beard an' shinin' red nose, you'll fit the part like a glove! I hoap you won't mind?"

"Ahem! I shall be delighted, of course, my dear general!" said the Head. "But—er—don't you think there's a danger that some of the guests may mistake me for a berglar?"



"Not the slightest, my dear fellow!" grinned General Jolly. "There are no valuables about apart from the rajah's diamond tiepin which he keeps on a table by his bed; and in his case I can assure you that he sleeps like a top!"

"All screen, then, general!" grinned the Head. "For your sake I'll do it. You'll keep it dark from the rest, of course?"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled the general. "Mum's the word!"

That nite, a bearded figger, wearing the familiar garments of Father Christmas, might have been observed flitting from room to room on the upper floor of Jolly Lodge. In the pale light of the moon, he might have been seen carrying over

his shoulders a grate sack that simply bulged out with presents.

But although he might have been seen, he was not seen because there was nobody awake to see him.

Doctor Birchmell was grinning all over his face as he went about his task. The idea of such an important personage as himself playing the part of Santa Claws appealed to his sense of yewmer.

But his grin faded slightly when he reached the rajah's room, and he tiptoed across the carpet with a grate deal of cawtion. He was not quite sure how that grim-looking Eastern potentate might behave if he found a stranger at his bedside in the middle of the nite.

Forchuntly, there was no cause for alarm. The Rajah of Bhang was sleeping soundly to the tune of a loud snoring worthy of one of the elephants of his native land. He never so much as moved an eyelid when the Head leaned over his bedside table and slipped Christmas presents into one of his socks.

His work completed, Doctor Birchmell returned to his bed.

A lass! A rude awakening was in store for the Head next morning.

Just as Jack Jolly & Co. were laying the foundation for Christmas Day with a good, solid breakfast, there was a wild shout from the floor above that sent them racing upstairs in alarm.

Reaching the landing, they found the Rajah of Bhang prancing up and down, flourishing a rifle—and looking daggers at everybody.

"My tiepin!" he shouted. "My so-beautiful diamond tiepin! It is gone!"

"What?"

"Impossible!"

"Gone! Vanished!" shrieked the rajah. "I leave it at bedside last nite. Now it is gone! I ask one question: who comes to my room last nite? Yes, no?"

"Oh grate gad!" gasped General Jolly, who had just arrived. "Birchmell! Did you—"

A garstly pallor crept into the Head's face.

"I never took it! I swear I never!" he panted. "I admit that I went into the rajah's room to deliver presents. But I never took his tiepin and—yarooooo! Keepin' off!"

The Head broke off—then broke out in a cold sweat—and then broke into a run! The rajah, rolling his eyes furiously, ran after him.

Persewer and persewered fairly raced down the staircase of Jolly Lodge three at a time, with the rest in full cry behind them!

(Looks like being an exciting Christmas for the Head! Don't miss the thrills and larks in next week's spiffing instalment!)