

Bumper Christmas Number

The Magnet 2^D

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper

A MERRY
CHRISTMAS



BILLY BUNTER'S TREBLE!

Nobody wants Billy Bunter—not even at Christmas! But as it happens, it's very fortunate for Harry Wharton that the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove turns up unexpectedly at Wharton Lodge!

HARRY WHARTON'S CHRISTMAS GUEST!



The Famous Five were busy with Christmas decorations when a plump figure appeared suddenly at the open door of Wharton Lodge. "I—I say, you fellows," said Bunter hastily, "I've looked in to say something rather important to Wharton!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Trust Bunter!

"**C**ROT in, Bunter!"
"Roll in, old barrel!"
"Just the man we want!"
"Oh!" ejaculated Billy Bunter, the fat boy of the Remove.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes and big round spectacles fixed on a box on the table in Study No. 1 in the Remove.

It was a rather large cardboard box. It was tied with a nicely coloured ribbon, and it bore on the lid, in gilt letters, the inscription: "CHUNKLEY'S CHRISTMAS CAKE."

"Oh!" repeated Bunter.

He was deeply interested in that box. He knew what Chunkley's Christmas cakes were like! Smithy had had one the day before, and Bunter had had a slice of it. His mouth still watered at the recollection.

"Trickle in, old thing!"

Harry Wharton & Co. all spoke together, in the most hearty tones.

They seemed pleased to see Bunter. They beamed on him.

Bunter rolled in. He was surprised, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,609.

but gratified. He had not expected so hearty a welcome.

He had come to Study No. 1 to catch the Famous Five before they went out. It was the last half-holiday of the term, and the Co. were going over to Cliff House School, to say good-bye to Marjorie & Co. there, before they scattered for the Christmas Holidays. Bunter was going with them. Tea at Cliff House was worth the walk. He was prepared to disregard any objections on the part of the Famous Five.

But at the sight of Chunkley's Christmas cake, he forgot Cliff House and tea there. A bird in the hand was worth two in the bush. An armchair by a study fire was preferable to a walk on a bitter December afternoon. So far from desiring to fare forth in the winter wind with the Famous Five, Billy Bunter hoped that they would fare forth on their own, with promptness and dispatch—so long as that cake-box remained in the study.

"I say, you fellows, if you're going now, I—I'll look after that cake for you while you're gone!" said Billy Bunter. "Going now?"

"Oh, no hurry!" said Bob Cherry cheerily.

"I think you'd better start pretty quick," advised Bunter. "It looks to me like snow—you don't want to be caught in the snow."

"Well, perhaps we'd better be going," agreed Harry Wharton. "But we want to stick that box in a safe place. There are fellows up the passage who would scoff a cake if they had a chance."

Bunter was aware of that!

He was one of the fellows, in fact!

"Bunter will look after it for us!" said Frank Nugent.

"That's the idea!" agreed Johnny Bull.

"We can trust the esteemed Bunter not to scoff it!" remarked Hurree Jamset Rain Singh.

"Will you keep it safe in your study, Bunter?" asked Bob.

"What-ho!" gasped Bunter. His eyes fairly danced behind his spectacles. "Safe as houses, old chap. Safe as—as—as anything! Leave it to me!"

Billy Bunter was more and more surprised. He was not used to trustfulness like this, especially in matters of tuck. He was surprised, but he was glad—very glad—to see that these fel-

lows were so much more confiding than was their wont.

He understood now why they had been so pleased to see him when he appeared in the doorway. They wanted to leave that gorgeous Christmas cake in safe keeping while they were out! It was surprising that they should select Bunter. But the fat Owl of the Remove was very glad to oblige them. There was no doubt that, when they were gone, Billy Bunter would put that cake into a very safe place—a very safe place indeed!

"Well, here you are, then!" said Bob Cherry. He lifted the box from the table. "Hike it along to your study, Bunter!"

"Oh, Toddy's there—" said Bunter.

"That's all right—Toddy wouldn't scoff a fellow's cake—"

"Nunno! But—"

"But what, old fat man?"

"Well, you can't be too careful!" said Bunter. "They're such ripping cakes—any fellow might feel like scoffing it; any chap except me, of course. I'm rather more particular than most fellows, as you know—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob. "I—I—I mean— Oh, quite!"

"I think I'll stay here," said Bunter. "I'll sit and—and read by the fire—the 'Holiday Annual's' here—I'll sit and—and read it, and see that nothing happens to the cake—"

"Right-ho, then!" said Harry Wharton. "Come on, you men!"

The Famous Five walked, smiling, out of the study, leaving Billy Bunter

quad. Five overcoated figures walked away to the gates!

Billy Bunter blinked after them with happy satisfaction.

They were gone—really gone! It seemed almost too good to be true—but there they were, tramping out of the school gates and disappearing from sight.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Billy Bunter.

He rolled back to the study table.

Exactly how he was going to explain to the Famous Five how that box came to be empty when they returned from Cliff House, Bunter had not yet decided. It had to be explained somehow.

Still Billy Bunter was not trammelled, like some fellows, within the narrow limits of the truth! He could say that he had gone to sleep in the armchair, and had woke up to find, with great surprise, that the cake was gone!

He could say that Mr. Quelch had sent for him, and that after going down to see his Form-master, he had returned to the study, to find, with great surprise, that the cake was gone!

He could say that he had gone down to Hall to tea—or that he had joined in punting a footer in the quad—or started packing for break-up—and in each case had found, with great surprise that the cake was gone!

The Famous Five might not believe in the great surprise, but they would certainly believe that the cake was gone—for on that point there would be no doubt—no possible, probable

confided to empty space what he thought of the Famous Five of the Remove. And everything he thought was fearfully uncomplimentary!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Skid In The Snow!

"CHRISTMAS weather!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Brrr-r!"

"Seasonable, you know!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Bob looked on the bright side of everything. But, seasonable as it was, the Famous Five of Greyfriars did not enjoy that sudden and tremendous downfall of snow.

They were a good distance from Greyfriars when it started. They had nearly reached the stile in Friardale Lane, beyond which lay the footpath through the wood to Pegg and Cliff House. Then it came down!

There had been snow before. It was a snowy Christmas-tide. The wide, deep ditch along the lane was filled to the brim with snow. Leafless branches were ridged with white; hedges were packed. Still, that afternoon had looked fine, though frosty, when they started to walk. The lane had been cleared since the last snowfall, and was easy going—till the new fall started. And it came down in thick flakes, in lumps and chunks.

There had been a glimpse of blue in the December sky. Now it was grey and grim with snow clouds. And the snow came down, thick and fast, and thicker and faster. It covered the ground with

σηκινθεδιτχοπποσιτεθεστιλεινφριαρδαλελανε

The Mysterious Message in Greek.

contemplating the cake-box with an ecstatic gaze.

Footsteps rang down the passage towards the stairs. Billy Bunter's fat hands reached out to untie the ribbon on the cake-box before those footsteps had died away.

But there was a sudden patter of returning footsteps, and Bob Cherry's ruddy face looked in, just as the fat hands reached the box.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob.

Bunter jumped.

"Oh, I—I wasn't going to open the box, old chap—"

"Did I leave my cap here?"

"I—I can't see it! I—I say, I—I'd get off, if I were you—looks to me like rain—"

"As well as snow?"

"Oh, I—I mean snow, old chap—"

"I suppose I left it down in the lobby!"

To Bunter's great relief, Bob Cherry cut after his friends again.

But the fat Owl did not restart on the box. It was safer to wait till the owners were clear—that fathead Cherry might come scudding back looking for his silly cap! The Famous Five seemed unusually, uncommonly trustful—but that unusual and uncommon trustfulness could hardly continue if they found the cake-box open!

It was not easy for Bunter to wait, with a Christmas cake fairly in his fat grasp! But he made the necessary effort. He rolled across to the window to watch for the chums of the Remove to go out.

Five heads appeared in sight in the

shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever!

Grinning, the fat Owl unfastened the ribbon!

He gasped with happy anticipation, his capacious mouth watering, as he removed the lid of the box.

And then—then as the poet remarks—a change came o'er the spirit of his dream!

He gazed into that box! His eyes almost popped through his spectacles into it!

It did not contain a cake! It contained an ancient, disused boot, apparently rescued from a dustbin. It contained also a half-sheet of paper, on which was written:

"SOLD AGAIN!"

Billy Bunter gazed at it! There was no cake! There was a cake-box, but no cake therein! He realised that this must be Smithy's old cake-box, utilised by the Famous Five for this nefarious purpose!

They had not left him with a Christmas cake at his mercy! They had left him behind while they went over to Cliff House! He was not going to scoff the contents of that cake-box. Even Billy Bunter could not scoff an old boot. And he was not going to tea at Cliff House! Like the dog in the fable, he had snatched at the shadow and lost the substance!

"Beasts!" hissed Bunter.

His fat face was pink with wrath.

"Cads! Swabs! Making out that a fellow can't be trusted with a cake! Beasts! Rotters!"

And for several minutes Billy Bunter

a white blanket, thicker and thicker. It piled up on the already crammed ditch; it almost hid the hedges. And the Famous Five pulled down their caps, pushed up their coat collars, and tramped through it, not enjoying the weather.

"Rotter!" said Frank Nugent.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" mumbled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The junior from India's coral strand did not revel in snowflakes and cutting December winds. "An absurd study fire would be terrifically preferable."

"We're not turning back," said Johnny Bull.

"No; push on!" said Harry Wharton. "It won't be so bad under the trees when we get on the footpath."

"Might have been worse," said Bob. "The worsefulness could not be posterous, my esteemed Bob."

"Well, we might have run out on the bikes. We should be skidding right and left if we had. We're all right now—Yaroooooh!" Bob gave a yell as his feet slipped in a snow-filled rut he did not observe, and he sat down in the snow.

"Oh! Ow! Oooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Is that all right?"

"Fathead!"

Bob scrambled up.

"Time they did some road repairing in this lane!" he grunted. "Can't see a thing in this snow."

"It's seasonable!" grinned Frank Nugent.

"Christmas weather!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Urrghh!" Bob dusted snow from his overcoat. "Anyhow, it would be worse on the jiggers. Shouldn't like to

be biking in this. Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's somebody who doesn't mind a spot of snow under his wheels."

Honk, honk, honk!

The juniors glanced round at the honking behind them. A motor-bike was coming on at a great rate—a reckless rate, considering that the ground was thick with slippery snow, and the edge of a deep ditch quite hidden from sight.

It was not weather in which a prudent man would have cared to scud along on a motor-bike; but no doubt the rider, like the Greyfriars fellows, had started out when it was fine, and not foreseen that heavy snowfall.

"Better give that chap a wide berth," said Johnny Bull. "He may skid any minute."

"This way!" said Harry.

On one side of the lane, which was not wide, was the deep ditch, banked high with accumulated snow. On the other was a steep bank up to the wood that bordered the road on that side. Up that bank the Famous Five scrambled to give the motorist plenty of sea-room. If the motor-bike skidded, as it looked like doing any moment, they did not want to be mixed up in the crash.

The motor-bike came roaring on. They could see little of the rider, between a pulled-down hat brim and a turned-up coat collar, except a nose—which was rather long and beaky. He came on with a rush, and in a few more moments would have been past and whirling on to Friardale. But almost in face of the spot where the juniors had clambered on the bank was the hidden rut in which Bob had stumbled, and as the motor-bike struck that rut there was a sudden skid.

On a macadamised highway no doubt the rapid rider would have been safe, more or less, in spite of the snow. But a country lane was a different matter. There were deep ruts from heavy country carts in the lane, left over from rainy autumn, now frozen hard and hidden by snow. And in one of those ruts the rapid rider came to grief.

It was like a kaleidoscopic scene, under the startled eyes of the five schoolboys on the bank. One moment the motor-bike was roaring on—the next it seemed to be a catherine-wheel!

So swift and sudden was the mishap that the eye could hardly follow it.

They heard a startled howl and a crash.

Then a sprawling figure lay in the middle of the lane, twisting and struggling, and the motor-bike had shot over the edge of the ditch, sinking deep in the snow there—only a section of one wheel showing above the snow.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob.

"Come on!" exclaimed Wharton.

They scrambled down the bank into the lane again to render aid.

The motor-bike, obviously a hopeless wreck, was sinking deeper in the ditch, disappearing from sight. That did not matter so much as the rider, who was evidently hurt.

He made an effort to scramble up, gave a sharp cry, and tumbled down again. One of his legs failed to support him.

But the schoolboys reached him quickly. Their only thought was to help the victim of that sudden disaster.

"Rough luck, sir!" said Bob. "Can we help you?"

The man rose on one knee; the other leg seemed crumpled. His hat had fallen off, revealing his face—a face with a beaky nose and sharp, glinting black eyes. It was not a face that the juniors would have liked on its looks, but they did not think of that. But

they could not help noticing that the beaky man, hurt as he was, gave them a sharp, searching, suspicious stare, as they came up and surrounded him. Hurt as he was, in need of help, he did not seem pleased to see them.

"Your leg's hurt," said Harry. "Let us help you up."

"Help me to that stile!" muttered the beaky man.

The stile was only a little distance away—not more than twenty yards. The beaky man was heaved up by willing hands on his sound leg, and, supported by the juniors, limped along to the stile, sinking down on the step.

His face was white. It was clear that he was in pain. But his look showed that fierce and savage temper predominated. The bitter fury in his face was not pleasant to see, and he muttered some expressive words that the Greyfriars fellows affected not to hear. Apparently he was pressed for time, and felt the interruption of his trip more than the pain in his injured leg. He sat on the step of the stile, breathing in gasps, in the intervals of gritting a set of tobacco-stained teeth.

"If we can do anything else," said Harry.

"No—no! Go on your way!"

"If you'd like us to help you to the village—it's about half a mile on—"

"No, I tell you! Leave me alone!"

"Oh!"

The Famous Five had to get to Cliff House, but they were willing to be late to help a stranger in distress. But that ungracious snarl was enough for them. It was plain that the man only wanted to be shut of them, and certainly they did not want to press their services where they were not desired.

Johnny Bull gave a grunt and clambered over the stile. His friends followed him in silence.

But on the woodland side of the stile Harry Wharton paused and spoke again to the scowling, muttering man with the beaky nose.

"Look here, you don't seem in a state to walk, and your bike's a goner. If you'd like us to help you along to Friardale—"

"Mind your own business, and leave me alone!"

That was more than enough for the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. He walked on after his friends, and they disappeared up the snowy path under the frozen trees, leaving the wrecked motorist to his own devices.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Startling Meeting!

"**B**LOW the snow!"

"Bless it!"

"What's the odds," inquired Bob Cherry, "so long as you're 'appy?"

"Fathead!"

"Same to you, old bean, with knobs on!"

"Blow!"

Harry Wharton & Co. tramped on by the footpath through the snowy windy wood. They were hardy, and did not mind a little rough weather. But really that sudden change was disconcerting.

The leafless branches over the footpath were some protection, but not a lot. There was plenty of snow on the path.

And when they emerged from the wood into Pegg Lane, they were in the open again, and the wind from the sea was sharp and burdened with snow. They set their faces against it and tramped

The countryside looked like a Christmas card—quite beautiful to the view, but rather uncomfortable to be out in. Not a soul was to be seen. Pegg Lane led down to the fishing village of Pegg, on the bay. The sea could be heard booming on the shingle. Boats were tied up at the old stone quay. The village street, the beach, and the quay were all deserted.

On any other half-holiday some of the Cliff House girls would have been seen out of gates—but none was to be seen now. Even the hardy inhabitants of Pegg seemed to prefer indoors, or the cosy fire at the Anchor, that snowy afternoon.

Not till they were quite close to the village did the Famous Five spot a single human being. Then they were rather surprised to spot one. A man was standing in the middle of the road, and from the amount of flakes that had gathered on his hat and shoulders, looked as if he had been standing there some time. Why, was rather a puzzle. It was not weather to walk in, if a fellow could help it, and it assuredly was not weather to stand about in.

"That chap seems to like snow!" remarked Bob Cherry, glancing at the figure in the road.

"Looking for somebody, perhaps!" said Nugent.

Near the gates of Cliff House School the road from Friardale joined Pegg Lane, at the top of the village street. The man was staring along the road from Friardale with a fixed stare—but if he was, like Sister Anne, in hope of seeing anyone coming, he was, like Sister Anne, disappointed. There was neither vehicle nor pedestrian to be seen on the long white road that led round the wood to the village of Friardale.

The man as he stood had his left to the juniors, and they saw his profile—clear-cut features under a bowler hat white with snow. His stare was fixed on the Friardale road, and Harry saw his lips move in an impatient mutter, and noted the brows pucker with irritated anxiety.

Clearly, he was waiting and watching for somebody—somebody who was keeping him waiting. All the juniors, though not specially interested in him, could see that. And a sudden thought struck Bob Cherry.

"That chap's expecting somebody by that road," he murmured. "Think it might be that sportsman on the motor-bike."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"That sportsman would have come round by that road if he hadn't had a spill," said Bob. "It's the only road, the way he was going. He must have been heading for Pegg."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Harry. "If that chap's waiting for him, he won't see him in a hurry!"

"He won't see him at all on the jigger!" grinned Bob. "That jigger's gone due west! Look here, might as well ask him, and let him know, if that's the johnny he's waiting for."

"Yes, let's!" assented the captain of the Remove.

It seemed quite probable that Bob's conjecture was correct. It had taken the juniors a good time to tramp through the snow-driven wood, but the man on the motor-bike, had he kept on, would have reached Pegg long ago, though he had twice the distance to cover by road.

If this man was waiting for him, he had probably expected him some time since. At all events, his impatient

look showed that he was expecting someone on that road who had not yet put in an appearance. If, as was likely enough, it was the motor-cyclist, it seemed only good-natured to put him wise to what had happened.

Bob Cherry left his friends and stepped towards the man in the road.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he called out.

The man's face turned, his glance swift, as he was hailed. Then the juniors saw his face in full view—a face a little pale in complexion, with well-cut features and eyes like steel. And Harry Wharton, as he saw it, caught his breath. He knew that face now. It was long since he had seen it, but he knew every line of that sleek, smooth face.

"Did you speak to me?" The man's voice came quietly—a well-modulated voice, as familiar to Wharton's ears as the face to his eyes.

"Yes," answered Bob cheerily. "You seem to be waiting for somebody to come by the road up from Friardale, and if it's a sportsman on a motor-bike—"

"It is!" The man's voice was eager. "Have you seen him?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob. "You see—"

He broke off as Harry Wharton pushed past him, his eyes fixed on the pale, clear-cut face of the man who watched in the road.

"James Soames!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "What are you doing here?"

The smooth-faced man started violently. And Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh jumped at the same moment. Now that they looked at the man, they knew him as well as Wharton knew him!

"Soames!" stuttered Nugent.

"That villain!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The esteemed and execrable Soames!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "He has turned up like an absurd penny!"

For one moment the man called Soames stared at the juniors, taken quite aback.

A sudden deadly glitter shot into the steely eyes; the lips shut hard over the even teeth. But the next moment the smooth face was quite calm again, and a faint smile came over it.

"You young gentlemen!" said Soames. "What a pleasure to see you again—a very unexpected pleasure! Believe me, I am greatly gratified!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at him.

It was Soames—once the manservant of Mr. Vernon-Smith, the millionaire; once the free-booter of the South Seas; once the kidnapper of Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. Manservant, valet, freebooter, kidnapper, and many other things—a strange man of many strange parts. That he had been wanted by the police, the Greyfriars fellows knew only too well; but whether he was still hunted for, they did not know. They were surprised to see him there—and still more surprised by his suave coolness and calmness.

Judging by his manner, he might have been still the sleek manservant of Smithy's father, without a crime on his conscience.

"You don't deny your name!" said Harry at last.

"To an old acquaintance—may I say, with all proper respect, an old friend, like yourself, certainly not, sir!" said Soames smoothly. "To others, perhaps, I might give another name—and there might be some difficulty in proving that I ever went by the name you have called me by. But I feel sure that you young gentlemen do not nurse grudges from other days—especially at this season of the year!"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob, rather blankly.

"He always was a cool card!" said

never forget—that honesty is the best policy. I am now gaining a modest, but honest, livelihood as a commercial traveller."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton.

"At present," continued Soames, "I am putting up at the Anchor in Pegg. I hope to do a little business here which will enable me to pass a frugal, but comfortable Christmas."

"Is that the truth?" asked Harry very quietly.

"Oh, Master Wharton!" said Soames reproachfully.

"If you are trying to make an honest living, good luck to you!" said Harry. "But"—he paused a moment—"I don't believe a single word of it! And now we've spotted you, whatever you're up to, I don't think we'd better lose sight of you!"

"No fear!" said Johnny Bull.

Soames' steely eyes narrowed.

"You do not believe in giving a man a chance, Master Wharton?" he murmured.

"If you've told the truth you can tell it over again to Inspector Grimes!" said Harry, sarcastically. "Now—"

Soames made a quick step back. Johnny Bull, who was nearest to him, promptly grasped him by the arm.

The next instant Johnny was on his back in the snow, and Soames was running as swiftly as a deer up the snowy village street.

"Ow!" gasped Johnny, as he sprawled.

"After him!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

But it was not much use to think of getting after Soames in the thick snow and the whirling flakes. He vanished almost in a moment beyond some of the irregular buildings of the village street. Bob made a step or two and stopped. Johnny Bull scrambled up, panting.

"Look here—" he gasped.

"Come on!" said Harry. "We can get on the telephone at Cliff House, and let Inspector Grimes know that we've seen him. That's all we can do."

And the juniors tramped away to the gate of Cliff House.

"But what the dickens can a man like Soames be up to in a quiet place like this?" said Bob, in wonder. "Nothing here in his line."

"Something," said Harry—"something in connection with that beaky man on the motor-bike. We know now that that was the man he was waiting for."

Bob chuckled.

"He won't see that sportsman in a hurry," he remarked.

"All the better, very likely."

The juniors arrived at the gate of Cliff House. Soames had disappeared, though it was likely that he was not far away. As a matter of fact, the steely eyes were watching the juniors from a distance from the cover of a building.

Soames watched them till they disappeared from sight. Then he gave a last, long, anxious look up the Friardale road; but nothing was to be seen there but whirling snowflakes. Then he hurried away, but he did not head for the

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,609.

Christmas Greetings

From your Editor

Johnny Bull. "He jolly well ought to be in chokey, and I rather think we ought to collar him and walk him there!"

"It might not be easy, sir, to prove that I was the man you once knew," said Soames gently. "Neither, I think, are junior schoolboys authorised to make arrests. Let us have no harsh words! It is a real happiness to see you again, and to have the pleasure of wishing you a merry Christmas!"

"I suppose it's none of our business," said Bob slowly. "But—"

"What are you doing here, Soames?" asked Harry Wharton quietly. "I know you too well to think that you're up to any good!"

"At the moment I am, as you have seen, waiting for a friend to join me," said Soames. "But if you have the kindness to be interested in me, Master Wharton, I have no objection to tell you that I have learned a lesson which, I hope, you young gentlemen will

Anchor, where he had told the juniors that he had his quarters. He headed for the beach, hurried across the old quay, and dropped into a motor-boat that was moored to the sea-splashed old stone steps there.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Hidden Message!

"RAT HANKEY," by which name the beaky man on the motor-bike was known to his friends, leaned heavily on the stile in Friardale Lane, where the juniors had left him.

His sharp, ratty eyes glanced again and again in the direction from which he had come on the motor-bike. Had Harry Wharton & Co. been still able to see him, they would probably have guessed that the beaky man dreaded pursuit.

But there was no sign of pursuit in Friardale Lane. Snow was falling heavily, and every trace of the machine that had tumbled into the ditch had been completely obliterated. Its tracks in the lane were thickly covered. No one who had seen the beaky man leaning on the stile would have guessed that he had arrived there on a motor-bike; not a sign remained.

He groaned and muttered oaths alternately as he leaned on the stile and rubbed his damaged leg. Probably he had not realised at first how badly that leg was damaged. He had intended to get on his way after the schoolboys were gone—chiefly anxious to get their eyes off him. But when he made the attempt, a few limping steps convinced him that it was impracticable. He had been glad to totter back to the stile and rest there.

He had a bad sprain, and he could not walk. He scanned the solitary lane with savage eyes. He dreaded to see a car, but the sight of a country cart would have been welcome—anything that would have afforded him a lift. But no vehicle was likely to pass in such weather—not even a pedestrian was to be seen.

The game was up for Rat Hankey. Ten miles away, in the town of Lantham, excitement reigned. Hardly an hour ago there had been a hold-up at Lantham Post Office. The hold-up man, with a bundle of banknotes in his wallet, had escaped on a motor-bike. This was an old game with Mr. Hankey; Lantham Post Office was not his first by a dozen or more. But it looked like being his last.

He would have given all the banknotes packed in that leather wallet under his coat for a machine to escape on—or even for a sound leg to run on! Either would have been cheap, in the circumstances, at £1,000.

A very disagreeable residence loomed ahead of Rat Hankey unless he could get clear—and he knew that he could not.

Two or three miles by road on the motor-bike would have seen him safe. Hardly more than a mile by the short cuts would have seen him as safe. But his motor-bike lay buried in snow at the bottom of the ditch twenty yards away, and he could not have limped a dozen yards on his sprained leg. The mile to Pegg might as well have been a hundred miles!

And at Pegg his confederate was waiting, expecting him by this time or before this. The plan was cut and dried. From Lantham, it was likely, three or four cars had rushed in pursuit of the hold-up man on the motor-bike. He had chosen by-ways

instead of highways, and was fairly certain that pursuit was off the track.

At Pegg his confederate waited with a motor-boat. The motor-bike—which had been stolen for the occasion—would be abandoned, and the two rascals would disappear seaward with their plunder. That was the plan—as good a scheme as James Soames and Rat Hankey had ever laid. But the spill in the snowy lane had knocked it utterly to pieces.

Hardly more than a mile away, the man with the motor-boat waited, and Rat Hankey leaned on the stile and cursed, utterly at a loss.

Escape was impossible. Sooner or later they would pick him up. Indeed, when the bitter December night shut down, he would be glad to be picked up and taken away to shelter, if only to that of a prison cell.

For many long minutes the Rat leaned on the stile, groaning and muttering oaths in desperate rage. It was long since the schoolboys had disappeared through the wood, and no one else had appeared in sight in the lane.

But he calmed himself at last. Capture was inevitable now, but there was still a chance of saving his plunder.

He could, at least, hide the wallet containing the bundle of banknotes, and hope for a chance to get word to his confederate where to find it.

Where to hide it, however, was a problem. He stared round him with haggard eyes at snow-covered fields and woods. To shove it under the snow was to leave it to be discovered at the first thaw. Where else?

He limped, with gasps of pain, across the lane to the ditch on the other side opposite the stile. It was likely to be long before that depth of snow melted—quite possibly for weeks, or even months.

He gave a searching look up and down the lane; it was utterly deserted. Lying on the edge of the ditch, he groped down in the deep snow within.

At the length of his arm his fingers groped in a hollow under the bank. He grasped the leather wallet and thrust it down, pushing it into that hollow in the side of the ditch as far as his extended fingers could push.

He drew up his arm, leaving a cavity in the snow. That was quickly filled up again, and over it the flakes were still falling.

The loot was safely hidden now.

He limped back across the lane to the stile and leaned on it, somewhat relieved in his mind. Even when the snow melted, that wallet might not be found; and all the chances were that the snow would not melt away in the ditch—it was a hard winter. Anyhow, it was safe for the time.

They would get him, but they would not get the loot of Lantham Post Office. That was a comfort to the Rat.

He could hardly hope that it would remain safely there till he "came out," for it would certainly be a long "stretch" for his exploits at Lantham that afternoon. But word must reach his confederate—Soames was not the man to let a partner down; the Rat's share would be safe with him. How was he to get word to the man who waited with the motor-boat at Pegg? The first passer-by—any country labourer—might carry a message for him.

Not a written note; there were other means. Rat Hankey shot another glance up and down the lane; no one was in sight. But surely someone would pass sooner or later, even in the snow-fall. A promised reward would induce him to go to Pegg with a cunningly hidden message.

Now that he had thought it out, the Rat lost no more time. A written note might fall into the wrong hand—dangerous hands. But there were other ways.

Leaning on the stile, he took a silver cigarette-case from his pocket—a flat, oblong case. It was half-full of cigarettes, which he removed and laid aside.

He opened a penknife. On the inside of the case, with the keen point of the blade, he proceeded to scratch a succession of letters.

But they were not English letters.

Mr. Hankey had been a man of some education. He did not know the Greek language. But he knew the Greek alphabet.

That row of Greek letters might have puzzled any Greek to elucidate any meaning. Likewise, it would have puzzled any person who did not know the Greek characters.

Having scratched the letters, the Rat went over them again and again with the point of the knife, making the incisions in the metal deeper, till every letter was clearly defined.

Then he replaced the cigarettes in the case and snapped it shut.

Leaning on the stile, he surveyed the lane with eager eyes, hardly conscious of the pain in his leg in his eagerness.

If only some passer-by appeared—someone who could be persuaded or hired and trusted to carry that cigarette-case to the man who waited at Pegg!

He would not even know that there was a message in it! Even if he looked into the case, a row of Greek letters engraved in the metal would mean nothing to him. But Soames would not need telling that it was a message; once he received the case, he would guess instantly why it was sent to him. If only that cigarette-case reached Soames!

With the case gripped in his hand, eagerness and despair mingled in his breast, the Rat watched the lane, and at long last he fairly gasped with relief when the solitude was broken by a fat figure that rolled up the lane through the falling snow.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Comes In Useful!

"O H lor'!" groaned Billy Bunter.

Bunter wished that he hadn't started.

But he had—after that sad disappointment with the Christmas cake box.

The bird in hand having turned out a delusion and a snare, Bunter's fat mind turned to the bird in the bush, as it were! Tea at Cliff House was still practical politics—if he got there in time!

So he started.

Bunter's progress was slow. He had no hope of overtaking the Famous Five on their way to Cliff House. But he hoped to roll in before they started tea there. Which, no doubt, he would have done, but for the sudden snowfall which caught him in Friardale Lane, as it had caught the Famous Five, and slowed down his already slow progress.

He trudged on.

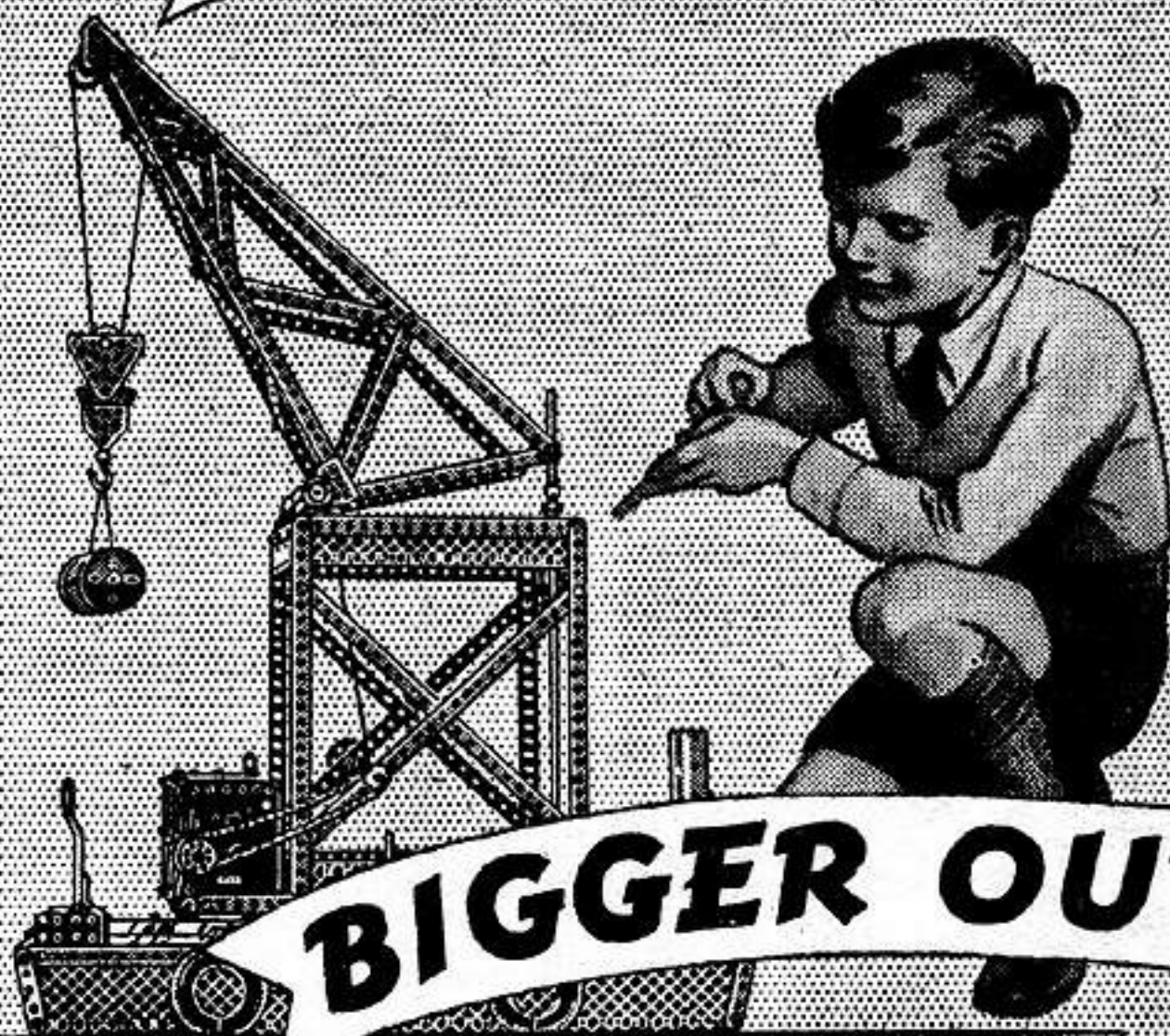
Slowly but surely he trudged. He grunted and groaned occasionally as he trudged. By the time he sighted the stile in the lane he wished that he had turned back. But now he had as far to go back as forward—and ahead was tea! So he trudged on.

He reached the stile. A man was leaning on it, to whom Billy Bunter gave no heed. He clambered on the top bar, and sat there to rest before he proceeded. Branches overhead kept off the worst of
(Continued on page 8.)

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the snow. He sat and puffed and blew, and the man with the beaky nose and sharp black eyes watched him furtively. He spoke at last.

"Going Pegg way?"

Billy Bunter blinked round at him. He had seen the man there, but taken no notice of him. He was not in the least interested in him. His interest was concentrated on the fatigue in his own little fat legs. Now, however, as he blinked at the man, he noticed that he had a damaged leg.

"Yes," he answered. "Fallen over in the snow?"

"That's it!" said Mr. Hankey. "I slipped over and hurt my leg. I can't walk."

"Rough luck!" said Bunter more or less sympathetically. "I say, if you can't walk what are you going to do? You can't stick here."

"Oh, I'll get a lift when some cart passes!" said the Rat. "That's all right. But I've got a friend at Pegg waiting for me. Perhaps you'd take him a word as you're going that way."

Bunter paused before replying.

The urgent matter, to Bunter, was to get to Cliff House before they started tea. Taking word to anybody meant loss of time, with possible loss of tea at Cliff House as the result.

Still, even Bunter could feel for a man, stranger as he was, down on his luck like this! He could see that the man was really hurt; his face showed it plainly enough, and his leg hung like a stick.

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter, after pausing. "Who is it?"

"Man named Thompson," said the

Rat. "He's waiting in a motor-boat at the quay at Pegg."

"Oh!" said Bunter dubiously.

The quay at Pegg was some little distance farther than Cliff House. Bunter did not like distances, even little distances—especially in the snow! He was willing to oblige a man so unfortunately circumstanced, but he did not want to exert himself, or to lose time.

"I don't know whether money's any use to you," went on the Rat, eyeing him, "but I'd gladly stand a pound to have a message taken to Mr. Thompson."

"Oh!" said Bunter again, not dubiously this time.

It was perhaps a little below the dignity of William George Bunter to take a tip for rendering a service. On the other hand, he had been disappointed about a postal order he was expecting, and a pound was a pound.

There were twenty shillings in a pound. There were no shillings at all in dignity. Dignity was not legal tender at the tuckshop; shillings were! Bunter decided to disregard dignity. Neither did it take him long to decide.

"I'll go with pleasure!" he said affably. "You'll have to get somebody to help you, with that leg! I'll go!"

"That's kind of you, sir!" said Mr. Hankey. "You go to Mr. Thompson, on that motor-boat at Pegg, and tell him the friend he was expecting has had a spill and hurt his leg, and is waiting on this stile in Friardale Lane."

"Certainly!" agreed Bunter.

"And take this to him," added the Rat casually. "He mightn't take notice of a word from a stranger, fetching him

out in the snow; but he'll know this comes from me—he lent it to me a few days ago."

He held out the silver cigarette-case.

Bunter blinked at it and took it.

"You see, Mr. Thompson will know that the message really comes from me when he sees his own cigarette-case," explained the Rat.

"I see!" assented Bunter.

He slipped the cigarette-case into his coat pocket. With much more satisfaction he stowed away a pound note in an inner pocket.

He was much more interested in the pound note than in the cigarette-case.

If he missed tea at Cliff House it did not matter so much now. There was a scrumptious tea to be had at the Anchor in Pegg by any fellow who could pay for the same. Bunter was able to pay.

"Much obliged, sir!" said Mr. Hankey.

"Not at all," answered Bunter politely. He clambered down on the inner side of the stile.

"You'll go as quick as you can, sir," hinted the Rat. "It ain't pleasant sticking here in the cold with a game leg."

"I'll hurry like anything," promised Bunter. And he kept that promise for nearly a hundred yards, after which, being out of Mr. Hankey's sight in the winding footpath, he slowed down and plugged on at the leisurely rate to which he was more accustomed.

Rat Hankey breathed hard and deep as he sat on the stile and nursed his aching, twinging leg.

His message had been dispatched successfully. Soames, alias Mr. Thompson, would receive it; he had no doubt about that. It might take that fat schoolboy an hour to reach him, but he would reach him.

Again the Rat shot anxious glances up Friardale Lane. Was pursuit near or not? He could not tell, but so far, at least, he saw no car on the snowy road. If the Lantham police had lost the track he was all right. If they had not, his loot, at least, was all right.

Soames, when he learned what had happened, would come to his help. If he was still on the spot when Soames came, the hidden loot would be re-taken from its hiding-place, and Soames would help him away to safety.

But Mr. Hankey hardly dared to hope for so much good luck as that. It was much more likely that he would be snapped up long before Soames had time to come to his help.

But, in that case, the message incised in the silver cigarette-case would tell Soames where to pick up the loot. He would very soon find a safe opportunity of picking it up.

That, at all events, would not be lost!

Sitting on the stile, the Rat waited in anxious mood. The minutes passed very slowly to him. Once he made an attempt to limp away, but the pain in his leg drove him back to the stile.

He could only wait there—hoping for Soames, dreading the Lantham police! Half an hour crawled by, and then, through the falling flakes, a motor-car came grinding down the lane. It was the first vehicle that had appeared, and the hapless Rat hardly needed the sight of a policeman's helmet inside it to tell him that he was run down.

He had yet time to crawl into the wood and skulk in the thick snow, had he been able to make the effort.

But that was far beyond Rat Hankey's powers.

His injured leg had swollen terribly during the last hour; and he could not even stir it without a spasm of pain that almost made him faint.

Only an hour since, he had limped and crawled across the lane to hide the wallet in the ditch, opposite the stile. But he could not have crawled a yard from the stile now without sinking down helpless.

Indeed, to the wretched man, liberty itself seemed hardly so attractive now as a bed and a doctor's care.

He sat hunched on the step of the stile, without movement, as the car ground through the snow, approaching. His face was drawn, and as white as the snow around him.

Sharp eyes from the car gleamed at him as he sat there in a huddle. The car came grinding to a halt, a police-inspector leaped out, and came quickly towards him. They had his description; many eyes had been on him in Lantham Post Office when he had carried out his desperate raid, automatic in hand, many eyes had seen him as he fled. The police from Lantham were hunting for a man on a motor-bike; but they knew that they had the man they wanted.

There was only one comfort for the

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Rat, as he was lifted, half-fainting, into the police-car. Soames had his message, and the loot was safe! Or, if that message failed to reach Soames, it would tell nothing to any other eye—and still the loot would be safe. That was all the consolation that remained to the man who had "held-up" the post office at Lantham—his last hold-up for many a long day!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Beastly For Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER trudged on through the wood.

Progress was slow.

The man with the game leg had urged him to hurry, and the fat Owl of Greyfriars fully intended to do so; but fatigue and laziness supervened.

It was hard going through the thick snow on the rugged footpath, and Bunter's rate of progress slowed more and more, till, long before he was through the wood, it resembled that of an old and tired snail.

The chief reason for haste, in fact, was now gone; it did not matter very much whether he arrived in time for tea at Cliff House or not. With a pound note in his pocket, Billy Bunter was in the happy position of being able to stand himself tea at the Anchor, if he liked. They did very good teas at the Anchor, in Pegg! The fact that they had to be paid for was like a lion in the path, as a rule. But a pound note made all the difference.

More and more slowly Bunter plugged onward, and before he sighted Pegg Lane ahead he came to a rest. Under a thick oak by the footpath was a clear space, where the snow had not accumulated, and there the fat Owl sat down on a jutting root to rest his weary, fat limbs. And there he drew the silver cigarette-case from his overcoat pocket.

That that cigarette-case contained a hidden message on a subject that would have made Bunter jump, if he had known, he had not, of course, the faintest idea. But he could guess that it contained cigarettes. Anyhow, he was going to see!

Billy Bunter had his faults—indeed, their name was legion! But he was not, as a rule, given to cigarette-smoking, like Skinner, and Snoop, and the Bounder. The fat Owl was not over-gifted with brains, but he was not ass enough to spend money on smokes—not so long as money could buy jam tarts! If Billy Bunter ever smoked a cigarette it was somebody else's cigarette.

If somebody else's cigarette came Bunter's way he would smoke it—and fancy himself no end of a rorty dog while he did so!

That was what he was going to do now. As he had nothing to eat, he was going to comfort himself with a smoke while he rested under the thick old oak. Bunter saw no reason why he should not help himself to a smoke or two.

He was going to convey that cigarette-case to "Mr. Thompson" on the motor-boat at the quay at Pegg, along with the verbal message the beaky man had given him. A fag or two would hardly be missed!

He snapped open the case.

To his satisfaction, he saw that it was nearly half-full of cigarettes. Nice, fat cigarettes, too, of a more expensive brand than the wild and woolly Woodbine in Skinner's studv.

He extracted a matchbox from another pocket and struck a match and selected a cigarette. In a moment more he was happily smoking!

The cigarette-case lay open on his fat knees as he sat, feeling—or, at least, fancying that he felt—immensely bucked by that smoke!

Thus it was that the fat Owl's eyes—and spectacles—fell on the Greek characters incised on the metal on the inside.

He blinked at them in surprise.

He picked up the case again and blinked at them more closely.

"I wonder what the dickens that means!" murmured the fat Owl, quite curious and interested.

Billy Bunter's knowledge of the

Greyfriars Greetings.

All through the Alphabet we go
To gather Greyfriars greetings,
And may their wishes cast a glow
On all your merry meetings.

ANGEL hopes you'll back a winner,
BUNTER hopes you won't get thinner,
COKER hopes you'll wake the neighbours,
DESMOND says: "Here's luck bejapers!"
EARL MAULEVERER hopes you'll sleep,
FISHY hopes you'll get things cheap,
GOSLING hopes the cops may "drown you,"
HOBSON hopes that friends surround you,
INKY hopes no ills come near-fully,
JOHNNY BULL sends wishes cheerfully,
KIPPS has conjured up a greeting,
LINLEY hopes your luck wants beating,
MORGAN sends you luck, whatever,
NUGENT says: "The best time ever!"
OGILVY sends, "Auld Lang Syne,"
PENFOLD hopes your fun is fine,
QUELCHY sends his kind regards,
RAKE would like to send you cards,
SKINNER hopes your smokes are pleasant,
TODDY hopes you'll like each present,
UNCLE BENJAMIN says: "Quite!"
VERNON-SMITH hopes all is right,
WHARTON sends you all the best,
XMAS wishes from the rest,
YULETIDE greetings, kind and true,
ZESTFULLY they send to you!

language, and the alphabet, of Plato, and Pericles and Pindar, was strictly limited.

They did not "take" Greek in the Greyfriars Remove. They took Latin, and of that classical language Bunter had as much knowledge as Mr. Quelch

had been able to drive into his fat head—which was not much.

Of Greek he knew about as much as he knew of Cherokee or Chinese. Still, he had seen plenty of Greek books lying about, and he knew a Greek letter when he saw one.

What the letters meant, however, was a deep mystery to Bunter. He could guess that they corresponded, more or less, to English letters. Some of them, of course, were similar in appearance. The Greek "omicron" was very like the English "o", the "epsilon" had a family resemblance to the "e", and the "kappa" would hardly be anything but a "k."

But where the letters differed in shape they had no meaning to Billy Bunter. So those letters cut in the metal under his eyes conveyed no sense to him.

But he wondered a good deal at finding them there. Why anyone should scratch Greek letters on the inside of his cigarette-case was a puzzle to Bunter—unless, of course, it belonged to a Greek, and that was his name!

But the beaky man had told him that that cigarette-case belonged to Mr. Thompson—and Thompson was a good old British name, with nothing Greek about it. Moreover, though Bunter did not know the average length of Greek names, he could hardly suppose that that row of letters could possibly be included in the lengthiest name.

If it was a word at all, it was a tremendously long word! As the letters ran consecutively, without spacing, it looked as if it must be.

The fat Owl blinked at it very curiously. It was fortunate, for the sake of Mr. Hankey's secret, that he had used Greek letters! Otherwise, Billy Bunter would have derived some startling information from the message scratched in the metal. As it was, he derived none, and did not even suspect that it was a message at all.

He finished his cigarette and started another, blinking curiously at that puzzling inscription as he smoked it.

"Jolly queer!" commented Bunter; and he helped himself to a third cigarette.

He was, in fact, so curious about it that he almost wished that he had learned some Greek, like that chap Linley in the Remove, who was a "swot." Mark Linley could probably have read this at a glance.

But the mere thought of learning Greek gave Bunter a feeling as if he had a headache coming on! On the whole, curious as he was, he was glad that Greek was not added to Latin, among the horrors and terrors of school life!

Blinking at the curious object, Bunter smoked a fourth cigarette; but he did not finish that fourth cigarette.

It dawned on him that he was getting a queer, a very strange feeling, in his podgy inside.

He forgot all about that Greek inscription in the cigarette-case. He threw away that fourth cigarette half-smoked. He had now something more urgent to think about than mysterious Greek letters in a silver cigarette-case.

His fat face changed colour a little. "Ooooooh!" murmured Bunter.

He sat very still!

Bunter had been through this before. He had forgotten it, as he generally forgot any lesson, however valuable! But now he was reminded of it!

He wished, from the bottom of his fat
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heart, that he had been satisfied with one cigarette! He wished he hadn't smoked any at all! He wished that he had never met that beast with the beaky nose and the game leg! He wished that he hadn't opened that putrid cigarette-case! All sorts of wishes crowded on Billy Bunter—now that it was too late.

"Urrrgh!" murmured Bunter.

He shut the cigarette-case and dropped it into his coat pocket again. There were still half a dozen cigarettes in it; but Bunter would not have touched one of them for love or money!

"Wooooogh!" moaned Bunter.

"Gooooogh!"

He essayed to rise to his feet at last.

He tottered, and leaned on the trunk of the oak.

"Gurrrrrgggh!"

He clung to the oak, as once he had clung to the rail on a Channel steamer. He gurgled.

He was not feeling rorty now. He was not feeling doggyish. He was not feeling that he fancied a smoke! Far from it!

"Gooooogh! Oooo-er! Oooh!"

The extensive interior of William George Bunter heaved like the mighty ocean. It was, perhaps, just as well that there had been no Christmas cake in that box in Study No. 1. Bunter would have lost it now!

"Urrrgh! Wurrgh! Oooooogh! Wooooh!"

Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle!

For ten minutes, at least, Bunter clung to the oak, and suffered for his sins. The sounds that came from Bunter might have touched a heart of stone. But in the lonely wood there were no ears to hear, except Bunter's own podgy pair.

"Ooogh! Groogh! Ooo-er! Ooogh! Oh crikey! Ow!"

The fat Owl detached himself from the oak at last. He lurched on his way. He gurgled as he went. Slowly, sadly, he plugged onward. Gradually the keen winter air revived him, and he no longer felt that sudden death would have been the greatest of boons.

But it was not a happy Owl that reached Pegg Lane, and plugged on through the snow towards the village on the shore. There was only one comfort—he had ample space now for tea at the Anchor.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Smokes!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Jolly old Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five chuckled.

It was rather entertaining.

They had tea'd at Cliff House. They had said their good-byes to Marjorie & Co., and wished everybody a merry Christmas. And now they were starting back to Greyfriars.

So, as they turned their backs on Cliff House School, and tramped up Pegg Lane towards the footpath in the wood, it was rather amusing to see a familiar fat figure approaching them from that direction.

Bunter was in the offing. But he had turned up rather late.

The Famous Five had not quite expected Bunter to be satisfied with that old boot in the Christmas cake box. They had rather fancied that he might roll after them to Cliff House.

Evidently he had rolled.

But he seemed to have rolled at about the pace of a steam-roller. He had arrived much too late. Tea was long over at Cliff House, and the

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Famous Five were, like the ploughman in the poem, plodding their homeward way.

No doubt the snow had slowed him down. Other things, if they had only known it, had slowed him down still more—especially the cigarettes under the oak in Friardale Wood.

Anyhow, here he was, slowly plugging down Pegg Lane from the wood, and the chums of the Remove chuckled as they beheld him.

The Famous Five, grinning, walked towards Bunter; Bunter, grunting, rolled towards them. They saw him, but he did not see them. Bunter plugged on, looking neither to the right nor the left. He had recovered, more or less, from those cigarettes! but he still had an uneasy feeling within, and he was tired, and he was breathless. He trudged on, feeling as if his fat little legs were going to drop off, not in the least interested in his surroundings.

"The fat old bean's taken his time," remarked Harry Wharton. "Must have crawled on his hands and knees, I should think."

"The crawlfulness must have been terrific," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The too-latefulness is also great."

"The old porpoise hasn't spotted us yet," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Let's tip him that we are here."

There was an easy method of apprising Billy Bunter that they were in the offing. Bob Cherry stooped, gathered a double handful of snow, and kneaded the same into a snowball. Then he took aim at the fat figure rolling slowly onward.

Whiz!

Squash!

"Yoo-hoop!" spluttered Billy Bunter, as the snowball suddenly plumped on his manly chest, and squashed there.

He tottered, slipped in the snow, and sat down.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh crikey!" gasped the fat Owl.

He struggled up, slipped again, and rolled over in the snow, his feet flying into the air. Then he sprawled and spluttered.

"To the rescue!" grinned Bob.

And the Famous Five rushed to the rescue, grabbed the fat Owl, and heaved him to his feet.

"Grooogh!" spluttered Bunter. He gasped and gurgled, and set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at them. "Ooogh! I say, you fellows—Urrrgh!"

He spluttered snow.

"Urrrgh! Some beast knocked me over! Grugggh!"

"What on earth did you go over for?" asked Bob. "Can't you take a snowball without falling down?"

"Ooogh! Was it you, you beast? Grooogh! I've a jolly good mind to punch your silly nose! Ooogh!" gasped Bunter.

"Give him a bunk up, somebody!" said Bob cheerily. "He can't reach it without."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrrgh! Beast! Wurrgh!"

"Coming back, old fat man?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing. "We'll roll you home, if you like."

"You fellows had tea?" asked Bunter.

"Ha, ha! Yes! We're just going back!"

"Too late, old podgy porpoise!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"The too-latefulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter. "Think I want a measly tea at a girls' school!"

"Sort of," chuckled Bob. "You didn't roll over here just for the pleasure of seeing our kind faces, did you?"

"I'm going to the Anchor to tea," answered Bunter, with dignity. "You can get jolly good feeds there!"

"They don't give 'em away," grinned Bob. "Oh, my hat! Don't tell us that your postal order's come!"

"As a matter of fact, it has," said Bunter loftily. "I'm in funds, see? I'd have asked you fellows to a feed at the Anchor, if you'd treated me decently, now I won't! Yah!"

And Billy Bunter, with a snort of scorn, rolled on into the village street.

Bob Cherry gathered up snow.

"Chuck it!" said Harry.

"I'm going to—Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look here!" Bob dropped the snow he had intended to use as a snowball, and picked up a glimmering object.

It was a silver cigarette-case.

"That fat villain!" said Bob. "Bunter must have dropped this out of his pocket when he went over. He's taken to smoking."

"The potty porpoise!"

"Stacked with smokes!" said Bob, snapping open the case. "My only hat! Looks as if the fat chump's in funds, for once, as he said, as he's stood himself smokes!"

"The howling ass! Taking up Smithy's games," said Johnny Bull. "He would get six if Quelch saw that."

"The sixfulness would be terrific!"

"The blithering Owl!" said Harry Wharton. He stared after Bunter, but the fat Owl was out of sight in the winding, rugged street of Pegg Lane. "Shove it into your pocket, and give it to him when he gets back; only we'll give him the smokes down the back of his silly neck!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bob Cherry chuckled as he slipped the silver cigarette-case into his pocket.

"I dare say the rorty young dog was going to have a smoke after tea at this distance from Greyfriars," he remarked. "He won't now. Serve him right to make him sit in the study, and smoke the whole lot, but we'll let him have them down the back of his neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five tramped on their way, the silver cigarette-case safe in Bob's pocket.

That it had been dropped by Bunter, when he rolled over there in the snow, was certain. Had it been there more than a few minutes, the falling flakes would have hidden it.

The juniors, aware that Bunter had dropped it, had, of course, no doubt that it belonged to Bunter. They were not likely to guess the curious circumstances under which it had passed into his keeping.

So far as they could see, Billy Bunter was following the bad example of the Bounder, and supplying himself with smokes. Which smokes they were going to ram down his fat neck when he came in, as a warning that Smithy's example was not one to be followed.

The chums of the Remove tramped cheerily away up the lane, and followed the footpath through the wood to Friardale Lane. As they approached the stile there, they remembered the beaky man on the wrecked motor-bike.

But there was nothing to be seen of him, and they hoped that, savage-tempered and uncivil as he had been, he had not had to wait long for a lift.

As a matter of fact, it was a



Under the startled eyes of the schoolboys on the bank, the motor-bike struck the hidden rut, skidded, and then went shooting over the edge of the ditch, sending its rider hurtling through the air! "Oh!" gasped Bob Cherry.

considerable time since Rat Hankey had had a lift. He was almost at Lantham in the police car by that time.

Unaware of that, or that anything at all had happened at Lantham that day, the Famous Five swung over the stile, and tramped up Friardale Lane to the school.

They arrived at Greyfriars about the time that Rat Hankey was arriving at Lantham; and it was fortunate for the Rat's peace of mind that he did not know that the silver cigarette-case, containing his message for Soames, went into Greyfriars School in a Greyfriars junior's pocket!

Whatever became of that cigarette-case, and its mysterious message in Greek letters, it was not likely to reach the man who waited on the motor-boat at Pegg.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Bunter!

SOAMES stood in the motor-boat looking across the old stone quay; his thin lips set, his steely eyes glinting.

The village of Pegg was a mass of white; firelight glimmered from the old diamond-paned windows of the Anchor out into the snow. Not a moving figure was to be seen in the straggling street of the little village. Only the moan of the winter wind, the wash of the sea, broke the wintry silence—no sound reached his straining ears of the motor-bike he had watched for. His thoughts were disagreeable enough as he stood there, in the bitter wind.

That his confederate, Rat Hankey,

had succeeded in the hold-up, he had little doubt—the Rat was an old hand at that game, and had always been lucky. He had hardly a doubt that the Rat had got through at Lantham, and escaped with his plunder. But it was quite likely that the sudden fall of snow had disconcerted his flight. The roads were dangerous now—it was likely, and likelier with every minute of delay, that his partner in crime had come to grief. The Rat could not afford to stop—he had to keep on, snow or no snow; and Soames pictured him with his motor-bike piled up in wreckage.

Had he only been sure of it, he would have turned the motor-boat out to sea, and left danger behind. But he could not be sure—many other things, besides an accident, might have delayed the Rat; he might have had to take a longer route to drop pursuit; any minute, in fact, Soames' ears might pick up the sound of the engine.

Yet Bob Cherry had been about to tell him something—the Greyfriars juniors had seen the man on the motor-bike, and noticed him, for some reason. Was it an accident that they had seen? What else could Bob have been going to tell him, when Harry Wharton interrupted?

Still, he could not be sure.

He waited and watched with growing uneasiness and impatience. The meeting with the Greyfriars juniors had been quite unexpected—and it spelled danger for Soames.

He no longer dared to watch for the Rat in the village street. He was, in fact, watching now as much for foes as for a friend. At the sight of the police, he had no choice but to run out to sea and leave Rat Hankey to his fate, whatever it was. He was ready to start, if

it came to that; he had no fear for his own safety.

But he watched the shore in the hope of seeing or hearing the Rat; in the uneasy dread of seeing a policeman's helmet!

What he saw at last, when a figure finally appeared, was a fat schoolboy rolling slowly through the falling flakes, and blinking rather like an owl through misty spectacles.

Soames gave him a glance—then a second glance. He had seen that fat schoolboy before. He had forgotten him, as he had forgotten Harry Wharton & Co.; but he knew him at once.

He had no interest in Billy Bunter! But as the fat Owl rolled nearer, he pulled his hat lower over his eyes, and pulled up a muffler over the lower part of his face. Bunter, if he got a good look at him, knew him quite as well as the Famous Five; and he did not want to be recognised.

Harry Wharton & Co. had seen him, and perhaps reported his presence to the police; but they knew nothing of the motor-boat. But he was standing on the motor-boat now, if Bunter spotted him.

He saw the fat schoolboy come to a halt and turn his spectacles towards the firelit window of the Anchor. That building had great attractions for Billy Bunter—who was absolutely ravenously hungry by that time!

However, the fat junior turned his back on those enticing windows, and rolled down to the quay, across which Soames was staring.

He halted, blinking to and fro, and his eyes and his spectacles came to rest

on the man standing in the motor-boat. He rolled directly towards Soames.

Why, Soames could not guess; for he knew that Bunter could not see enough of his face to recognise him; moreover, it was certain that if Bunter had even dreamed that that desperate man was there, he would have taken to his heels on the instant. Bunter had forgotten James Soames long ago; but if he had remembered him, he would have remembered him with dire terror.

"I say!" squeaked Bunter, blinking at the muffled figure standing in the moored motor-boat. "I say, are you Mr. Thompson?"

Soames started.

He had borne more names than he could have remembered, in his time; but Thompson was the latest, under which he travelled in company with Mr. Hankey!

"Oh! Yes!" he answered. He guessed instantly that this was a message from the Rat; it could be nothing else.

By some strange chance, it was a Greyfriars schoolboy whom the Rat had found to serve him as a messenger. Still, that was not, after all, so surprising, as the school was only two or three miles distant.

"All right, then!" gasped Bunter. He was out of breath. "I say, I've got something for you."

He groped in his overcoat pocket.

"You have a message for me?" asked Soames quietly.

"Yes, and something else!" said Bunter, blinking down at him. "If you're Mr. Thompson—"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, the man never gave me his name," said Bunter, "but he told me to tell you that the friend you were expecting had had a spill and hurt his leg, and was waiting for you on the stile in Friardale Lane."

"Oh!" breathed Soames.

"He gave me this cigarette-case to give you," added Bunter. "He said you had lent it to him, and you would know the message came from him when you saw it."

"Oh!" repeated Soames.

Bunter groped, and groped. He did not find the cigarette-case in the pocket where he was sure he had put it. He groped in the other.

Soames watched him eagerly.

He knew instantly, though Bunter did not dream of it, that the cigarette-case must contain some kind of message. The reason the Rat had given Bunter was good enough for an unsuspecting messenger. But Soames saw more than that in it, as Rat Hankey knew that he would.

"Give it to me then!" he breathed.

"Blessed if I can find it!" said Bunter, puzzled. "I know I put it in that pocket! At least, I think I did!"

"Find it!" hissed Soames.

"I'm trying to find it as fast as I can!" grunted Bunter. "What's the hurry? It must be here!"

Bunter did not see any urgent cause for hurry, except that he wanted his tea at the Anchor. But minutes, and seconds, were precious to the confederate of the hold-up man.

The Rat had had a spill, and was disabled, and had sent a message—in that cigarette-case. That was clear. The verbal message, which Bunter had repeated, meant that he hoped that Soames would be able to come to his help. The written message must mean something else—and Soames could easily guess what it was!

It was easy enough for him to follow the Rat's thoughts in that extremity, and guess what he would do. His very

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first step, when he found himself disabled and unable to proceed, would be to hide the loot—to keep that safe, whether his confederate was able to help him or not.

There was little chance that Soames would be able to help him. It must be a long time—probably over an hour—

Christmas Chuckles

Recorded by BOB CHERRY.

Coker of the Fifth has ordered a new dress-suit for Christmas, but as he is going home on his motor-bike, his tailor has decided that, in order to fit Coker, the suit will have to be made in several pieces.

We understand that Temple's home is so frightfully aristocratic that they have a footman at each chimney to show Santa Claus in when he comes.

Bolsover tells us that last Christmas he just managed to stop a girl-friend from skating through a hole in the ice, and she fainted in his arms. I should think any girl would faint in Bolsy's arms!

Fisher T. Fish has been trying desperately to hook an invitation for Christmas. He doesn't want to spend the hols. with Fisher T. Fish, because he's afraid of being swindled out of his dollars.

The Friardale Waits are now in full song, and last night they actually went to Sir Hilton Popper's place and struck up: "The First Nowel." It was the Last Nowel also, when Popper got busy!

One of Farmer Cobb's turkeys was seen walking into the Courtfield Life Insurance Office recently, but they told him to call again after Christmas—if possible.

*Here's to old Christmas,
A time very jolly,
When hatchets are "berried,"
As well as the holly!*

An article on Christmas presents for gents says that "the smart cane is coming into fashion again." It has never been out of fashion with Quelchy!

Mrs. Mimble has a notice in the tuckshop window: "Have A Mince Pie and Ensure a Happy Month." At the moment, Bunter is booked to be happy until June, 1959.

since he had given the message to that fat schoolboy.

Soames, crook as he was, was not the man to let down his associate. He was going to help the Rat if he could. But he had hardly the faintest hope that Rat Hankey was still at liberty.

A post office raider, fleeing from pursuing police, could not afford to linger an hour in his flight! It was ten to one, a hundred to one, that the Rat had

been snapped up, even before Bunter arrived in Pegg. Indeed, it was plain that Rat Hankey expected as much, from the circumstance that he had sent a secret message—which could only refer to the loot.

Bunter went through pocket after pocket.

Soames' eyes burned at him. He remembered Bunter of old—clumsy and fatheaded; just the fellow to lose anything confided to his care. If he had lost that cigarette-case—

"Give it to me, will you?" almost hissed Soames.

"Eh? I can't till I find it, can I?" said Bunter, blinking at him. "I know I put it in that pocket! It ain't there! I—I wonder if it dropped out when that beast knocked me over with a snowball in Pegg Lane. Oh crikey!"

"Have you lost it?" said Soames, between his teeth.

"No, I jolly well haven't!" snapped Bunter. "If it dropped out when a beast knocked me over with a snowball, 'tain't my fault, is it? Think I asked Bob Cherry to buzz a snowball at me, and knock me spinning—"

Soames breathed hard.

"What was it like?" he asked. He remembered something else of Bunter—that he was as curious and inquisitive as a jackdaw. It was more likely than not that he had examined the cigarette-case, while it was in his fat hands. If so, he might be able to tell what Soames wanted to know, even if the cigarette-case itself was lost.

"Eh? I suppose you know what your own cigarette-case is like, Mr. Thompson," answered Bunter. "The man said it was yours! A flat silver one—"

"What was in it?"

"Only cigarettes," answered Bunter. "Not that I opened it, you know! I mean to say, I never smoked any of the cigarettes—I don't smoke, you know—groooooogh!" added Bunter, feeling an inward heave at the remembrance of those cigarettes.

"You saw nothing in it, but cigarettes?"

"Only those letters scratched in it," answered Bunter. "I suppose you know, if it was your cigarette-case—a lot of Greek letters—"

Soames' heart beat faster. He understood.

Rat Hankey had scratched a message on the inside of the metal. And that fat and fatuous schoolboy had read it! It was clear, however, that if he had, it had conveyed nothing to him! Greek characters, obviously meant nothing to Bunter. Had the Rat used English letters, that is to say, Roman, the fat Owl would have read the message. But the trick of using Greek letters for a message was an accustomed one between the two rascals.

"Blessed if I can find it!" Bunter gave it up at last. "It must have dropped when I went over—I know the place—I'll look for it as I go back—I've got to go and have tea now—"

"Do you remember the Greek letters you saw cut inside the cigarette-case?" asked Soames quietly.

"Eh? How could I remember them?" asked Bunter with an astonished blink. "I don't know Greek! We don't do Greek in my Form."

"Where did you drop it?"

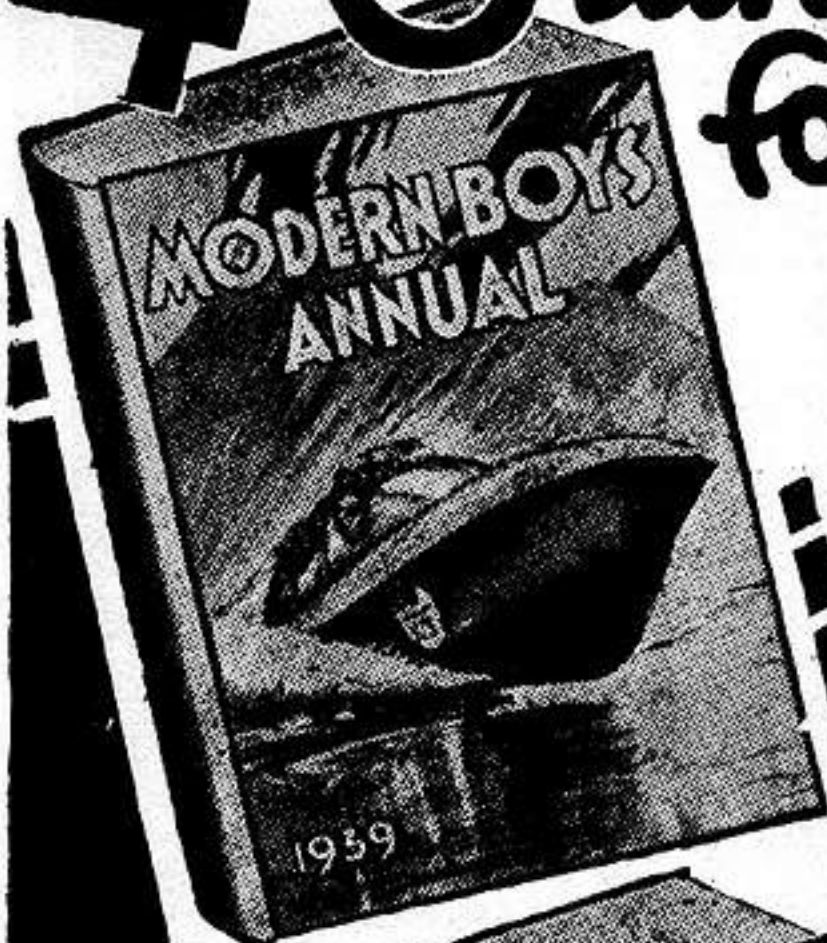
"Well, it must have dropped when I went over—right at the other end of the street, in the lane," said Bunter cheerily. "I'll go and look for it after tea—I will really—"

With one bound Soames was on the quay as the fat junior was turning away.

Billy Bunter gave a startled howl, as a grip of iron fell on his fat neck.

(Continued on page 14.)

4 Grand Gift Books for your Xmas List



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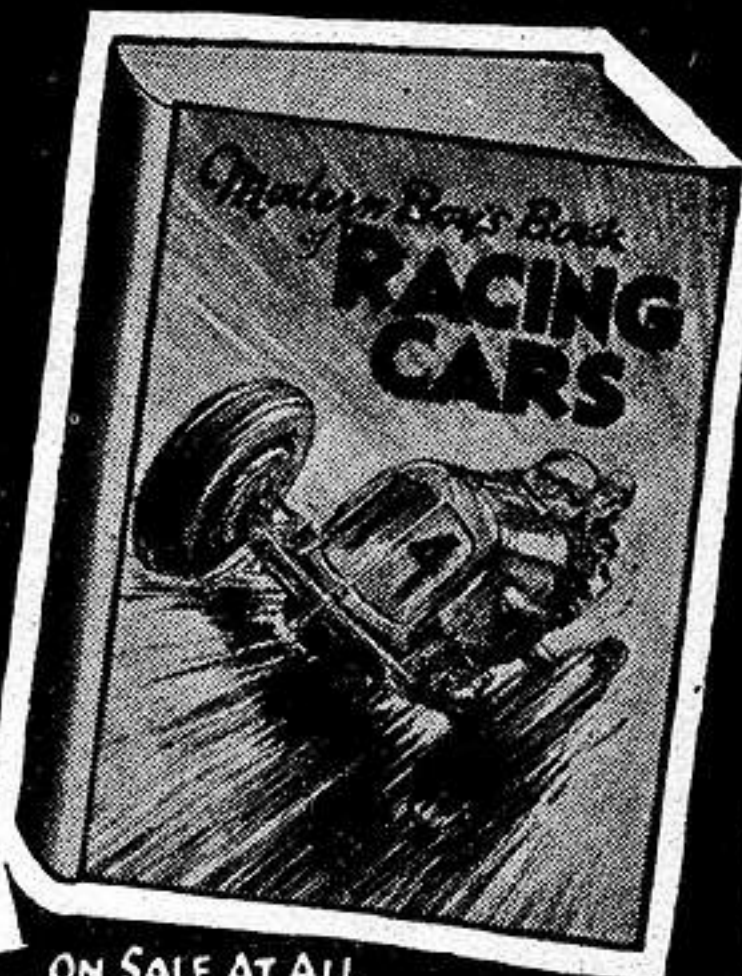
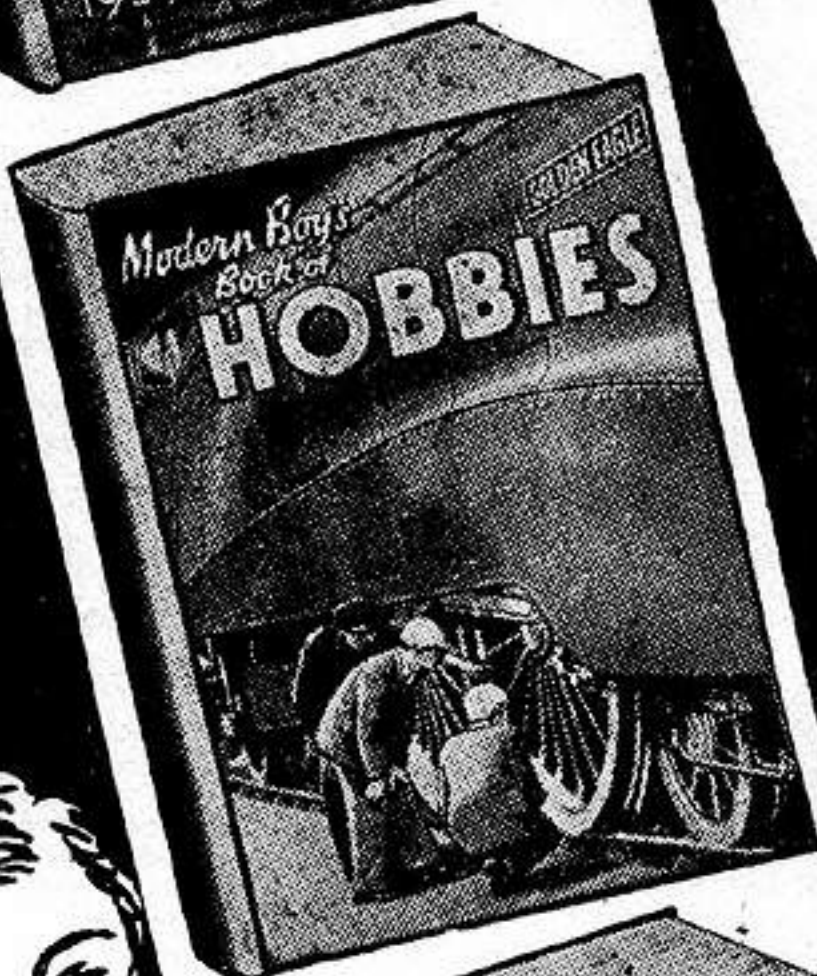
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ON SALE AT ALL
NEWSAGENTS AND BOOKSELLERS

"Ow! Leggo! Wharrer you up to?" he yelled in surprise and alarm. "You leggo my collar, blow you—why, you—"

Bunter broke off as he saw, at last, the face of the man he had been talking with. He blinked at that face, now close to his own, and glaring at him threateningly, in utter terror.

"Oh crikey! You ain't Mr. Thompson at all! Oh, crumbs—it—it—it's Soames! That awful villain Soames! Oh lor! Leggo! Help!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Lost!

QUIET, you fat fool!" hissed Soames.

"Help!" yelled Bunter.

"Quiet—"

"Yaroo! Leggo!"

"Another sound and I will throw you into the sea!" hissed Soames.

Billy Bunter did not utter another sound!

He blinked in terror at the pale, set face of the man who had once been Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet, once a South-Sea adventurer, once a kidnapper, his fat heart almost dying within him. Only too well, he knew that James Soames was quite capable of carrying out his threat.

The hapless fat Owl nearly collapsed in Soames' grip, quaking.

Soames shot a swift glance round. There was no one at hand to observe that little scene on the quay, and Bunter's frightened yell could hardly have reached the buildings in the distance.

Still gripping the fat junior's neck, he bent over him and spoke in a low, tense voice.

"You fat fool, quiet! You're in no danger, you dolt! Take me at once to the spot where you dropped that cigarette-case—that is all I want."

"But—but it ain't yours!" gasped Bunter. "That man said it was Mr. Thompson's—"

"Fool! Take me to the place at once!" hissed Soames.

"Leggo my collar, then!" gasped Bunter.

Soames was not likely to let him go. He was not looking for a foot-race!

"Fool! Come, and lose no time!" he snarled.

"Oh, all right!" gurgled Bunter.

He rolled dismally up the village street with Soames' grasp still on his collar.

Billy Bunter was tired. He was breathless. He was hungry. But he forgot all these things, urgent and pressing as they were, as he rolled away by the side of James Soames. Terror overmastered everything else. Bunter would have given a dozen teas at the Anchor, with a dozen dinners to follow, to get away from his terrifying companion.

His one thought now was to get back to the spot where he had rolled over in the snow as fast as his fat little legs could carry him, and escape from Soames.

If Soames wanted to pinch the cigarette-case that belonged to "Mr. Thompson," Bunter, evidently, could not stop him.

It did not occur to his fat brain for a moment, that Soames and "Mr. Thompson" were one and the same person!

It looked, to Bunter, as if that villain, Soames, wanted to pinch Mr. Thompson's cigarette-case.

Whatever he wanted, Bunter was not the man to try to stop him! He rolled

on through the snow, and, like Iser, he rolled rapidly.

They passed the gates of Cliff House School, and trudged up Pegg Lane.

Billy Bunter blinked to and fro, in search of the spot where he had rolled over when smitten by Bob's playful snowball.

But as the flakes were still falling, the spot was not easy to identify. Billy Bunter would very soon have given up the search—had he dared! But with Soames' grip on his collar, and Soames' steely eyes glinting at him, the fat Owl exerted himself to the utmost.

"Here's the place!" he gasped at last. "That's it! You can see where I went over!"

It was clear that some heavy body had rolled in the snow at that point. The falling flakes had not yet had time to fill up the hollow in the snow. And there were still signs where the feet of the Famous Five had trampled, when they gathered round Bunter to help him up.

"You are sure—" muttered Soames, with a look at the fat Owl that made his podgy knees knock together.

"Ow! Yes! This is the place!" gasped Bunter. "It must have dropped here, as it ain't in my pocket, and I never fell down anywhere else! I—I—I say, I—I'll help you look for it, if you leggo my collar!"

Soames gritted his teeth. If the fallen cigarette-case was there, it had been covered by the falling flakes out of sight. He had no doubt that the fat Owl had dropped it there, but it needed looking for.

"Help me look for it," he snarled. He released Bunter's collar at last.

"Make an attempt to run, and I will follow you and twist your fat neck!"

"Oh crikey! I—I'll help you with—with—pleasure!" groaned Bunter. "Lose no time, fool!"

Soames stooped, and began scratching in the soft surface of the snow, round about the spot where Bunter had rolled.

Billy Bunter eyed him—his fat little legs almost running away with him of their own accord.

But he dared not try it on. They were well out of the village at this spot—there was no help—and the one-time sea-lawyer of the Pacific would have run him down in a few moments. There was no help for it, and the hapless fat Owl followed Soames' example and groped in the snow.

It was not an easy search, but there was no doubt that, had the silver cigarette-case still lain where it had fallen, it would have been found. But as it was now at Greyfriars School, in Bob Cherry's pocket, the searchers in Pegg Lane were not likely to have much luck!

For a quarter of an hour the search went on. Then Soames stopped at last, his face white with rage. If the lost object was still there, it was not to be found—but he doubted whether it was still there.

"Who was with you here when you fell over?" he snarled, his eyes glinting at the gasping fat Owl.

"That beast Cherry knocked me over with a snowball, or I shouldn't have dropped it!" groaned Bunter. "They were all here, the beasts—the five of them—"

"Did you leave them here when you came on?"

"Eh? Yes!"

"Then one of them may have seen it and picked it up."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter.

He had not thought of that! Now that he did think of it, however it seemed very probable to him.

"Do you know where they are now asked Soames, between his teeth.

"They were going back to the school when I met them—I expect they've got in by this time—" gasped Bunter through his chattering teeth. "I—I say, we—we can't find it, and—and I—I'm fearfully hungry! Oh lor!"

Soames did not heed him further. He stood with his hands clenched, his brows knitted, in deep and savage thought.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, and backed away. Had Soames' eyes turned on him, the frightened fat Owl would have come to an instant halt. But the sea-lawyer was through with him; Bunter was of no further use to him, and he did not heed him.

Never had Billy Bunter been so glad to be unheeded!

He backed farther and farther; and then suddenly turned and took to his heels. He charged breathlessly into the village street of Pegg.

There, he ventured to blink back over a fat shoulder! Soames was no longer to be seen! Where he had gone, and what he might be up to, Bunter neither knew nor cared—so long as he was done with him!

He was done with him now! He dropped into a walk, and puffed and blew up the snowy street to the Anchor!

There, at long, long, last, Bunter had his tea! At long, long last he got going on the most urgent and important business within the wide limits of the universe! Bunter had had a worrying afternoon—a very worrying and unpleasant afternoon, taking it altogether! But there was still, so to speak, balm in Gilead! It was an undoubted fact that they stood you a good tea at the Anchor in Pegg! And Billy Bunter, as he encircled the same, realised that life was worth living, after all!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

No Smoking!

ABOUT Christmas, Mauly—"

"Comin'!" called out Lord Mauleverer.

"I say, nobody's calling you—"

But Lord Mauleverer was gone! Whether anybody was calling him or not, Mauly seemed to be in a hurry! Billy Bunter snorted.

After prep that evening he had caught Mauly in the Remove passage. But Mauly was elusive. He had been elusive for days.

Bunter could not help feeling annoyed.

In a day or two, Greyfriars was breaking up for Christmas. The matter of the hols, therefore, was rather an urgent one! It had to be settled!

But how was a fellow to settle it, when the fellow with whom it had to be settled cut off in answer to imaginary calls when Bunter got started on the subject? It was really very annoying.

If Mauly let him down over the hols—and it really looked as if Mauly was going to—Bunter was rather at a loose end. Next to Christmas at Mauleverer Towers, he rather liked the idea of the hols at Wharton Lodge. But there was a distinct lack of enthusiasm on the part of Harry Wharton—why, Bunter did not know.

He was going to have fellows home for Christmas—not such nice fellows as Bunter. A chap who could stand Nugent and Bull and Cherry and Inky ought to have been jolly glad to get a really fascinating guest like Bunter. But somehow or other, the captain of

the Remove displayed no sign of jolly gladness at the idea.

Hols with Smithy would have been all right—but the Bouncer was too hard a nut for even Billy Bunter to crack!

Bunter began to wonder dismally whether he would have to put up with Peter Todd, his studymate. But, really, he need not have worried about that. Bunter was prepared to put up with Toddy, at a pinch! But the severest pinch would not have induced Toddy to put up with Bunter!

"Beast!" grunted the fat Owl, as Lord Mauleverer disappeared down the Remove staircase. And he rolled along

at once. "A Christmas present from my Uncle George!" he added. "Did you pick it up?"

"Yes, we picked it up all right," agreed Bob, "and if it's yours, here it is, you smoky porpoise!"

"It's mine, all right," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I mean to say, if a man isn't there to take it, I can't give it to him, can I?"

"Eh, what man?"

"Oh, nobody!" said Bunter hastily. "As I said, that cigarette-case is a Christmas present from my Uncle William—hand it over, Cherry—"

Bunter rather fancied himself with a cigarette-case.

True, it was not exactly his, but it was until he came across Mr. Thompson, to whom he supposed it really belonged. Bunter, of course, had no idea of pinching that silver cigarette-case, if he came on the owner. Until then, however, it was Bunter's.

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter blinked at the Famous Five, not quite understanding why they were grinning so widely. "Look here, I dropped in to speak to you about Christmas—"

"Help!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, let's have

I RAN into the Greyfriars Ghost outside the Remove Dorm. last night—in fact, I ran through him before I noticed he was there. A deep groan apprised me of his presence.

"Tut-tut!" I said hastily. "I beg your pardon for running through you. I was in a bit of a hurry."

The ghost groaned again. "What I ses is this here," he replied. "You needn't apologise. I got used to being run through in my time. If I 'appened to lock the gates on some young rip in the Fifth after six o'clock, he'd like enough run me through with his sword when he got in—me, a man old enough to be his grandfather."

"Great Scott!" I cried. "Why, I thought you were the ghost of an Abbot!"

"A haddock?" groaned the spectre. "Look 'ere, you young rip, if you try to insult me, what I ses is this here—I'll report yer!"

"Not a haddock—an Abbot! Aren't you the ghost of some giddy old Abbot who lived here in the year dot?"

"Not me! I was a porter, I was. My name was Hugh de Goslynge. It still is, as a matter of fact."

"But you're wearing a cowl," I objected.

"That was because of me pipe," replied the ghost. "They weren't used to tobacco in the Good Old Days, so when I started smoking a pipe, the Abbot up and ses, ses he, 'If this man wants to turn 'imself into a chimbley,' ses he, 'he must be fitted with a cowl, because the wind do blow 'is smoke into our eyes something 'orrid.' So they clapped this 'ere cowl on me 'ead."

"Was the Abbot strict with you?"

"He was that!" groaned the ghost. "Many a time he's said to me: 'Goslynge, if I miss any more bottles of sweet wine out of the cellar,' he ses, 'I shall consider it my painful dooty to give you the push.'"

Ghostly Gossip.



Our Special Reporter, TOM BROWN, has a few words with a Phantom.

And I ses, 'Say not so, for it wasn't me, but a young rip of a Friar named Bunterre of the Remove.'

"And did he believe you?"

"No, 'e did not," replied the ghost sourly. "He said I carried the evidence of my evil ways in my own nose, which shineth like a beacon. I could 'ave told 'im that at any rate I didn't sneak off down to a low tavern called the Three Fyskers, like some of the bretheren in the Remove."

I nodded sympathetically. "How did you become a ghost?" was my next question.

The spectre snorted. "Worked meself to a shadder and faded away," he replied.

"Do you mean to tell me you never died?"

"Not me! There wasn't enough of me left to die, time I'd finished

me day's work. What with sweepin' and polishin' and ringin' the risin'-bell and lockin' up at night, I never 'ad a minute to call me own. So when I'd wore out me flesh and blood and 'ad become a mere ghost, they said they'd pension me orf. Well, I'm still 'aunting this school, lookin' for me pension, and I ain't found it yet. You 'aven't seen it lyin' around nowhere, I suppose?"

"'Fraid not. How long have you been haunting us now?"

"Three 'undred and fifty years," replied Goslynge's Ghost. "And between you and me, I'm gettin' a bit dis'artened. Seems to me I ain't goin' to get that pension."

"Did you like your work at the monastery here?"

"No, I did not, except now and then, when one of the brothers 'ad to be flogged. Then the Abbot would send for me and say: 'Take him hup, Goslynge!', while he got busy with a birch-staff. The yells of the victims was moosic in me ears."

"I suppose you quite liked reporting the brothers for being late?"

"Dooty being dooty," replied the ghost, "I did. If a Friar tried to sneak in after lock-up, I reported 'im, and he got 100 lines of manuscript to write. Served 'im right. All Friars oughter 'ave been drowned at birth, that's what I ses."

"From something in your conversation," I murmured, "I have an idea that William Gosling, our present porter, must be a relation. Were you his great-grandfather?"

"Me?" shrieked the ghost indignantly. "Certingly not! Wot d'yer mean? He's MY great-grandfather! He took on the job when I faded out!"

At which I gave a start, and woke up to find myself in bed.

The ghost had vanished—probably to look for his pension. And if the ghost's great-grandfather reads these lines, I shall have 100 more to do when he reports me!

to Study No. 1 where the Famous Five had gathered after prep.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Roll in, old barrel!" said five voices at once.

Bunter rolled in—with a suspicious blink! He had not forgotten how heartily he had been welcomed in that study early that afternoon. He was not to be caught twice with the same chaff, and he did not want to discover any more old boots in Christmas-cake boxes.

"Did you drop something in Pegg this afternoon?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Oh!" Bunter remembered that silver cigarette-case. "Yes, I did! I thought you fellows might have picked it up!"

"What was it?"

"A silver cigarette-case!" said Bunter

"As well as from your Uncle George?" asked Bob.

"I—I—I mean—I mean, my Uncle William George! Look here, you jolly well give me my cigarette-case!" exclaimed Bunter warmly.

Bob handed over the cigarette-case. As Bunter evidently had dropped it, it was, presumably, Bunter's; though the juniors were not likely to believe that it was a present to him from an uncle, either William or George. Such articles were, of course, forbidden to Greyfriars juniors, and they supposed that Bunter, being in funds for once, had stood himself a silver cigarette-case with smokes in the same.

The fat Owl received the cigarette-case, with considerable satisfaction.

a fag all round, what?" asked Bunter breezily. "I've got some rather good smokes—"

"Have you?" chuckled Bob.

"Tip-top!" said Bunter. "I'll stand you a smoke all round, old chaps, while we talk about the hols, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" grunted Bunter. "I say, what are you fellows cackling at?"

The fat Owl had not noticed, so far, that the cigarettes had been tipped out of the silver case. They lay in a little heap on the study table, ready for Bunter—but not for Bunter to smoke!

Bunter had recovered by this time

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HARRY WHARTON'S CHRISTMAS GUEST!



(Continued from page 15.)

from his exploit in the wood, and was ready to be rorty again.

"What about putting on a fag, what?" asked Bunter. "Don't be noodles, you know! Don't be nincom-poops! Have a smoke!"

He snapped open the case! Then there was a yell:

"Beast! Where's my smokes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you gimme my smokes, Bob Cherry, you beast!" howled Bunter, in great indignation. "There were six or seven at least—gimme my smokes!"

"Just going to!" grinned Bob. "Here they are!"

He gathered up a handful of cigarettes from the table.

"Hold his head!" he added.

"I say, you fellows! Leggo!" yelled Bunter, in angry surprise and indignation. "Wharrer you grabbing me for, you silly asses—leggo my ears—leggo my collar—leggo, you rotters—ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton took one fat ear and Frank Nugent the other. Johnny Bull grasped the back of Bunter's collar.

His head was jerked forward; his collar backward! That left a space for the cigarettes to be dropped into!

Bob dropped them in!

The Fat Owl wriggled and roared as they slid down his podgy back!

"Ow! Beast! My smokes—ooogh!"

"That's a tip—"

"Beast!"

"Not to play the giddy ox—"

"Yah! Rotter! I shan't be able to smoke those fags now! Ow! Beasts! Swabs! Ooogh!" spluttered Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you rotters!" gasped Bunter, wriggling wildly. "They're tickling my back—ooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"You—you—you cackling beasts! I say—ooogh! I'll jolly well punch your cheeky heads! Oooh!"

Billy Bunter wriggled and squirmed. Bunter fancied that he liked cigarettes; but even Bunter did not fancy that he liked them down his back! Those cigarettes were not likely to be smokeable by the time he extracted them! No doubt that was all the better for Bunter—the Famous Five really had done him a good turn! Still, he did not seem pleased.

"Urrgh! Beasts!" roared Bunter, wriggling and squirming. "Rotters! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five, chuckling, left the study, and went down to the Rag! Bunter was left to wriggle and squirm.

Fellows who passed the study on their way down, looked in and chortled, quite entertained by the sight of a crimson, breathless Owl, gasping and spluttering, as he struggled to extract fragments of dismantled cigarettes from his podgy back!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Christmas Present!

"BARRY, old chap—"

"Oh dear!" said Harry, old chap.

It was the following day, and Billy Bunter ran the captain of the Remove down in the Rag after morning school.

From Bunter's friendly—indeed, affectionate—manner, Harry Wharton had no doubt that Christmas was coming, as it were.

For which reason he side-stepped Bunter.

"I say, hold on, old fellow!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "Tain't about the hols!"

"Oh!" said Harry.

And he held on.

If it wasn't about the hols, he was willing to let Bunter run on for a few minutes, at least. A fellow could be accommodating when he had the happy prospect in view of not seeing Bunter again till next term.

"The fact is," said Bunter, with dignity, "I've got you a Christmas present, old fellow."

"Wha-a-at?"

"A rather expensive one—"

"Eh?"

"And here it is," said Bunter, groping in his pocket.

Harry Wharton stared blankly at the fat Owl. About the last thing in the world he would have expected from William George Bunter was a Christmas present—especially an expensive one!

Bunter, it seemed, had been in funds, though he had not revealed—and was not likely to reveal—the source of those funds. Bunter was not proud of having taken a tip from a stranger, and he preferred to allow it to be supposed that his celebrated postal order had turned up.

But for Bunter to expend his funds on presents for other fellows was very unusual and unexpected.

Indeed, without being unduly suspicious, the captain of the Remove could not help suspecting that that Christmas present, if any, was rather in the nature of a sprat to catch a whale.

The Christmas present was the sprat, and the whale was the hols at Wharton Lodge.

However, as Wharton had not the slightest idea of accepting a Christmas present from the fat Owl, that little scheme, like most of Billy Bunter's little schemes, was likely to prove a "frost."

"Lots of thanks, old man," said Harry, laughing, "but—"

"I insist, old fellow!" said Bunter firmly. "We're pals, ain't we? I got it specially for you, old chap. I knew you'd like it."

"Oh, but—"

"If you don't want to keep cigarettes in it—"

"Cigarettes?" ejaculated Wharton.

"It will do for something else—stamps, or cough lozenges, or—or pen-nibs—anything, you know," said Bunter. "Look at it, old top."

Harry Wharton looked—or, rather, he stared—as Bunter jerked a silver cigarette-case out of his pocket.

"Got it specially for you, old fellow," said Bunter breezily, apparently forgetful of his statement the previous evening that the case was a Christmas present from his uncle, variously named George and William. "I don't mind telling you that I gave thirty bob for it."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Harry Wharton.

Bunter cheerily held out the silver cigarette-case. There was a sly gleam in his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles.

Really it was quite a nice little Christmas present for a fellow who had a use for cigarette-cases—which Harry Wharton certainly had not. And the fellow to whom it was presented could hardly, Bunter considered, continue to be so stuffy and stand-offish about the Christmas holidays.

It was true that that cigarette-case, as a matter of actual fact, was not Bunter's to give.

It was only Bunter's by possession—which, according to the proverb, is nine points of the law.

Bunter was liable to forget the tenth point after a very short lapse of time.

Bunter was honest. He would have scorned the imputation of being otherwise. But he had his own inimitable ideas on the subject of property.

If a fellow lent Bunter a penknife, that penknife became Bunter's until and unless the fellow asked for it back. If he borrowed a fountain-pen that some chap had left on a table, that fountain-pen became Bunter's until the chap spotted it in his fat paw.

Thus it was with the silver cigarette-case.

Nothing would have induced Bunter to "pinch" that case if he had found "Mr. Thompson" at Pegg the day before. He would have handed it over to Mr. Thompson as a matter of course.

But Mr. Thompson had proved undiscoverable. The man who had sent it to him was equally undiscoverable. So it had become Bunter's.

The beaky man with the game leg at the stile had told Bunter that Mr. Thompson was on a motor-boat at Pegg. But there had been only one motor-boat at Pegg, and Mr. Thompson certainly was not on that; that villain Soames had been on that.

On his homeward way, after tea at the Anchor, Bunter had kept his eyes open for the beaky man, but had seen nothing of him, and had no doubt that the man had obtained a lift—though he little dreamed what sort of a lift he had obtained.

Bunter, naturally, never expected to see him again. He did not expect ever to see Mr. Thompson.

So the cigarette-case remained without an owner—and inevitably, in such circumstances, became Bunter's.

Being Bunter's, there was no reason why he shouldn't give it to a pal for a Christmas present if he chose so to do.

This reasoning would not have satisfied some people, but it satisfied William George Bunter; he was easy to satisfy in such matters.

"Yours, old chap!" said Bunter, holding it out, and failing to comprehend why the captain of the Remove put his hands into his pockets, instead of taking it. "Rather natty—what?"

"Oh, quite!" gasped Wharton.

"But—"

"Well, here you are—"

"Thanks no end!" said Harry. "But what would your Uncle George or your Uncle William say if he or they knew you'd given away a Christmas present?"

"Oh!" Bunter remembered. "The fact is, I meant—I mean, I didn't mean—that is to say, that was only a jog-jog-joke! I bought this specially for you in Courtfield yesterday—"

"You didn't go to Courtfield yesterday; you went to Pegg!"

"I—I mean, last Saturday," explained Bunter. "I gave two guineas for it at Chunkley's, old chap."

"As well as thirty shillings?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I—I mean, it

was—was two guineas, but they let me have it for thirty shillings. I had the bill with it."

"Let's see the bill."

"I—I—I've lost it!"

"And it looks to me," said Harry, "as if somebody's lost that cigarette-case. Look here, Bunter, you blithering owl, if you've picked it up somewhere, it ought to be taken to the police station. Findings are not keepings, you fat chump; that's what policemen call pinching."

"Why, you—you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "Think I'd pinch a cigarette-case? I can show you the letter that came with it from my Uncle George."

"As well as the bill from Chunkley's in Courtfield?"

"I—I—I mean—"

"You howling ass!" said Harry, quite serious now.

The Famous Five had been rather surprised the previous day by finding Bunter the possessor of such an article, and they had not, of course, believed that it had been given him by an elderly relative. Now the captain of the Remove doubted very strongly whether it was Bunter's at all. He was only too well acquainted with the fat Owl's free-and-easy ideas on the subject of property.

"Well, I like that!" said Bunter bitterly. "A fellow goes specially over to Lantham—I mean Courtfield—to buy you a Christmas present, and all you can do is to call him names! Talk about an ungrateful serpent's tooth being sharper than a thankless child!"

"Did you pick it up somewhere, you dithering duffer?"

"No, I didn't!" howled Bunter.

"Then where did you get it?"

"My Uncle George—I mean Chunkley's—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" exclaimed Harry, really concerned for the fat Owl now. "You're landing yourself in trouble, you blitherer! Can't you see the thing's not new? Anybody can see it's been in a pocket a long time."

"Oh, they—they sold it second-hand—" stammered Bunter.

"Chunkley's don't sell things second-hand."

"Oh, I mean I got it at old Lazarus—not Chunkley's at all! When I said Chunkley's, I meant old Lazarus," explained Bunter.

"Ye gods!" gasped Wharton.

"Besides, what does it matter where I got it?" demanded Bunter. "It's mine, ain't it?"

"It's pretty plain that it isn't!" answered Harry. "Somebody must have lost it, and you've found it, so far as I can see."

"Nothing of the kind!" hooted Bunter. "I bought it from old Chunker—I mean, Chunkley's—that is, old Lazarus! Specially to give you for a Christmas present, old fellow."

"Is there a name in it?" asked Harry. He had, of course, not the slightest doubt, by that time, that to whomsoever that silver case might belong it did not belong to William George Bunter.

"No, unless it's a Greek name," answered Bunter. "I mean, there ain't a name in it at all."

"A Greek name," repeated Harry, in surprise. "Not many Greeks about these parts, I should think! Let's look at it."

He took the cigarette-case from Bunter's fat hand and opened it.

The fat Owl watched him, with a morose blink.

This little scheme was not working out as Bunter had hoped and expected. Instead of being pleased with that handsome Christmas present and ceasing to be stand-offish about the holidays, this

beast seemed to fancy that Bunter had pinched it!

Harry Wharton scanned the row of Greek letters in the inside of the case. He knew that they were Greek characters, but that was all he knew.

"That can't be a name," he said. "It's too jolly long for a name—even a Greek name, though they're jolly long sometimes."

"Of—of course not," said Bunter. "That chap wasn't a foreigner—"

"What chap?"

"Oh, nobody! Besides, Thompson ain't a foreign name—"

"Thompson? Who's Thompson?"

"Oh, nobody! The—the fact is, old chap, I—I had that inscription put in specially—classic, you know! It—it means 'A Merry Christmas.'"

"Wha-a-t?"

324 MORE OVERSEAS READERS WIN PRIZES FOR COLLECTING "ARMAMENTS" STAMPS!

This week we announce the result of the Overseas Section of our "Armaments" Contest No. 2, for which there was a special late closing date.

As stated in the competition offer, there were special prizes for good "scores" from overseas, and these have been awarded in cash form as follows:

FIRST PRIZE, £2: G. Aaron, 6, Rockey Street, Bellevue, Johannesburg, South Africa (whose stamp total was 327—congratulations!).

SECOND PRIZE, £1: P. George, 27, Reed Street, Port Elizabeth, South Africa (who came next with a "score" of 318).

For space reasons we are unable to print all the other winners' names here. All "scores" of 72 and over qualified for prizes, however—totals of 178 stamps and over winning special consolation prizes of 5s. each, while totals of 177 down to 72 were awarded prizes of 2s. 6d. each. These prizes have all been posted.

"And—and 'A Happy New Year,'" added Bunter. "That—that's why it—it's so jolly long—see?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Look here, old chap, I'm giving you that cigarette-case as a Christmas present—"

"You're jolly well not!" said the captain of the Remove emphatically. "I'm not going to get run in for pinching it, you fat fraud!"

"Why, you beast—" gasped Bunter.

Wharton handed the silver case back to Bunter.

"You'd better take that to Quelch!" he said.

"Eh? Quelch doesn't smoke," said Bunter. "Catch me making a beak a Christmas present if he did!"

"You burbling ass!" roared Wharton. "Take it to Quelch and tell him where you found it so that he can get it back to the owner, whoever he is."

"Beast!"

"Take my advice, you fat ass, or you'll be sorry for it!" said Harry. And with that he walked out of the Rag, leaving the fat Owl with the silver case in his fat paw.

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

That little scheme had been a failure. The Christmas hols were still in an unsettled state. Only the silver cigarette-case remained to Billy Bunter, as a sort of consolation prize!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

"MASTER BUNTER!"

It was a soft, quiet voice; but it made Billy Bunter jump.

It was after morning school, and the fat junior was rolling down the lane to Friardale.

Harry Wharton & Co. had walked down to the village after class, and Bunter was going to meet them on their way back. It was an opportunity for a little chat on the subject of the Christmas holidays; a matter of urgent interest to Billy Bunter, though of less interest to the other fellows.

But Billy Bunter forgot all about the Famous Five and all about the Christmas holidays as he heard that quiet voice from the trees beside the lane. There was a familiar note in that quiet, smooth voice.

He blinked round as a man, muffled in a thick coat, with a soft hat pulled down over his face, stepped into the lane.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"Stop, please!" said the smooth voice.

"I think you know me, Master Bunter."

"Sus-sus-Soames!" stammered Bunter.

He could not see much of the man between the upturned coat collar and the hat. But he knew who it was at once.

He stopped. Soames had stepped in front of him, and he had to stop. He backed away promptly.

"I—I—I say, wharrer you want?" he stammered. "You keep off, you know!"

"Will you step under the trees, Master Bunter?"

"Oh, no! I—I've got to get back to the school. I—"

"I think you had better, Master Bunter," said Soames. "I want only a few words with you; you have nothing to fear, you fat fool!"

Bunter was not so sure of that! Certainly he could not imagine what Soames wanted with him. But his dread of the one-time sea-lawyer was deep.

"Lose no time!" snapped Soames. "This is a lonely place, but I do not desire to be seen! Step under the trees!"

Bunter rolled under the trees. Soames followed him, and they were out of sight of any chance passer-by.

"I—I—I say, what do you want, Soames?" stammered Bunter, blinking at him uneasily through his big spectacles. "I—I say, you ain't safe here, you know. I—I believe the—the bobbies are looking for you, Soames!"

"Never mind that, Master Bunter!" Soames' voice was smooth and sleek—as smooth and as sleek as when he had been Mr. Vernon-Smith's deferential manservant. But it had a terrifying sound to Billy Bunter's fat ears. "I simply wish to ask you a question or two. One of your friends, I think, picked up the silver cigarette-case you dropped in Pegg a few days ago."

Soames' eyes were keenly on the fat face as he spoke.

He was not sure, but he thought it very probable that that was what had occurred. He wanted to be sure. All he needed was to find an opportunity of questioning Bunter, and he had watched and found it. It was not likely that the fat Owl would be able to deceive him.

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunter. His fat face told Soames all that he wanted to know, and the sea-lawyer's eyes gleamed. "Oh! Yes! I—I—I mean, no! Not at all!"

Bunter remembered how Soames had hunted for the silver case in the snow. Evidently he was after it now!

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Bunter was not going to part with it if he could help it!

He was prepared to hand it over to "Mr. Thompson" if Mr. Thompson ever turned up! Until that unlikely event it was Bunter's! Soames was not going to pinch that cigarette-case—not if Bunter knew it!

"Oh, no!" went on Bunter, shaking his head. "The—the fact is, Soames, that—that cigarette-case was never found. I—I think it must be still lying there, under the—the snow, you know."

Soames made a step nearer to him.

"If you utter one more falsehood, Master Bunter, I shall wring your fat neck!" he said quietly. "Tell me the truth. Who picked up the cigarette-case?"

"Bib-Bub-Bab-Bob Cherry!" gasped Bunter, the truth popping out of him, as it were, like a pip from an orange at the deadly glitter in Soames' eyes.

"Cherry! He gave it back to you, of course?"

"Oh, no! He—he lost it——"

"What?"

"I—I mean—keep off, you beast!—he gave it back to me, of—of course!" gasped Bunter. "The beast rammed the cigarettes down my neck, b-b-but he gave me back the case—— Oh lor! I—I say, Soames, I—I was going to meet some fellows, and—and they'll be wondering what's become of me——"

"Where is it now?"

"I—I left it in—in my study!" stuttered Bunter.

"Give it to me at once!" hissed Soames.

"I—I'd gig-gig-give it to you with pleasure, but—but how can I when—when I've left it in my study—— Keep off, you beast!" yelled Bunter. "I mean, it—it's in my pip-pip-pocket, and I—I'll get it!"

"Quick!" snarled Soames.

His look was gloating now.

It had seemed to him likely, almost certain, that that silver case was in Bunter's fat hands again. All he needed, if that were so, was to interview Bunter in a quiet spot.

All was plain sailing now. Bunter, he knew, had made nothing of the Greek letters scratched on the metal inside. But one glance at them would tell their meaning to Soames.

Rat Hankey was in the "stone jug." From him Soames was not likely to get a word for a very long time to come. But the Rat's loot had never been found. Soames had read every word that appeared in the newspapers on the subject of the post office raid at Lantham.

The sum of £1,200 in currency notes and banknotes had been taken by the raider, and what had become of it no one knew. The Rat had declared that he had thrown it into Lantham Wood to pick up later, a statement that Soames, and no doubt the police also, knew was not the truth.

Soames knew, if no one else did, that that wallet of banknotes had been hidden somewhere after the Rat had had his spill, and he knew that the hiding-place was indicated by the Greek letters scratched in the cigarette-case.

Bunter, of course, had not the remotest idea of anything of the kind. He had never even heard of the post office raid at Lantham; and neither the fat Owl nor the Famous Five had any idea that they had fallen in with a motor bandit on the run!

But Soames knew, and all he wanted was that cigarette-case. His eyes fairly burned at Bunter as the fat junior groped in his pocket.

"Quick!" repeated Soames savagely.

It was a solitary lane, but he did not want to linger. It was dangerous

for him to be there at all in broad daylight.

"I—I—I've got it here!" gasped Bunter. "It ain't yours, you know—it belongs to a man named Thompson——"

"Fool! Give it me!" snarled Soames.

Billy Bunter's fat hand came out of an inner pocket with the silver cigarette-case in it.

Soames' eyes gleamed as he saw it. He knew Rat Hankey's silver case—there was no mistake about it. One glance inside—— He held out an eager hand.

At the same moment Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles fell on five figures coming up the lane from the direction of Friardale.

He glimpsed them between the frosty tree-trunks by the lane, coming along at a trot, their footsteps making no sound on the carpet of snow.

A few moments more and he would have handed the silver case over to Soames, and the eager grasp would have closed on it.

But at sight of the Famous Five, coming on quickly, and almost on the spot, Bunter clutched that silver case instead of handing it over.

"I say, you fellows, help!" yelled Bunter, at the top of his voice, and he made a sudden, frantic bound, and before the sea lawyer could grasp him,

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The Next issue of the
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FRIDAY, December 16th.

he was back in the lane and charging to meet the Famous Five, letting out yell after yell as he went.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Rescue!

"**B**ALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Is that Bunter——"

"Or an escaped porpoise——"

"What the thump——"

Harry Wharton & Co., trotting cheerily up the snowy lane, were surprised to see Billy Bunter suddenly charge out of the trees and race towards them, yelling wildly.

He had something clutched in his fat hand as he charged and yelled. They did not notice what it was. The next moment a man in a thick overcoat and a pulled-down hat rushed out after Bunter. Then they understood the cause of the fat Owl's alarm.

Soames would have run down the yelling fat Owl in a matter of seconds, had not help been at hand. Bunter had not the remotest chance of escape in a foot-race.

But the Famous Five, coming on fast, reached Bunter before Soames could reach him.

"Ow! I say, you fellows, help!" yelled Bunter. "I say, yaroooh! I say—oh crikey!"

Bump!

Bunter slipped and went over. He rolled and roared. Leaving him to roll and roar, Harry Wharton & Co. gave their attention to the man in the thick coat. They could only suppose that some footpad had stopped Bunter in that lonely lane, and they were more than ready to handle that footpad.

But Soames did not stay to be handled.

His back had been towards the Famous Five as he stood facing Bunter under the wayside trees, and Bunter had seen them first. He had leaped in fierce pursuit of the fleeing fat junior, but at sight of the five schoolboys he stopped, and, hardly pausing a second, turned and darted into the trees.

In the twinkling of an eye, almost, he was gone. The Famous Five had not had time to recognise him.

"I say, you fellows!" roared Bunter, as he rolled in the snow. "I say, keep him off! Help! Yaroooh! I say, help! Rescue!"

"All serene, old fat man!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "He's hooked it!"

"The hookfulness was terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh soothingly. "The disappearfulness is preposterous."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He sat up, spluttering. "I say, you fellows, he was going to rob me! Oh crikey!"

"Must be a beginner at the game to pick on you, old fat man!" said Johnny Bull, with a grin. "He would have wasted his time."

"He was after my cigarette-case!" gasped Bunter.

"Eh?"

"What?"

Bunter staggered to his feet. He gave an anxious blink round through his spectacles. But the man in the thick coat was gone. The snowy fields and thickets had swallowed him from sight.

The silver case was still safe—clutched in Bunter's fat paw. It had had a narrow escape—a very narrow escape! But there it was, and the fat Owl pushed it back into his pocket.

"That's what he wanted!" gasped Bunter. "Bagged me, you know, specially for my valuable silver cigarette-case."

"Fathead!" said Bob. "How could he have known that you had it?"

"He jolly well knew!" gasped Bunter. "It was Soames——"

"Soames!" exclaimed the Famous Five, all together.

"Yes, that beast Soames——"

The Famous Five stared at Bunter. They had forgotten, or almost forgotten, Soames. That Soames had waylaid the fat Owl to pinch a cigarette-case from him was startling—if true. Soames was a desperate character, with all his soft, smooth ways, and they had no doubt he had been up to some rascality when they had seen him in Pegg a few days ago. But they found it hard to believe that Soames would play the footpad for a cigarette-case that could hardly be worth a pound. Soames had, no doubt, been every sort of a rascal in his time, but they could not picture him as a petty pilferer.

"Soames!" repeated Bunter. "After my cigarette-case, you know."

"What utter rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"It can't have been Soames," said Harry.

"It was Soames."

"Bow-wow!" said Bob.

"I tell you it was Soames!" roared Bunter. "He jolly well knew that I had that silver case, and he was after it."

"Some footpad!" said Nugent.

"Of course——"

"Don't I keep on telling you it was Soames?" hooted Bunter.

"Bosh!" said Bob Cherry. "Soames is an awful bad hat, but he hasn't taken to picking pockets; he's a cut above that."

"It was Soames——"

"You'd fancy anybody was Soames,

after seeing him the other day," said Bob. "I dare say he's a hundred miles away."

"I tell you it was Soames!" yelled Bunter.

"Oh, all right!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "Have it your own way, old fat man! Soames, if you like. Come on, you men, or we shall be late for dinner!"

"He was after my cigarette-case—" "What did he want it for?" grinned Bob. "Must be fearfully hard-up if

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! The fact is, it's an heirloom in our family, and jolly valuable—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Where did you get it?" asked Bob.

"I've told you, you beast! My Uncle Montague—"

"Oh crumbs! Not Rupert?"

"I mean Rupert. It was a Christmas present from my Uncle Rupert!" said Bunter firmly. "He gave a lot for it. I mean to say, it must be fearfully valu-

"Well, it must be if Soames is after it like that—"

"If!" chortled Bob.

"The if-fulness is terrific."

"Well, he is, and that proves that it must be jolly valuable," declared Bunter. "That Greek inscription inside may mean that it belonged to some big gun, or something—"

"Then you don't know whom it belonged to?"

"Oh, yes! My Uncle Herbert—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE day before Break-up is always a grand time. Morning lessons take place as usual—except that they're even less welcome. But at dinner we have turkey and pudding, with extras in the shape of nuts and oranges. Afternoon school is from 2.30 p.m. to 4 o'clock—this is the last school of the year! In the evening there is no prep, no restrictions, and bed-time is half an hour later than usual. We spend the time in concerts, feeds, rags, raids, packing, games, and farewell suppers.

But it's the afternoon school I'm describing here. Nobody does any real work. In the fag Forms they make Christmas cards and hang decorations, while Wiggins and Twigg sit back with their feet on the desks. In the Remove we're more orderly—catch Quelch shoving his feet on a desk—but it's quite good fun.

We have competitions, with Quelch standing the prizes. This year he awarded a handsome volume of Shakespeare for the best four-line verse on Christmas. We had to stand up and read out our efforts, of which mine was easily the best, though it didn't take the prize.

This was it:

"Good old Christmas! Shout hooray!

Three rousing cheers for Christmas Day!

I'm jolly glad it's come at last, And I'll be jolly sad when it is past!"

Some silly chumps cackled at this, thereby exposing their ignorance. Cackling at another chap's work is jolly bad manners, and Quelch soon told them there was nothing to laugh at. Far from it, he said.

Bolover major was next. He got rid of the following:

"Christmas is a jolly time,
A jolly, jolly time, I say,
It's really jolly, jolly prime,
And jolly, jolly, jolly, gay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" we yelled, while Quelch bellowed for silence and Bolsy turned red and gave us an angry glare. Bolsy has no sense of humour—that's his trouble.

"Sit down, Bolover!" rapped

Last School of the Year!

A Breaking-Up Sketch

by

BOB CHERRY.

Mr. Quelch. "I think it very unlikely that you will ever be Poet Laureate!"

"Jolly, jolly unlikely," murmured Smithy, and there was a chortle.

Russell was next. His muse had soared to sublime heights.

"Oh, thou best season of the year,
Thou art in sooth so fine and good
That we art glad thou dost appear
And bring us heaps and heaps
of food!"

We leaned back and shrieked, while Russell glared and Quelch fought to suppress his feelings.

"Silence!" gurgled Quelch. "The next boy who laughs will be—ha, ha, ha!—will be severely caned—ha, ha! Mauleverer, it is your turn."

Somebody woke Mauly up and he rose languidly and drawled:

"Let us keep
Christmas right.
Go to sleep,
So—good-night!"

"Sorry it's a bit short, sir," explained Mauly. "Too much fag to write a longer one, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Indeed?" glared Quelch. "Well, I hope it won't be too much fag to write that verse out twenty times after class. Perhaps that will help you to conquer your laziness, Mauleverer."

"Oh, gad!"

"Bunter will go on!"

"Oh, lor'!" groaned Bunter. He rose reluctantly, clutching a grubby sheet of paper, and eyed Quelch uncertainly. Quelch glared at him, and then took a cane out

of his cupboard and laid it on his desk, in case it might be needed.

"Proceed!" barked Quelch.

Bunter proceeded. In a voice filled with deep misgivings, he mumbled:

"Christmas comes but once a year
With turkeys full of stuffing.
I eat these beasts with ginger-beer
Because they're much better than
nuffing!"

"What?" roared Quelch, through a howl of laughter from the Form. "How dare you compose such a ridiculously incomprehensible verse as that, Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Silence! Bunter's obtuseness is not a matter for laughter." He grabbed the cane and then slowly put it down again. "I have a great mind to cane you, Bunter. A boy who can rhyme the word 'stuffing' with 'nothing'—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you be silent? Next boy—Rake!"

Rake's verse wasn't bad, but in the end Penfold and Mark Linley tied for the prize, with Redwing second, and Bunter a bad last.

"I disapprove of settling these matters by chance," said Quelch, grimly. "However, it is nearly four o'clock and there is no time to write another verse, so—" He took out a penny. "You may call, Linley."

"Heads!" guessed Marky.

And heads it was, so Mark bagged the prize.

"And now," said Quelch, "put your books away and tidy your desks." We did so. "Well, my boys, we have reached the end of another term, and your work has been quite good—with a few exceptions." He glared at Bunter. "Before you go, let me take this opportunity of wishing you all a very merry Christmas indeed."

"The same to you, sir," came the chorus.

"Thank you—and don't forget your holiday tasks!"

And then the bell rang!

A moment later, amid noise, chatter, laughter, and good wishes, the Last School of the Year—**BROKE UP!**

he's taken to pinching cigarette-cases!"

"Well, it's jolly valuable, you know," said Bunter. "Solid silver."

"Worth a quid, perhaps," said Bob. "I can't quite see Soames rooting about after a quid, with the bobbies looking for him."

"My Uncle Rupert gave five guineas for it—"

"Was that before or after you bought it at Chunkley's, and old Lazarus, too, to give it to me for a Christmas present?" asked Harry Wharton.

able, or why should Soames be after it like that? He wouldn't take all that trouble for a pound or two."

"Bet you he wouldn't!" grinned Bob. "Come on, old fat man! Don't you want any dinner?"

"Don't walk so fast—I can't race!" hooted Bunter. "Keep with me, you fellows, in case that awful villain comes back. I say, you fellows, now I've found out that this silver case is awfully valuable—"

"Is it?" chuckled Bob.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! What I mean is, being so valuable, I could very likely sell it for a good round sum," said Bunter, his eyes glistening behind his spectacles. "What about a big study supper to wind up the term—what? I say, you fellows, you walk down to Courtfield with me after dinner, and I'll sell it to old Lazarus—"

"You howling ass!" roared Harry Wharton. "If you try to sell some-

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thing that doesn't belong to you you'll get run in!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You burbling bandersnatch, old Lazarus would ask you, first of all, where you got it, and then very likely phone for a policeman—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Let him run on!" grunted Johnny Bull. "He must have picked it up somewhere, and he ought to take it to the police station. I don't see why he shouldn't be run in for pinching it."

"Why, you beast—" gasped Bunter.

"I told you to take it to Quelch, you idiotic bloater," said the captain of the Remove. "Quelch will know what to do with it."

"I'll watch it!" snorted Bunter. "It's mine, ain't it? I mean to say, I couldn't find that man Thompson—"

"What man Thompson?"

"Oh, nothing! It's mine!" said Bunter. "Still, I won't take it to Lazarus. Come to think of it, a fellow oughtn't to sell a family heirloom—I mean, a Christmas present. My Uncle Thomas wouldn't like it if he heard. I say, you fellows, I came to meet you to have a talk about the hols—"

"Put it on!" said Harry.

"Run for it!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The school gates were in sight now. The Famous Five broke into a run.

Billy Bunter glared after them with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"I say, you fellows!" he roared.

The Famous Five vanished in at the gates. And Bunter, with an indignant snort, rolled on, and rolled in after them—with that urgent matter of the hols still undiscussed and unsettled.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Blow For Bunter!

"OH!"

On the last day of the term a good many fellows were doing some packing.

So was Bunter!

Other fellows were packing some of their own things. Bunter, as it happened, was packing some of Smithy's.

So he ejaculated "Oh!" in quite startled tones when Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped into the study.

The Bounder stared at him grimly.

Smithy had been sorting things out in his study, ready for packing. He had not yet sorted out a box of cigarettes he kept in the table drawer. Bunter had saved him the trouble—Bunter had sorted that out.

Bunter, at the moment, was standing by the open table-drawer. He had his celebrated silver cigarette-case in one hand, and a bunch of Smithy's cigarettes in the other. He was packing—when Smithy happened in.

Immediately, Bunter put both hands behind him.

As the Bounder had seen both, and what they contained, it was really not of much use. Bunter was not quick on the uptake, and he was generally rather a little late. However, as he was not yet aware that Smithy had spotted both the case and the cigarettes, he was hopeful of getting through.

"Well!" said the Bounder grimly.

"What are you up to?"

"Oh, nothing—I mean I came in to see if I could help you pack, old chap," explained Bunter. "I haven't bagged any of your smokes, you know—I wouldn't! I—I don't smoke—nasty habit, you know! All very well for

fellows like you, Smithy, but a bit no-class for a chap like me!"

"You pilfering, piffing, pic-faced porker—"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"You prying, pinching, potty porpoise—"

"If you're going to call a fellow names, Smithy, I shan't stay here and help you pack!" said Bunter with dignity. "Don't shut that door—I'm just going—"

Slam!

"Look here, you beast, I'm going—"

"Not just yet," said the Bounder. "First of all, you're going to shell out those cigarettes—"

"If you think I'd snaffle your smokes, Smithy—"

"And then I'm going to boot you round the study—"

"Beast!"

The Bounder came round one side of the table. Billy Bunter promptly backed round the other. Cigarette-case and cigarettes came into view. He blinked at the Bounder in great alarm through his big spectacles.

Smithy had a hefty kick. Bunter had sampled it more than once—and he did not want to sample it again.

Really, he wished that he had not dropped into Smithy's study to fill his cigarette-case. But what was a fellow to do? What was the use of a cigarette-case without any cigarettes in it? How was a fellow to get a smoke in the train going home without a smoke to smoke? Bunter was an ass, but not ass enough to spend money on smokes. Smithy was. There were a dozen smokes left in Smithy's box—and Bunter's case held a dozen nicely! It was fearfully irritating to be interrupted like this.

They circumnavigated the table, Bunter panting, the Bounder following him up, ready with a boot.

"Look here, you beast, I wasn't snaffling these smokes!" gasped Bunter. "The fact is, Smithy, you'd get into a row if a beak or a prefect found them here. I—I was going to put them in a safe place for you, old chap!"

"Such as your trousers' pocket?" asked Smithy.

"Yes—I mean no, you beast! Nothing of the sort! Keep off!" yelled Bunter, as the Bounder put on speed round the table.

He hopped and skipped round that table like a fat rabbit. But he did not hop and skip fast enough.

Thud!

"Yaroooooh!"

Thud!

"Yoo-hoop!"

Boot leather, landing twice on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars, spurred Bunter on. He flew. He roared as he flew!

"Beast! Rotter! You kick me again and I'll yell for Quelch!" he roared. "I know he's on the landing—I saw him talking to Wharton there! How'd you like him to catch you with smokes in your study, you beast?"

"By gad! I'll—"

"Yaroooooh! Help!" yelled Bunter, as the Bounder, putting on speed, fairly whizzed round the table and grabbed him. "Leggo! I'll get Quelch here! Ow!"

The Bounder let go.

He was aware that Mr. Quelch was on the landing, within earshot of a yell from Study No. 4! Certainly he did not want the Remove master to barge in and ask what the matter was, and learn that it was a shindy over smokes! Smithy had no desire to wind

up the term with six of the best from Quelch's cane.

He let go, looking at Bunter as if he could have eaten him.

Bunter grinned breathlessly.

He had the whip-hand—or he fancied he had.

"You keep off, you beast!" he said. "Like Quelch to come here and see these smokes? Yah! I'll jolly well bring him here, you beast, if you kick me again!"

Smithy breathed hard, and he breathed deep. But his manner was quite quiet—dangerously quiet.

"I don't want Quelch here," he agreed—"not while there's smokes in the study, that's a cert! Fill your case!"

"I'm jolly well going to!" declared Bunter. "I—I wasn't going to snoop your smokes—I'm not the sort of fellow to snoop a fellow's smokes, I hope—but now you've kicked me I jolly well will, see! And if you try to stop me, you beast, I'll yell to Quelch, and you can jolly well tell him what you've got smokes in the study for, see?"

"I see!" assented the Bounder. "Shove 'em in! The sooner those smokes are out of the study, the better."

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

And he filled his case with the cigarettes.

"I'll leave you one, if you like, Smithy," he said generously.

"No, take the lot," said Smithy. "I don't want any left here, with Quelch nosing around."

"Safer not, perhaps!" grinned Bunter. "All right!"

He crammed the last of the cigarettes into his case and snapped it shut. As he did so, Vernon-Smith reached over to him and unexpectedly grabbed the silver cigarette-case from his hand.

Bunter gave a yelp.

"Beast! Gimme my case! Wharrer you up to? Look here, you gimme my case or I'll yell Quelch, and if he sees those smokes—"

"Quelch won't see any smokes in this study!" grinned the Bounder.

He stepped to the window. With his left hand he threw up the sash. With his right he sent the silver cigarette-case whizzing from the window.

Bunter gave a howl of consternation.

He bounded to the window. He was too late to stop the Bounder's action—not that the fat Owl could have stopped it, anyway. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the cigarette-case, as it went, glimmering in the winter sunshine, describing an arc in the air.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Smithy had put plenty of force into that throw. The metal case whizzed fast and far, and dropped somewhere at a distance from the House and disappeared into drifting snow.

"Oh!" gurgled Bunter. "Oh crikey!" He gave the grinning Bounder a devastating glare. "Beast! Rotter! My cigarette-case—"

"And my cigarettes!" grinned Smithy. "You can keep them if you can find them, old fat bean!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"It will take you some time, I fancy!" grinned the Bounder. "You'll have to put in the hols in the school like Fishy—"

"Rotter!" howled Bunter. "I've a jolly good mind to yell to Quelch and let him come here and find smokes in your study!"

"There's no smokes in my study now!" chuckled Smithy. "Not a single cigarette—or even a cigarette-case!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "You—you—you—keep off, you beast! You—you—you—keep off,



"What are you doing?" said Vernon-Smith, catching Bunter standing by the open table-drawer. "Oh, nothing!" said the fat junior, putting both hands behind him. "I haven't bagged your smokes. I—I don't smoke!"

you rotter! If you kick me again, I'll—yaroooh!"

Smithy did kick him again, and yet again, and the fat Owl rolled out of the study in haste.

He had not, after all, had the whip-hand of Smithy. Smithy had got rid of the cigarettes in the study, and of Billy Bunter's cigarette-case along with them.

Which, really, Billy Bunter might have expected, in the circumstances. But he hadn't—and he rolled away in a state of great wrath and indignation to look outside the House for that cigarette-case.

He might as well have looked for a needle in a haystack. It had dropped in drifted snow, where its weight, as it fell, had naturally buried it. But where it had dropped, Bunter knew no more than the man in the moon.

It was a cold, shivering, and intensely irritated Owl that plodded back to the House after searching half an hour—in vain!

There was no smoke in the homeward train for Bunter the next day. His cigarette-case was full of cigarettes—but the fat Owl was not likely to see it again before next term, if he saw it then!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Man On The Train!

BILLY BUNTER smiled.

Yuletide joviality seemed to shine forth from his fat face.

The cause of that cheery smile lay on Bunter's fat knees. It was a large box of chocolate creams.

Bunter was seated in a train, buzzing out of Lantham Junction. Save for one passenger, who had pushed in at the last moment, he had the carriage to himself.

Greyfriars School had broken up for Christmas. Greyfriars fellows were scattering far and wide.

Billy Bunter had intended to scatter in company. But there had been, so to speak, no takers! He had to scatter on his own!

But there was a consolation. At Lantham Junction, Harry Wharton & Co. had clubbed together a "bob" each to buy a large box of chocolate creams. They had asked Bunter to carry it for them—which Bunter was only too willing to do.

Hardly a minute later they had lost sight of Bunter.

It was, in the opinion of the Famous Five, well worth a box of chocolate creams to lose sight of Bunter at such a time! They were quite keen to lose sight of Bunter, though perhaps not so keen as Bunter, with that box under his arm, was to lose sight of them!

So here was Bunter, homeward bound, with an open box on his fat knees, gobbling, gurgling, happy, and sticky.

True, he was not fixed up for Christmas, after all, and it looked like Bunter Court or nothing. Still, the chocolate creams were a consolation and a comfort. There was another comfort—his minor, Sammy, was not on the same train. Had Sammy Bunter been there, he would have wanted a whack in those chocolate creams.

Billy Bunter knew how greedy Sammy was!

Busy with the chocolate creams, which were going down faster than oysters, Billy Bunter did not take any heed of his fellow-passenger. He was not in the least interested in that fellow-passenger.

So far as he had noticed the man at all, he was a complete stranger in a brown ulster and a cloth cap, with a reddish beard—nothing whatever to interest Bunter in his looks.

Neither was the fat Owl aware that the man in the ulster had been loitering on the platform and had not got into the train till Bunter got in, and had then cut along to get in the same carriage. Bunter, concentrated on chocolate creams, gave him no heed whatever.

It was not till the train was well out of Lantham and running on through a snowy, frosty landscape that his attention was drawn to the man in the brown ulster. Then it was drawn by a quiet, silky smooth voice that Bunter knew—only too well.

"Master Bunter!"

The fat Owl jumped. A chocolate cream in his fat hand on its way to his mouth to join one already there remained suspended in midair like Mahomet's coffin. Petrified, Bunter blinked across at the man in the ulster. "Ooooooh!" he gasped.

The man in the ulster shifted along the seat nearer to him. Two steely eyes fixed on Bunter under the low peak of the cloth cap—steely eyes that Bunter knew, though he had never

seen them accompanied by a reddish beard before.

The fat Owl cast a longing blink up at the communication cord.

"Don't move!" said the smooth voice.

"Oh, no! Groogh! I wasn't going to!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! Sus-sus-Soames! Oh crumbs! Sis-sos-Soames!"

"I am happy to see you again, Master Bunter," said Soames, in those quiet, smooth tones that had a terrifying sound to Billy Bunter's fat ears. "We were interrupted yesterday."

"Oh crikey!"

"But I thought it probable that I might find an opportunity of falling in with you when your school broke up for Christmas," smiled Soames. "It is a pleasure to see you again, Master Bunter!"

"Oh, lor'!"

"Luckily, we have the carriage to ourselves."

"Oh dear!" It did not seem lucky to Bunter!

"It is nearly ten minutes to the next station," smiled Soames. "Ample time for our little chat. Hand over the cigarette-case!"

"Oh, jiminy!" gasped Bunter.

Alone in a railway carriage with James Soames, Billy Bunter would have handed over the cigarette-case, or anything else, like a lamb—had it still been in his keeping. As it was, he couldn't!

"Don't keep me waiting!" said Soames genially. "I should be sorry to hurt you, Master Bunter. But if you do not instantly hand over that silver cigarette-case, I shall throw you off the train!"

"Ow!"

"Better not waste time!" said Soames. "Now, then!"

"I—I—I'd gig-gig-gig-give it you with pip-pip-pip-pleasure!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I would, really, but—but—I—"

"I have warned you not to waste time, Master Bunter," said Soames. "It is a matter of complete indifference to me whether I leave you in this carriage when I step out at the next station, or whether I leave you on the line!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Hand over that cigarette-case, you fat fool!" snapped Soames, his tone changing. "Now, then, before I wring your fat neck!"

"I—I—I haven't got it!" gasped Bunter.

Soames' eyes glittered. He had seen the silver case in Bunter's fat hand the day before, so he was not likely to believe that statement.

"Are you going to bandy words with me, you fat fool?" he asked, between his teeth. "You should know me well enough to know that I am not to be trifled with!"

"But I—I—I haven't, really!" gasped the terrified fat Owl. "I—I'd give it to you like—like anything if I had it, but—it—it's lost!"

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## SPEED MERCHANT.

How's this for a cycling record, lads? When Cyril Heppleston rode from Edinburgh to London he broke the former record by one hour, six minutes, and put up the amazing average speed of twenty miles per hour for over 385 miles—and that includes many terrific hills. He used a Hercules for this ride and certainly proved the super quality of these machines. Incidentally, over 570,000 Hercules Cycles were sold during the year ended 25th November, 1937. What an achievement!

Soames gave him a stare of contempt. "It dropped out of your pocket that day in Pegg when you were snowballed and fell over!" he said, with a sneer.

"Are you going to tell me that has happened again, Master Bunter?"

"Yes—exactly!" Bunter did not mind in the least what he told Soames, so long as Soames believed that he hadn't the silver case.

"Give it to me at once!" snapped Soames, his sarcastic, sneering tone changing to one of savage menace.

"I—I—it's lost!" gasped Bunter.

"You—you can look in my pip-pip-pockets if you like. A chap took it away from me!"

"Tell me no more lies, Bunter!" snarled Soames. "Where is it?"

"I—I—I—"

"Stand up!" said the man in the brown ulster savagely.

Bunter stood up. The box slipped from his fat knees—the chocolate creams rolled on the carriage floor—unheeded! Even Bunter was not thinking of tuck at that moment! He was wriggling with terror.

Slim fingers proceeded to "go through him" so swiftly and so skilfully that it was clear that this was not the first time that Soames had searched pockets.

For fully five minutes the hapless fat Owl stood shivering and unresisting while the light fingers searched. But the result of that search was only the certainty that the silver case was not on Bunter.

"Sit down!"

Bunter flopped into his seat.

The look on Soames' face sent cold chills down his podgy back. It was plain that the sea-lawyer did not believe that he no longer had the silver case—did not think for a moment of believing it. He knew Bunter too well to think for one moment of taking his word on that subject.

Soames at one time had seen a good deal of Billy Bunter. He was aware that Bunter had never sat at the feet of George Washington. George—according to his own account, at least—could not tell a lie. Bunter could—and did—lots and lots! Bunter would have prevaricated to any extent to keep that silver case out of Soames' thievish hands. Soames had not the slightest doubt that he was prevaricating now.

"You—you—you see, I—I ain't got it!" groaned Bunter.

"What have you done with it? Have you a box on this train?"

"Eh—yes!"

"Is it in your box?"

"Oh, no! You see, a—a chap took it from me—he really did!" gasped Bunter. "Grabbed it away from me!"

Soames eyed him narrowly.

"Some other boy has it now?" he asked.

He did not believe Bunter, but he was anxious to make sure.

"Ow! Oh, no! He—he—he chucked it away!"

"What?" roared Soames. "You lying young rascal! Do you think you can take me in with a tale like that? Tell me the truth at once, or you go head-first from the train!"

And he grasped the fat Owl and wrenched him from his seat.

Billy Bunter, his head swimming as he whirled in that sinewy grasp, howled with terror.

It was extremely improbable that Soames would have pitched him from the train; but the fat Owl, quite unaware of that, felt as if his last moment had come.

"The truth!" hissed Soames, his eyes

burning at the frightened fat Owl. "Is it packed in your box? Answer me!"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Bunter. He was prepared to say "Yes" to anything at that terrifying moment; the one thing he was concerned about was to get out of that awful grip. "Yes! Oh crikey! In—in—in by bib-bub-box, you know—packed in my sus-sus-socks! Oh lor'!"

Bump!

Soames flung him back on the seat like a sack of coke.

Bunter bumped there, and gasped.

"You lying young rascal! You should have told me at first!" said Soames, between his teeth. "Do you fancy I am a man that you can deceive, you fat fool?"

"Oh, yes—I mean, no!" gasped Bunter. "Oh lor'!"

"Why did you pack it in your box instead of carrying it in your pocket?" snapped Soames.

"I—I didn't—"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean, I—I—I pip-pop-packed it in my bib-bob-box because—because—because you nearly had it off me yesterday!" gasped Bunter, suddenly struck by a bright idea. "I—I—I thought you might be looking out for another chance, so I—I—I packed it in my bob-bob-box—"

"Enough, you troublesome fool!"

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

Evidently Soames believed that that silver case was packed in his box.

That, naturally, seemed most probable to Soames, as it was not on Bunter, and he was hardly likely to leave it behind at the school when going home for the holidays.

Bunter was willing to let him believe anything he liked, so long as he did not grab Bunter again.

A few minutes later the train slowed down in a station and stopped. Soames, taking no further heed of the Owl of Greyfriars, stepped out and shut the door.

He lingered by the door till the train restarted, perhaps suspecting that Bunter might call to a porter or the guard. But Billy Bunter was not thinking of anything of the kind. His one longing was to see the last of Soames.

In a minute more he saw the last of him.

The train rolled on, and Soames and the platform disappeared from sight.

Bunter wiped a perspiring fat brow.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped.

It was some time before the fat Owl felt equal to gathering up the chocolate creams. But he gathered them up at last, and, finding comfort in them, finished them to the very last one.

## THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Home For The Holidays!

"SAMMY!"

"Br-r-r!"

"Like to cut out and post this letter for me?"

"Hardly!"

"It's not five minutes to the pillar-box, Sammy!" urged Billy Bunter. "Don't be a lazy little beast, old chap!"

Bunter minor of the Second Form at Greyfriars did not answer in words. He merely grinned, settled himself more comfortably in his chair, and devoted his attention to a bunch of muscatels in one fat hand, and a fistful of almonds in the other fat hand.

Billy Bunter, sitting at the table, blinked at him with a deeply scornful blink.

Bunter had written a letter. He wanted it posted. It was rather an



urgent letter, and Sammy was too lazy to walk down to the pillar-box and post it.

It was very irritating. That letter was addressed to Harry Wharton, at Wharton Lodge, and was designed to remind the captain of the Remove of Bunter's fat existence, which he had perhaps happily forgotten.

Reminded of that fat existence, it was possible—if not probable—that the beast would realise that no Christmas festivities could be really a success without Bunter's fascinating company.

A couple of days at Bunter Court seemed to have sufficed for Bunter in the way of home, sweet home.

Perhaps that was because Bunter Court, at a close view, diminished to Bunter Villa; the flocks of liveried flunkies to a house-parlourmaid who seemed to have a rooted objection to doing anything for Bunter; and a cook who had a still more strongly rooted objection to snafflings and snoopings from the kitchen!

Having drawn Sammy blank, as it were, Billy Bunter blinked round at Bessie.

Bessie's occupation was rather like Sammy's. She had an orange in one hand and an apple in the other. She was giving attention to both.

"Bessie, old dear—" said Billy in his most affectionate brotherly tone.

"Haven't got one!" answered Miss Elizabeth Bunter.

"Eh—one what?"

"Stamp!"

"I don't want a stamp!" said Bunter.

"I've got a stamp."

"Oh, I thought you wanted a stamp, as you said 'old dear'!" said Bessie.

"What do you want, then?"

Billy Bunter breathed hard. This was the way he was misjudged in the family circle, just as he was at school.

He couldn't call a fellow "old chap" at school without the fellow fancying that he wanted something. Now Bessie fancied that he wanted something because he called her "old dear," like the warm-hearted, and affectionate brother he was. It was pretty sickening.

"It's a lovely, frosty night, Bessie!" said Bunter. "A trot down to the pillar-box will do you good, after all you've eaten!"

"I knew you wanted something!" agreed Bessie.

"I was thinking of you!" said Bunter, with dignity. "Just what you want—a trot in this beautiful fresh air—"

"It's foggy!"

"Who cares for a spot of fog?" said Bunter. "I shouldn't!"

"Well, you go and post your letter!"

Bunter breathed hard again. Bessie was as lazy as Sammy; there was no doubt about that. It looked as if Bunter would have to post that letter himself if it was going to be posted at all.

"Laziness all round!" said Bunter bitterly. "Blessed if I don't think I might grow lazy myself if I stick here all through the hols!"

And Bunter picked up his letter, and went for his coat and cap. He jammed on the cap, crammed himself into the coat, wound a muffler round his fat neck, and stepped out into the December night.

"Groooogh!" he remarked to the night.

It was only five minutes to the pillar-box up the road. Bunter had had no doubt that a trot would have done Bessie good, but he did not seem to anticipate much pleasure from the trot himself.

However, he rolled down the dark garden path, let himself out at the

creaking gate, and turned his fat face up the damp, foggy, shadowy road. It was a wide road, with leafless trees on either side, lighted—more or less—by lamps that were few and far between.

It was dark, it was damp, it was misty, it was distinctly unpleasant, and Billy Bunter snorted and grunted as he trudged up the road.

Had he blinked round, he would probably not have seen a dusky figure that emerged from the shadows and followed him.

He trudged on, reached the red pillar-box, groped for the orifice, and dropped his letter therein.

Turning to walk back, he almost ran into an overcoated figure.

"Here, look out!" yapped Bunter irritably. "Don't walk into a chap! I—I say, who—what—Leggo! What—Oh crikey! What are—"

"Quiet!"

"Oh lor'!"

Bunter was quiet enough after he had heard that smooth, low voice. He hardly needed the iron grip on his fat arm to keep him quiet.

Bunter had forgotten Soames! Bunter had a way of forgetting anything that was not right under his little fat nose!

He had got rid of Soames on the train by "stuffing him" that the silver case was in his box! It had not even occurred to him that Soames might trail him home and watch for a chance of snaffling him—after he had unpacked that box! He guessed it now!

He wriggled in that iron grip.

The man in the overcoat drew him into the shadow of trees by the roadside. Then his voice came sharp, staccato:

"Give me the cigarette-case!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Quick!" hissed Soames.

"I—I—I haven't got it!" gasped Bunter. "I—I told you on the train I—"

"You have unpacked your box from school before now, Master Bunter. Is it in your pocket? Quick!"

"Oh, no!"

"In your house?" breathed Soames.

"Oh, no!" gasped Bunter, in terror.

The thought of Soames paying a surreptitious visit

in the darkness of the winter night at Bunter Villa was terrifying.

"Then where is it?"

It was useless to tell Soames over again that a fellow had grabbed it at Greyfriars and chucked it away! He had told him that on the train, and it had not been good enough.

Soames had no doubt that that silver case had reached Bunter's home in Bunter's box! That was why he was there, lurking and watching in the December darkness.

Bunter had to start, as it were, from  
(Continued on next page.)

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that point—it was no use telling Soames now that that silver case never had been in his box. The grip on his fat arm seemed like cracking the bone. He did not want it transferred to his fat neck!

"Where?" breathed Soames.

He compressed his grip, till Bunter squeaked with pain.

"I—I—I—"

"Quick!"

"I—I—I've just posted it!" gasped Bunter.

Bunter thought that that was pretty good. Soames, certainly, had seen him drop something into the letter-box. He would not believe the truth—and Bunter had to tell him something! So he told him that!

"Posted it!" repeated Soames. He bent his head, scanning the fat, scared face in the shadows. "Where—to whom?"

"A—a—a Christmas present!" gasped Bunter. Like an inspiration, he remembered that he had offered that silver case to the captain of the Remove as a Christmas present! That gave him the idea. "I—I—I didn't want to keep it after—after you got after me for it, so—so—so I've sent it to—"

"To whom?"

"Wharton!" said Bunter promptly. "I offered it to him at Greyfriars, really, but he wouldn't take it there, so I've sent it to him by post, see?"

Soames searched his face. He had seen Bunter post something, but he had not been near enough, in the dark, to see what it was, whether a letter or a small packet. But the fact that Bunter actually had posted something, under his eyes, gave colour to the fat Owl's statement.

"Jolly glad to get shut of it, too!" added Bunter. "I couldn't find Mr. Thompson, and so—"

"Fool!"

"Well, I mean to say, if I'd found Mr. Thompson, I should have given it to him, as that chap asked me to, but—"

"Is this the truth?" muttered Soames.

Bunter gave an agonised squeal as the grip on his arm closed like a vice.

"Ow! Yes! Wharton will get it in the morning, first post! You—you can ask him, if you like!" gasped Bunter. "You can get him on—the phone at Wharton Lodge. I say—"

Bunter blinked round in the gloom. The grip on his fat arm was released; Soames was gone. Bunter gave one blink round—then he started down the road at top speed, running as if for his fat life, and did not stop till he reached the front door of Bunter Villa, where he gasped and gurgled for breath, and spluttered and spluttered, as if he would never leave off gasping and gurgling, and spluttering and spluttering.

## THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Billy Bunter Looks In—And Out!

"SING heigh-ho, the holly!  
This life is so jolly!"

Bob Cherry was singing. That, at least, was Bob's own belief; other fellows were often in doubt whether Bob, when he sang, was singing or just shouting for fun.

In the old hall at Wharton Lodge, in the snowy winter morning, Bob sang, from cheery exuberance of spirits, as he stood on top of a pair of steps, putting up holly, to adorn a set of ancient antlers.

ting up holly, to adorn a set of ancient antlers.

"Then heigh-ho the holly!"

The words were Shakespeare's; the tune was not recognisable as anybody's. Johnny Bull, who was putting up mistletoe, called back—misunderstanding:

"Haven't you got it?"

"Eh?" Bob left off singing. "Got what?"

"The holly!" answered Johnny.

"Yes, I've got it here—sticking it up."

"Then what the dickens are you asking for it for?"

"Eh? Who was asking for it?" inquired Bob.

Johnny Bull turned round from his decorative labours to stare at Bob on the steps.

"Potty?" he asked. "You were shouting out for the holly. Didn't you hear him, Inky?"

"The heartfulness was terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bawling for it," said Johnny, "and you've got it all the time!"

"You—you—you silly owl!" hooted Bob. "I wasn't shouting for the holly, you fathead! I was singing—"

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five were busy with Christmas decorations. Stacks of holly had been cut and carried in, and all hands were at cheery work. The big door stood wide open, letting in a flood of winter sunshine and a glare from the carpet of snow outside.

It was a bright, frosty morning. Every face was as bright as the morning.

Bob, as usual, was in exuberant spirits. Some fellows might have been shirty when their singing a song of the holly was mistaken for bawling for the same—but not so Bob!

Perched rather precariously on top of the steps, with both hands full of holly, Bob restarted after the interval:

"Then heigh-ho, sing heigh-ho  
Unto the green holly!  
Then heigh-ho, the holly!  
This life is so jolly!"

Bob's friends know now that he was singing—as he had told them! So that was all right.

Across the sunny doorway a shadow fell. It was the shadow of a plump figure. A pair of spectacles gleamed in.

"I say, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh spun round, to stare at that unexpected greeting—and Bob, turning his head also, nearly fell off the steps. He righted himself in time, the steps wobbling wildly.

"Bunter!" yelled Bob.

"The esteemed and ludicrous Bunter!"

"What the thump—"

"I—I—I've just looked in!" said Bunter hastily. "Something rather important to tell you, Wharton, old chap."

"Look out again!" suggested Harry.

"But I haven't told you—"

"Never mind that. Tell somebody else!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Good-bye!"

The Famous Five resumed decorations.

Billy Bunter blinked at them. Then

he rolled in. He gave Bob, on the steps, rather an uneasy blink.

"Look here, if you fall over, don't fall on me!" squeaked Bunter. "You look as if you're going over any minute. I don't want you to come down wallop on my head, you know!"

"Just like you!" agreed Bob. "If you were a good-natured chap, you'd like a fellow to fall on something soft."

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter stood with his back to the blazing log-fire in the hall, and blinked at the Famous Five—with a special uneasy eye on Bob.

"I say, Wharton, any mince pies about?"

"Not till lunch."

"Well, I don't mind if I stay to lunch."

"I do!"

"Beast! I mean, look here, old fellow, I've run across to tell you something rather special. 'Tain't every fellow who would tear himself away from a throng of guests on your account!" said Bunter warmly. "We've got rather a crowd at Bunter Court this Christmas—pretty distinguished people, too! We're expecting one of the princes—"

"Then for goodness' sake don't risk missing him! Good-bye!"

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter. "If you want a dangerous villain knocking you on the head, all right! I won't say anything! I came over specially to warn you! Now I won't!"

Five surprised stares were fixed on Billy Bunter at that! Four juniors stood and stared at him. Bob balanced himself on top of the steps and stared down at him. Bunter had succeeded in astonishing the natives.

"That villain Soames—" went on Bunter.

"Soames!" repeated the Famous Five, with one voice.

"Yes, Soames!" said Bunter. "He got after me last night—caught me as I was posting a letter. By the way, did you get my letter, Wharton?"

"Yes; you can take it away with you, if you like! It's there, on the hall table."

"Haven't you read it?"

"How could I, when I haven't opened it?"

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've a jolly good mind not to warn you about Soames now!" roared Bunter.

"Stick to that!" assented Wharton.

"You silly chump, you're going to have him after you!" howled Bunter. "He's after that cigarette-case—"

"Oh, my hat! He won't get any cigarette-cases from me!" said Harry, laughing. "I'm not a rorty dog, loaded with cigarettes—"

"I mean that silver case, you fat-head! He thinks you've got it!" explained Bunter. "He's fearfully keen to get hold of it, as I told you. It must be awfully valuable, you know. He wouldn't believe me when I told him it was lost, so I told him I'd sent it to you for a Christmas present—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"I had to tell him something, to get shut of him! I thought that rather neat!" said Bunter. "You see, thinking you've got it, he will let me alone after this, and get after you, instead. See?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"But I wasn't going to let you down," said Bunter generously. "I thought I'd better give you the tip. I came over for that entirely—not think—"

(Continued on page 28.)



# The Greyfriars Pantomime by William Wibley

## JACK AND THE BEANSTALK



Wibley's latest was the mock Panto that Removites performed in the Rag on the night before Break-Up. Here is some of ACT ONE. Wibley thinks it's great. Good job someone thinks so.

EDITOR.

**SCENE:** The Widow Wibley's cottage. **WIDOW WIBLEY** is washing socks, with a morose expression and a bar of soap. Her son, **FAT JACK**, is eating a Christmas pie and expecting a postal order from a titled relative. It is Christmas Day.

**THE WIDOW:** Guzzle, guzzle! Gnaw and nuzzle!  
Where you put it is a puzzle!  
It's really time you wore a muzzle!

**FAT JACK:** Oh, really, widow! Be a sport!  
This pie was sent from Fat-Jack Court!  
I haven't been to Coker Castle,  
Or pinched the Baron Coker's parcel!  
He didn't rave and tear his hair,  
Besides, you know, I wasn't there!

**THE WIDOW** wrings her socks and then her hands.

**THE WIDOW:** Alas, alack! It's past a joke!  
I'm busted to the wide, and broke!  
My meagre earnings have been spent,  
I cannot pay the baron's rent.  
And now you have to make him wild  
By pinching pies, you bloated child!  
No Christmas Day festivities  
For me, alas— But who are these?

**BOBBY and BLACKY**, two **BROKER'S MEN**, dance in, singing:

A Merry Christmas, missus!  
A Merry Christmas, barrel!  
For we're the "Waits," and this is  
Our little Christmas carol:  
We wait here for a pittance  
Of two pun' twelve and ten!  
We wait for a remittance,  
And will not go till then,  
For we're—the—broker's—men!

**BOBBY:** Hallo, hallo, hallo! Good-day!  
Well, here we are, and here we stay!

**BLACKY:** The stayfulness will be terrific  
Unless the money is prolific!

**THE WIDOW:** This is a trick of Baron Coker's,  
(wailing) He's been and gorn and sent the brokers!

**FAT JACK:** Oh, really, I will pay the rent,  
And see the back of these two warders;  
I'm sure my titled uncle's sent  
My long-expected postal orders!

**THE WIDOW:** Take Clara out, you fat disgrace,  
And sell her in the market-place;  
Bring back the dough on speedy legs,  
And if you stop at Uncle Clegg's  
I'll flog and flay you—that's a tip!  
And now I'll take my daily kip!

**THE WIDOW** drops on a sofa and off to sleep, while **FAT JACK** leads out **CLARA THE COW**.

**FAT JACK:** Come on, you beastly, horny brute,  
Or else I'll help you with my boot!

**THE COW:** Leggo, and give a cow a chance!  
I want to do a farewell dance,

**CLARA** does a slow dance as **FARMER FISH** looks in.

**FARMER FISH:** Say, bo, you wanna sell that cow?  
Sure, I'm your antelope—and how!

**BOBBY:** Hallo, old fat man, here's a bidder!  
He'll give you money for the widder!

**FAT JACK:** I say, you fellows, he's so mean  
He wouldn't give a chap a bean!

**FARMER FISH:** I kinder guess you're wrong—yes, sir!  
Why, look, I gotta bean right hyer!  
And is this bean the goods? Why, gee,  
It's sure the caterpillar's knee!  
Just plant this bean and try your luck,  
You'll sure have beanstalks full of tuck!

**FAT JACK:** I say, old fellow, it's a deal!  
It's ages since I had a meal!

**THE COW:** Good 'evings! Have I really seen  
(dazed) That fat ass sell me for a bean?

**FARMER FISH:** I'll tell the world he's sold you, and  
You're for Chicago, to be canned!

He leads **CLARA** away to the cannery as the **WIDOW** wakes. **BOBBY** and **BLACKY** dance round her, singing:

He's sold the cow, he's sold the cow,  
And, lumme, won't there be a row?  
He's sold her for a measly bean,  
And, lumme, won't there be a scene?

**THE WIDOW** starts and looks fiercely at **FAT JACK**.

**THE WIDOW:** You've only got a bean for Clara?

**FAT JACK:** Oh, really! Nothing could be fairer!

**THE WIDOW:** A bean! A mouldy scarlet runner!  
(screaming) Give it to me, you twenty-tonner!

She flings the bean out of the window.

And you'll go after it, you chump!  
Just let me find a cricket stump,  
I'll give you beans! I'll slaughter you!  
Oh, here it is!

**FAT JACK:** Ow-wow! Yaroooooh!  
(wildly)

**THE WIDOW:** That dancing cow was worth no end  
(whacking) Of money to a circus;  
And now she's gone, I'll have to spend  
My Christmas in the work'us!  
To sell her for a bean! My hat!  
Take that and that and that and that!

**BOBBY** (pointing out of the window):

'Ere, 'old 'ard, 'ow 'uge and 'igh  
That beanstalk's growing on the sly!

**BLACKY:** Oh crimes! The growfulness is weird,  
The top's completely disappeared!

**FAT JACK** dashes to the beanstalk and climbs it rapidly.

**FAT JACK:** Yaroop! I'll climb up past the stars  
To dodge that cricket stump of ma's!

**THE WIDOW:** Come back! I haven't done!  
(wrathfully) I'd hardly just begun!

**BLACKY:** The climbfulness is going strong,  
He'll reach the moonfulness e'er long!

**BOBBY:** His rotund figure's growing dim—  
Some bean, to stand the weight of him!

### FINAL CHORUS.

Farewell, O fat one, thou art gone,  
Who knows what star to light upon?  
But this we hope with might and main,  
That thou wilt not come back again!

**ACT II** is better still. **FAT JACK** gets into **GIANT BOLSO'S** castle and sees a goose which the giant has bought for his Christmas dinner. The giant sees him seize it, and throws him into a dungeon until he has written a million lines of Virgil. But **FAT JACK** throws his voice and makes the goose order the giant to let him out or he'll never lay another golden egg. Our hero then snaffles the goose and legs it, pursued by the giant, who offers a term's pocket-money to anyone who will stop him.

**ACT III.**—The cottage again. **FAT JACK** comes down the beanstalk head-first, and the **WIDOW** at once gets busy with the cricket stump. But suddenly the goose lays a clutch of eggs, and the **WIDOW** immediately pockets them and forgives everyone all round. When the **GIANT BOLSO** arrives, **BOBBY** and **BLACKY** knock him stone cold and sell him to a circus for enough to pay the rent. Just when they're all going to settle down to a happy Christmas, Fat Jack's postal order arrives, and they all die of astonishment, to slow music from the orchestra.

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ing anything about the hols, you know. Simply to warn you of your danger, old fellow—wholly out of friendship."

"You blithering, blethering, blather-ing owl!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Do you fancy I'm going to believe that Soames is wasting his time hunting for a silly cigarette-case, when he could buy one like it for thirty bob?"

"He seems to want that one specially," said Bunter. "There must be something very special about that cigarette-case, for him to want it so much. I think it must be worth a lot of money, somehow. May be more valuable than it looks—an antique, or something. I—I mean, I—I know it's an antique. It's been in our family since the time of the Plantagenets—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Famous Five.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here—"

"Anybody ever heard of the jolly old Plantagenets smoking cigarettes—before tobacco was heard of in England?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean the Tudors—that is to say, the Stuarts!" said Bunter hastily. "The fact is, it dates from James the—fourth—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Or Charles the Third—I forget which," said Bunter. "That Greek inscription in it is really an ancient motto of the Bunter family. See?"

"The seefulness is not terrific."

"It must be awfully valuable, and I jolly well wish I still had it," said Bunter. "Now Soames thinks you've got it, Wharton—"

"Gammon!"

"He's after it—"

"Rats!"

"And he will be after you—"

"Ring off!"

"Don't you believe me?" roared Bunter.

"Believe you! Oh, my hat! Not quite!"

"He got me," said Bunter, "and he will get you now! If you feel nervous, old chap, I shouldn't mind staying a day or two and looking after you a bit. I hardly like leaving a swarm of distinguished guests, but, dash it all, friendship comes first! What about it?"

"Nothing!"

"Beast!"

"Now you've told your funny story, good-bye, old fat man! Remember me to the prince—when you see him—"

"And take a bit of holly with you, old fat bean!" said Bob Cherry. "Here it is!"

Whiz!

"Yooop!" roared Bunter, as a section of holly landed on his fat little nose. "Owl! Wow! Beast! Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave the playful Bob a ferocious glare through his big spectacles. Then he clutched up a cushion from a chair.

Whiz!

"Oh!"

"Great pip!"

Crash!

Bob's position, on top of the steps, was none too safe. That cushion did it! It missed Bob by about a yard—but it hit the steps! The steps wobbled and went over. So did Bob Cherry!

The steps crashed! Bob Cherry crashed! He rolled on the floor—and the holly!

The holly was rather sharp to roll on! Bob Cherry roared—and roared, and roared again, as he rolled over the holly, and then sat up on it! He sat on it for about the millionth part of a

second, and then bounded to his feet like a jack-in-a-box!

"Owl! Oh! Wow! Yarooop! Whoop!" roared Bob.

He seemed damaged.

"He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter. "I say, you fellows—he, he, he! Here, keep off, you beast— Oh crikey!"

Bunter made one wild bound for the doorway as the infuriated Bob rushed at him. He bounded like a kangaroo.

He shot out of the doorway like a pip from an orange. After him shot Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the doorway, where four fellows gathered to watch.

Bunter was going down the snowy drive on his highest gear; and after him went Bob, gathering snow as he careered, and whizzing snowballs.

Snowball after snowball squashed on Bunter as he flew! Wild squeaks floated back. Billy Bunter and Bob Cherry disappeared down the drive, both going strong, leaving the Co. howling with merriment in the doorway.

## THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Doggo!

"**B**EASTS!" murmured Billy Bunter.

His face, and his big spectacles, were glued to a pane of glass.

The "beasts" to whom he referred were within the room. It was Harry Wharton's "den," and the five fellows there seemed to be very merry and bright—quite a contrast to the fat Owl outside!

Billy Bunter was rather in the position, at that moment, of a fat Peri at the gate of Paradise!

There was a balcony outside that French window, approached by steps from the garden and shadowed by a tall tree. Billy Bunter knew his way about Wharton Lodge—and there he was! In the room, the Famous Five were playing darts. The December evening had fallen, and outside all was dark, and snowy, and fearfully cold. Within, all was warm and bright.

There was a blazing fire, there was a dish of fruit on a table, there were roomy armchairs. Billy Bunter's eyes, through the frosty glass, lingered on them longingly. The window was a little ajar, and he could hear, as well as see—though the Famous Five, within, had not the faintest or remotest idea that Bunter was there.

Bob Cherry, cheery as he looked, every now and then gave a wriggle—reminiscent, no doubt, of the holly! That was a slight comfort to Bunter! And, really, he needed some comfort!

Bunter was rather in a bad box! That morning he had—with some difficulty—extracted his fare to Wimford from Mr. Bunter. He had not been able to take a return ticket—neither had he expected to need one!

A fellow who travelled in wild and snowy weather to give a friendly warning to a pal might naturally have expected to be asked to stay the night, at least! Bunter had banked on a night—which he relied on his skill in such matters to extend to another, and another, right up to the end of the hols!

But alas for Bunter! So far from staying the night he had not even stayed the day! He had departed in hot haste, smothered with snow, and only too happy to get away.

With the return half of a ticket in his pocket, no doubt the fat Owl would have headed for home, sweet home. Without the same, Bunter was landed! He

had no rooted objection to bilking the railway, if it came to that; but that was a risky and desperate resource, and far from a reliable one! Hence the presence of the fat Owl on that snowy balcony!

His friendly warning to Harry Wharton had brought him nothing! Wharton did not believe that Soames was after the cigarette-case; did not believe that the fat Owl was telling the truth, or getting within yards of it. That warning, in fact, might easily, if genuine, have been given by telephone, so it was fairly obvious that that was not the only reason why Bunter had arrived in person!

Still, there was Bunter—and he could not walk home! So Bunter was going to stay the night!

But, in the circumstances, his stay was going to be, so to speak, private—very private indeed!

Knowing his way in by that door on the back balcony, it was really easy—the door was not even fastened. Only at the moment there was a lion in the path—five lions, in fact. Wharton's "den" being occupied, Bunter had to wait till it was unoccupied. It was rather amusing to watch Bob Cherry still wriggling from the holly, but it did not encourage Bunter to venture within reach of his boot.

"That fat ass!" He heard Bob's voice.

"Still feeling the holly, old bean?" "Owl! Yes! I wish that podgy barrel hadn't rolled off so fast! I'd have liked to boot him all the way back to the station!"

"May turn up again!" grinned Nugent. "Shouldn't be surprised to see him roll in to-morrow, then you can boot him."

"Won't I just!" said Bob.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

A bell rang below, and the game of darts was left unfinished. Leaving dart board and darts, the Famous Five trooped out, Wharton shutting off the light as he went.

Which was a great relief to William George Bunter.

He pushed open the french window, stepped softly in, and pushed it shut again.

He did not venture to turn on the light again, but the leaping blaze of the log-fire gave him plenty of illumination. For a moment he listened at the door; the chums of the Remove were gone. Then he whizzed to the table, on which lay the dish of fruits.

Bunter was, of course, hungry. That was his usual state. Now he was more so than usual. He stood and gobbled.

There were apples, oranges, nuts, muscatels, and other things. They followed one another rapidly on the downward path.

Bunter would have preferred turkey, followed by Christmas pudding and mince pies. But it was a case of any port in a storm, and all was grist that came to his mill. The fat Owl was happily occupied for a good half-hour.

Then he listened at the door again, but there was no sound of returning footsteps.

He tiptoed to the other door, which gave admittance to Wharton's bedroom. He blinked into the latter apartment.

He was in want of a hideout; but there was no hiding-place there, unless he parked himself under the bed.

He shut the communicating door again, and blinked round the den.

A big armchair before the fire tempted him. But he did not yield to that temptation. He was not going



to be found there till it was too late—much, too late—for him to catch any train.

It would be safer not to be found till morning. A fellow could not be too careful. Once Wharton had gone to bed and gone to sleep, it would be safe to park himself in that big chair before the fire. Not till then.

Blinking round the den, he made the happy discovery of a box of chocolates. This delayed him for ten minutes or so. He left the box empty, and resumed blinking. Then he found what he wanted.

The dartboard was fixed up on a tall screen, which stood across a corner. It was a rather old screen, and it did not matter if darts, missing the board, bored into it—and, in fact, a good many had done so. It was unlikely that that screen would be shifted. And behind it was ample space for a

Bunter snored in the dormitory. Bunter did not really believe so. He had never heard himself snore, at any rate. Still, he was not going to run risks.

It was about an hour later that Bunter, half-dozing, was thankful that he had not gone to sleep. He heard a sound in the room, and started, and listened with all his fat ears.

One of the fellows, he concluded, had come up to look for something, though it was odd that he did not turn on the light. Apparently he was looking round by the flare of the firelight.

Who it was Bunter could not see, parked behind the screen, and he was very careful to make no movement and no sound.

He grinned as he listened.

Whoever it was, the beast did not know that he was there, or dream of suspecting it.

Wharton was left alone. Bunter heard him lock the french window.

The light was shut off again. The communicating door opened and closed. Harry Wharton had gone to bed, and Bunter, at long last, was safe.

He had only to wait till the household had settled down for the night, and then he would be free to crawl out of his hiding-place, heap logs on the fire, and park himself in a comfortable chair. He waited.

All was silent and still, save for the wail of the winter wind round the old chimneys of Wharton Lodge.

Billy Bunter stirred at last.

With great caution he crept out from behind the screen, crept across to the fire, which was burning very low, and stacked logs on it, immediately plunging the room into deep darkness.

Then he packed himself in the deep

**THE HEADMASTER:** My ideal Christmas would be a quiet gathering at which were all the friends I have ever known since my school-days long ago. The only drawback to this is the fact that I should be obliged to hire the Royal Albert Hall or Olympia in which to entertain, for I am glad to say that they number many hundreds.

**Mr. PROUT:** I should like very much to spend the festive season in a lovely house surrounded by pheasants, partridges, grizzly bears, and other ferocious creatures. Although I am not, I trust, a bloodthirsty man, I should spread havoc and dismay through their ranks, and they would fall before my gun like chaff before the reaper. In the evenings I should wish to have a little chat of five or six hours with my host before retiring to my well-earned rest. Such a Christmas, I venture to say, would be unprecedented. (Or even unparalleled.—Ed.)

**Mr. QUELCH:** My ideal Christmas would be spent with my typewriter and my "History of Greyfriars" in a secluded spot where Bunters cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

**GOSLING, THE PORTER,** says this here: "Which my ideal Christmas would be at a first-class hotel at the seaside, where I could drink my Christmas dinner in comfort and look out of the window to see all young rips in the country being marched off the pier and drowned."

**FISHER T. FISH:** I guess my ideal Christmas would be passed in the State of Iowa—sure!

## My Perfect Christmas

Greyfriars Celebrities Give Their Own Ideas of An Ideal Christmas.

**LORD MAULEVERER:** I guess my ideal Christmas would be passed in a State of Coma—snore!

**HARRY WHARTON:** I could spend a perfect Christmas anywhere as long as it was more than 10,000 miles away from Bunter.

**SQUIFF:** A hot day, a cold turkey, and a real good cricket match. That's Christmas in Australia.

**BILLY BUNTER:** You couldn't have a perfecter Crissmus than we have at Bunter Court. As the poet puts it:

And kings and princes you can meet  
In twos and threes on every seat,  
Indulging in a race to eat  
Their various provishuns!

And my titled relatives are there,  
showering postel-orders on their  
favorite nevw. For dinner, witch  
lasts from 6 a.m. to midnight, we  
have a dussen turkeys, ten geese, a  
cuvvey of chickens, a flock of  
pheasants and a herd of grice—  
witch is the plooral of "grouse."  
Then for meat we have a Bore's

Head and a nox roasted hole, in  
addishun to a hunch of venison—  
(The rest of this menu will be published in seven attractively bound volumes at £5 each. Order yours now.—Ed.)

**HAROLD SKINNER:** Me for Monte Carlo. After winning a fortune at the tables, I should go home with a fat cigar and play banker and nap for £5 points. A man could have a really fine Christmas at Monte. (But suppose a man LOST a fortune at the tables instead of winning one?—Ed.)

**WILLIAM WIBLEY:** The ideal way to spend Christmas is to perform a pantomime for your guests. You can leave guzzling and gorging to pigs like Bunter. Grease-paints and wigs are the things to give you a Merry Christmas.

**BOB CHERRY:** Have six hours sleep, rise at seven, take a six-mile walk and a seven-course dinner—and you'll never be at sixes and sevens.

**CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE:** A fellow needs a long vac. at Christmas to recover from the shock of his presents. If a fellow's aunts give him purple socks and lilac waistcoats, a fellow is naturally in a state of nervous exhaustion until they've been burned, and even then a fellow dreams about them at nights. My ideal Christmas is for a fellow to be allowed to choose his own Christmas presents—what?

**TOM DUTTON'S** only reply to our question was: "Hear, hear!" We wish he would.

fat Owl to cram himself into the corner.

Still there was no sound of anyone coming up. After supper, in fact, they were doing charades in the hall downstairs. Unaware of that, and dreading discovery, Bunter was anxious to get safely parked.

He gave a last searching blink round, failed to find anything further of an edible nature, annexed a cushion for comfort, and squeezed into the corner behind the screen.

There he sat on the cushion, warm enough and comfortable enough, and prepared to wait till the fellows had gone to bed.

Sitting there, leaning back in the angle of the walls, the fat Owl was rather disposed to nod off to sleep. But he resisted it manfully. According to what fellows said at Greyfriars,

He heard the communicating door open. Whoever it was, had passed into the adjoining bed-room. In a few minutes he returned, and Bunter heard him again. Then the sounds of movement suddenly ceased.

Whoever it was, was gone.

Billy Bunter, happy to be undiscovered, dozed again. He was in danger of slipping into slumber, when infallibly his snore would have betrayed him, when there was a bang of an opening door, a tramp of feet, and a buzz of voices.

Bunter suppressed his breathing as the light was switched on. The beasts had come up to bed.

For two or three minutes they remained chatting in Wharton's den; then four fellows went out, good-nights were said, and the door closed. Harry

armchair, and settled down with a happy grunt of comfort. His little round eyes had closed behind his big, round spectacles, and he was about to slide off into happy slumber, when a sudden sound made him start like a scared rabbit.

It was the sound of the lock at the French window snapping open.

### THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

In The Dark Night!

**HARRY WHARTON** woke—suddenly.

He woke, but he fancied that he must be still dreaming. For he woke with a hand jammed over his mouth, stifling any cry that he might have uttered, another hand gripping his neck, and pinning him down.

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He lay utterly amazed—too amazed even to be scared—but, realising that it was no dream, that someone in the dark was pinning him, and holding him silent.

"Quiet!" said a soft, smooth voice. "A sound or a struggle, and I shall use harsh measures, Master Wharton."

It still seemed like a dream—or, rather, a nightmare. For it was the smooth, sleek voice of James Soames that was breathing the words in his ear.

Wharton could not speak; he could not cry out. He was so utterly startled that it was not easy for him to collect his senses. He lay with his heart pounding, staring up into the darkness. Only a black shadow in the dark showed that a figure bent over the bed.

"Probably you know who I am," went on the smooth voice. "No doubt you know what I want. I have taken care that you did not cry out when I awakened you, Master Wharton; but now I shall let you speak. Only I warn you that I have a leaden pipe in my hand, and at that first attempt to give the alarm, your skull will crack like an egg-shell."

The grasp was taken from the Greyfriars junior's neck, and from his mouth. He was free to cry out, but he did not. He knew quite well that the threat was not an empty one, that the unseen weapon was ready to crash. Only too well, of old, he knew of what Soames was capable.

"You may sit up."

Wharton dizzily sat up in bed.

There was a sudden gleam of light—a flash-lamp turned on by the man beside the bed. Leaving it on, Soames placed it on the bedside table, where it shone on Wharton's pale, startled

face, and on his own, and cast a dim glimmer over the whole room.

"Soames!" breathed Harry, as his eyes rested on the cool, calm, clear-cut, smooth-skinned face of the one-time manservant, the one-time sea-lawyer.

"Precisely, Master Wharton!"

There was something strange, almost terrible, in the sleek, polite tones of the man who held in his hand the leaden gas-pipe, which he would have crashed down on a defenceless head, without the slightest compunction, had it suited his purpose to do so.

Harry Wharton looked at him—more amazed than alarmed.

He could see that the communicating door into his sitting-room was open—that was the way Soames had come. From that it was easy to guess that he had entered by the french window on the balcony—easy of access by the steps from the garden. A lock was not likely to stop him.

How he had come, Harry did not need telling, but why he had come was a mystery. That chance meeting, a week ago, at Pegg, had been quite unexpected, and Harry certainly had never expected to see Soames again, neither had he dreamed that Soames could have any motive for seeing him.

Soames looked down at him quietly, but grimly; and made a motion with his right hand that held the lead pipe. Then he sat by the bedside facing the junior sitting up in bed.

"You seem surprised to see me!" he remarked.

"I think you must be mad to come here," said Harry. "What do you want? The police did not find you at Pegg last week—but they will be looking for you again, when this is reported—"

"They will not find me easily!"

smiled Soames. "I am not alarmed! neither shall I interrupt your slumbers long, Master Wharton—I am sorry to interrupt them at all—but necessity knows no law. I fancy you know well enough why I am here, and I warn you not to try to deceive me—I would not willingly harm you, not being by nature a man of violence; but your life will be in danger if you play the fool."

"I haven't the foggiest idea why you are here," answered Harry. "What do you mean?"

"Then I will enlighten you!" said Soames, with a bitter sneer. "I am here for the silver cigarette-case that Bunter sent you by post yesterday."

Wharton jumped.

"The—the—the silver cigarette-case!" he stuttered.

"Exactly! Hand it over, and I shall be gone! It is of little use to you, Master Wharton—I trust that, at your age, you do not smoke!" said Soames ironically. "But it has certain associations for me—it belonged to a comrade from whom I have been parted, and for which reason I value it considerably—give it to me, and let me go!"

"Then that fat idiot was telling the truth!" exclaimed Harry blankly. "We never believed—"

"Our young friend Bunter does not deal largely in the truth—but if he told you I wanted that cigarette-case, he was, for once, giving you the facts," said Soames. "It is all that remains to remind me of a comrade, as I have said—and I want it."

"If it is yours, and if I had it, I would hand it over at once," answered Harry. "But as I haven't—"

Soames' eyes narrowed.

"Take care!" he said.

"You may threaten me as much as you like, as you have the upper hand, you scoundrel," said Harry quietly. "But if Bunter told you that he sent it to me, he was pulling your leg. He offered it to me at school, and I refused it. I have not seen it since."

"I have warned you to take care!" said Soames. "I saw Bunter dropping something into the post—he said that it was the silver cigarette-case, sent you for a Christmas present—"

"I certainly never received it, if it was."

Soames' eyes, gleaming, searched his face.

Harry Wharton's lip curled contemptuously. He could see that Soames did not believe him.

"You received it, if Bunter sent it," said Soames quietly, "and he said that he had; and I have little doubt that, as he said, he was glad to be shut of it. But if you're telling the truth, Bunter still has it."

"I don't know whether he has or not! I know nothing about it!"

"Then I must question Bunter! Where is he?"

"Eh? At home, I suppose. Do you think he lives here?"

Soames' eyes glittered.

"I have warned you not to play the fool!" he breathed. "I found out that this was your room, Master Wharton, by exploring it some time ago, earlier in the evening—luckily finding a french window ajar on the balcony. Having found your room, I did not risk making further investigations; so I am unacquainted with the quarters of your guests. Where is Bunter?"

"I tell you he is not here!" snapped Harry. "He called this morning, and went, and I haven't seen him since."

"You deny that he is in this house?"

"Certainly I do!"

"That is enough, Master Wharton! I am sorry to see that you have not  
(Continued on page 32.)

## IF YOU'RE KEEN ON WILL HAY—

be sure to read

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# My Own Page

This Week By  
**OLIVER KIPPS (Conjurer)**  
Study No. 5 Remove.

I HAVE two sets of instructions for filling my page. The first is from the Remove fellows. They want me, in their name, to wish you all A RIGHT MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR. Well, that's one job jobbed!

The other command is from the Editor. "I want you," he writes, "to give us a few easy conjuring tricks for the Christmas party. Nothing that needs a lot of apparatus or practice. Can you pass on a few of your little tricks?"

Well, Mr. Ed., I'll do my best, but as a matter of fact, nearly all my tricks need a deal of hard practice. I could give you a book full of real conjuring tricks, if you and our readers had the time to practise them, but as that's imposs., here are a few that need no hard work. Though even here the tricks will go better if you practise them a bit beforehand.

## THOUGHT READING

Nothing in a Christmas party is so mysterious and baffling as a good thought-reading trick. My favourite is this. I dish out an envelope and a piece of paper to each guest. I then ask each of them to write the name of some town on the paper, to put the papers in the envelopes, and stick them down—and I will read the names they have written, without opening the envelopes. I do this by taking up one of the envelopes, putting it to my forehead, concentrating hard, and then spelling out a name, thus—"B-R-I-S-T-O-L." This envelope contains the town Bristol. Who wrote Bristol? The writer has to admit that I am right, whereupon I open the envelope, confirm the fact, and drop it carelessly on the table while I pick up another one.

Now for the way it's worked. Unknown to the rest of the party, one of the fellows is my confederate, though all he has to do is to write an agreed town on his paper—say, Norwich. When I collect the envelopes and take them away to read, I keep his envelope to be opened LAST. I pick up any other envelope and start by spelling out the name N-O-R-W-I-C-H. My confederate agrees that he wrote it. I then carelessly open the envelope as though to confirm the fact, but really to see what name is inside it. It may be Leeds, perhaps, so I seize the next envelope and spell out L-E-E-D-S. When the fellow who wrote Leeds has owned up, I open the envelope to spot the next town—and so on. Last of all, I pick up the Norwich envelope, but give it the name of the town I have just read in the one before.

I give you my word that if you do this trick cleverly it is almost impossible to guess your method—unless your confederate gives it away, in which case kick him—hard!

## A PAPER PUZZLE

Here's a simple puzzle. Cut a hole the size of a sixpence in a sheet of paper and ask your chum if he can pass a penny through it, without tearing the paper. It can be done by folding the paper across the middle of the hole, dropping the penny between the folds, and then gently pulling the hole wider apart without tearing it. (See diagram.)

## CHEMICAL FUN

You have a jug of clear water and two empty glasses. You pour some of the water into the first glass, and it immediately becomes

wine! You pour the wine into the second glass and it changes back to water!

This is done with a queer chemical called Phenolphthalein, which we use in the Greyfriars Chemistry Lab. for testing acids. (I shall call it P. in future, to save space.) You can buy some at the chemist's for a few pence, but remember to get it in liquid form, not powder. P. is quite harmless, but the chemist will mix it in alcohol or some other spirit, so don't get it near a fire.

The weird thing about P. is that it changes to red when it comes in contact with ordinary washing soda and disappears again if it contacts with vinegar. Your jug of clear water has a teaspoonful of P. in it. One of your glasses has been rinsed in a strong solution of soda and water, which makes the water turn into red "wine." The other glass has been rinsed in vinegar, which changes the wine back to water.

You can play other tricks with P. Rub a little in a hanky and give it to a guest to wipe his nose. A little later, give him another hanky which is damp with soda-water—and his boko will out-Gosling Gosling's.

Sprinkle some P. on your door-handles, and then put some soda in the water when your guests wash their hands. Their hands will seem steeped in ber-lud! It's very good stuff for practical jokes!

Salt-petre (or Nitrate of Potash) is also good fun. Get threepennyworth and mix it in strong solution with warm water. This makes the famous "fire ink." You can now write messages or draw little pictures on blank sheets of thin soft paper, taking care that all the lines touch another line somewhere, and making a pencil mark where the message or picture starts. Now put the glowing end of a match on this pencil mark and the spark will travel along the invisible lines and burn out the message or picture as it goes. A

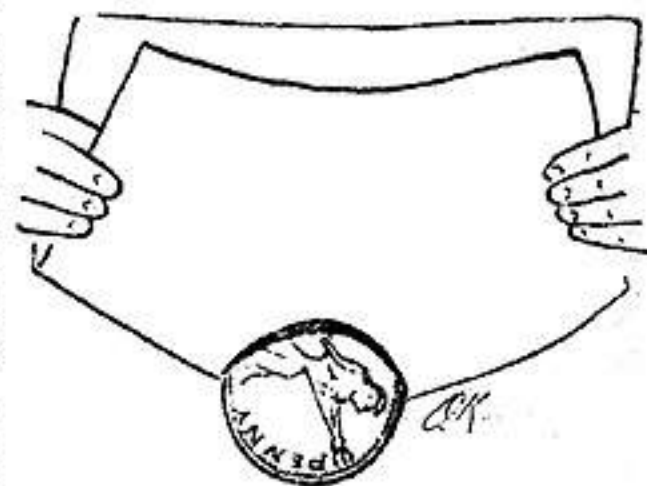


sharpened stump of wood is a good thing with which to draw the pictures in the solution, as you want your lines at least an eighth of an inch wide.

## CANE and STRING

We know all about the cane at Greyfriars, so here's a trick with two short pieces of hollow bamboo cane. Bore a hole through each piece near the top. Fasten a piece of string between the canes by threading it through the inside holes, pulling it out of the top of each cane, knotting it, and letting the knots slip back inside. Now thread a longer piece of string through the outside hole of one piece of cane, take it down one cane and up inside the other, bring it out of the farther hole, and tie a small ring to each end of the string.

Now show the trick by pulling the rings, with the canes held together. It appears as though the string goes straight through. Open the canes slightly, cut the string, put them together again, and pull one of the rings. The other immediately responds, showing that the string is still whole, although you have cut it. A very mystifying little trick, this. The diagram will make it clear.



## MATCH TRICK.

Half open a full box of matches and show that all the heads are at the same end. Close the box, open it again, and one of the matches has changed round!

"Easy," your guests may say. "You had a match wedged out of sight between the inside of the box and the sliding tray."

"O.K.!" says you, and you shut the box, open it again—and half-a-dozen matches have changed round.

The secret? You have previously prepared that box of matches by breaking a number of matches in halves. At one end of the tray you put all the heads, and at the other end a mixture of heads and half-a-dozen "tails." By only half-opening the box you conceal the breaks in the matchsticks, and when you want to show the half-dozen turned matches you simply open the box at the other end.

And that's all I have room for, Mr. Editor. If you will send me half-a-crown I'll vanish it and produce a dozen doughnuts, which will also vanish one by one. This trick would baffle anyone.

## OLIVER KIPPS

Kipps of the Remove has won great fame as a schoolboy conjurer. Coming from a family long connected with the highest art of conjuring, he could do tricks almost before he could walk. His skill in sleight of hand enables him to play amusing jokes on other juniors. Apart from his prowess at conjuring, Kipps is seldom in the limelight. He is a cheerful, good-natured lad, but is not brilliant either in class or on the sports field. His home is in the West End of London. Bunter is often a victim of Kipps' sense of humour; unexpected postal-orders have been found in Bunter's pockets, to the great astonishment of Bunter himself. At the Remove Concert on Breaking-Up Night, Kipps can be relied on for a good turn—pulling balloons and rabbits and goldfish from Mauly's topper, amid loud applause. He shares a study with Dick Hilary, with whom he is very friendly.

(Cartoon by H. SKINNER)

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learned to tell the truth, among the other valuable instructions you have no doubt received at Greyfriars School! I know that Bunter is here, because I have seen him—"

"Not since this morning."

"I saw him at nightfall in the grounds while I was watching the house from cover!" said Soames coolly. "From the direction he was taking, I believe he was coming to the french window on the balcony here—no doubt a way by which you and your friends are accustomed to come and go."

"Rot!" said Harry. "You must have fancied—"

"That will do! Bunter is in the house, and you have denied it! That shows me exactly how much your word is worth!" said Soames bitterly. "You have lied to me about Bunter—and I have, therefore, no doubt that you have lied to me about the silver case. You will now produce it—at once!"

"You fool and scoundrel!" said Harry, his eyes gleaming. "I haven't it—and if I had I would not give it to you—"

Soames rose from the chair. His right hand went up—his left grasped the Greyfriars junior by the shoulder. His eyes burned.

"The silver case," he said, between his teeth. "I give you one minute, Harry Wharton! If that case is not in my hands in sixty seconds, I will crack your skull like an egg-shell!"

## THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

### Bunter On The Spot!

**B**ILLY BUNTER hardly breathed. Through the open doorway between the two rooms, every word reached the fat ears of the terrified Owl.

Bunter had not stirred since he heard the window lock snap open. He had huddled deep in the armchair, in the dark, as a shadowy figure passed and went silently into Wharton's bed-room. He supposed, in his terror, that it was a burglar—till he heard the sleek, smooth voice from the adjoining room—then he knew!

His fat heart almost died within him. While the low-voiced talk went on in the adjoining room, he did not stir—terror chained him. But at Soames' last words, and the deadly threat in his voice, Bunter tried to pull himself together.

His fat knees almost failed him as he lifted himself from the armchair. He gave one blink through the open doorway—and shuddered at what he saw, in the light of the flashlamp on the bedside table—Harry Wharton, in the grasp of the desperate crook, the lead-pipe lifted over his head.

To hurl a cushion—a hassock—knock the brute over, and give Wharton a chance—that flashed into his fat brain. Then he remembered the dart board on the screen, the box of darts beside it. Billy Bunter seldom moved quickly, or acted promptly! But he did both now! He groped over the dart board,

and grabbed up darts. Another moment and he was blinking in at the doorway again.

Soames' voice came to his ears.

"Your fate is in your own hands, Master Wharton! Twenty more seconds—"

"You scoundrel!" said Harry huskily.

"Fifteen seconds—"

Billy Bunter's fat right hand went up! Bunter was no shot, with darts or anything else! But a broad back, at a short distance, was a target that even Billy Bunter could not miss!

Whiz!

He flung three darts at once! They whizzed at Soames, and all three struck him, suddenly and sharply!

There was a sudden, startled, agonised howl from Soames, taken utterly by surprise, by that sudden shower of darts at his back!

He spun round, stumbled against the chair, and stumbled over.

Harry Wharton, in utter amazement, had an instant's vision of a fat face and a large pair of spectacles at the doorway—then it vanished!

But Wharton was quick on the uptake—even as Soames stumbled over, howling with pain, he leaped from the bed and struck, and the sea-lawyer rolled on the floor.

"Help! I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter had rushed out into the corridor, where he was yelling on his top note. "I say—help! Wake up! Help!"

Soames sprawled and shrieked!

Harry Wharton bounded to the door.

Soames, for the moment, was hors de combat, and he did not wait for him to scramble up!

He tore out of the room, and there was a frightened howl as he crashed into a yelling figure in the passage.

"Yarrah! Help! Keep off! I say—yarrah!"

"Bunter, you ass!" gasped Wharton. He groped for the passage light, and switched it on. "Wake up, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What the thump—"

"Soames—in my room!" shouted Harry. "Get hold of something—pokers or anything—quick!"

The juniors were quick. But Soames was quicker. When they rushed into the room, Soames was gone. The french window on the balcony was wide open—the snow outside trampled—and in the darkness no eye could see the breathless figure that fled in the December night.

## "BUNTER!"

"That fat ass."

"The absurd and idiotic Bunter!"

The Famous Five gazed at William George Bunter. Colonel Wharton, in flowing dressing-gown, gazed at him. Wells, the butler, gazed at him! The Owl of the Remove was the cynosure of all eyes.

Colonel Wharton heard with astonishment what had happened in his nephew's room. But he seemed still more astonished by the unexpected and

amazing presence of William George Bunter! Really, it was surprising! Bunter seemed to have popped up suddenly from nowhere like a Christmas ghost.

"What—how—why—" said the old colonel. "How—how did Bunter get here, Harry?"

"Goodness knows!" answered Harry. "Soames thought he was in the house—he said he had seen him—but—anyhow, he jolly well saved me from getting my nut cracked! If he hadn't chucked those darts at Soames—"

"I jolly well did!" said Bunter.

"You did!" agreed Harry. "Then—then you never went home, after Bob saw you off this morning—"

"How could I, when I hadn't my return fare?" demanded Bunter.

"You fat ass, I'd have lent you your fare—"

"Well, I'm not a chap to borrow money—"

"Eh?"

"Besides, I wasn't keen to go home, really—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! 'Tain't every fellow who would sit up all night to watch over a pal!" said Bunter warmly. "Watching over Wharton like—like—like a brother, you know! I wasn't just keeping out of sight till the last train had gone, and I wasn't going to sleep in that arm-chair, either—I was—was sitting up and keeping watch—"

"The boy seems to have acted with some presence of mind!" said Colonel Wharton, staring at the fat Owl.

"As for thinking that Wharton might ask me in the morning to stay over Christmas, of course, I never thought anything of the kind!" explained Bunter.

"Good gad!" said the colonel.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five.

"Still, if he did ask me, after what I've done for him, I shouldn't refuse," added Bunter. "Being such an old pal, I should think it up to me to accept! Did you speak, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's a go!" he said. "Stick!"

"Well, that's not a very pally way of putting it—still, I don't expect much from you, in the way of manners, old chap! I shall have to turn down rather a lot of pressing invitations if I stay here—but dash it all, friendship first!" said Bunter nobly. "Rely on me, old chap—I'll stay over Christmas. In fact, I'll stay right bang up to the end of the hols! There!"

"Oh!"

"It's a promise!" said Bunter.

And Billy Bunter, not always a fellow of his word, kept that promise to the very letter! The fat Owl was safely landed at last, and there was going to be, after all, a Merry Christmas!

THE END.

(A topping Christmas Number, what! Guessed you'd like it! Now look out for: "THE MYSTERY OF WHARTON LODGE!"—the second story in this grand Christmas series. It's the real goods!)

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## "GIVE ME THE GOOD OLD DAYS!"

Blundell Bemoans Modern Methods

Blundell of the Fifth was critical of the modern Christmas, when he stood on the School House steps, waiting for the hired car that was to take him home for the holidays.

"Christmas and high-speed transport! Pah! The two don't go together!" he said contemptuously, as a crowd of cheering fags drove off in a roomy Daimler. "No question about it, you men—all this rush and tear have killed the spirit of the old-time Christmas!"

"You'd prefer the olden days, eh?" suggested a "Greyfriars Herald" reporter, who was standing near.

Blundell smiled expansively.

"Every time! Compare this scene with the sort of thing you'd have seen here a hundred years ago, and there's not much doubt about which you'd prefer."

"Cars dashing about—everybody het up—the smell of petrol all over the place—all these things are right out of place at Christmas! But everything fitted in with it a hundred years ago."

"Then, you would have seen a carriage or two—perhaps a pony chaise. Luggage would be going slowly down to the village on a farm wagon. A leisurely group of fellows would be carrying their bags on their shoulders, as they meandered down to



the gates to wait for the stage-coach.

"If they had an hour or two to wait—what of it? Time didn't matter then. Perhaps the coach was stuck in a snowdrift somewhere and wouldn't be

along for another day. Well, that didn't matter, either. The next day would be just as good!"

"I should think the uncertainty of it must have been rather trying," remarked the "Greyfriars Herald" reporter.

Blundell smiled.

"That's exactly where you're wrong, kid. They didn't expect things all cut and dried like we do now. It was just that same uncertainty that made life such a glorious adventure! What fun it must have been, getting down from the coach to help to dig it out of a snowdrift! Imagine the thrill of being held up by highwaymen! What a lark to arrive home at about three in the morning, when the coach was due in at six the previous evening! How they must have enjoyed Christmas a hundred years ago! Give me the good old days!"

Bland, who was going with Blundell, looked at his watch just then and started slightly.

"My hat! That car is a long time coming, isn't it, Blundell? It's five minutes overdue already!"

Blundell dropped the good old days and frowned.

## WELL DONE, GREYFRIARS!

"A Very Successful Half-Season!"

Says Vernon-Smith, our Live-Wire Reporter.

The last footer game of the term has now been played, and as I write these notes, Greyfriars is busy packing up for the Christmas holidays. I think the best thing I can do, under the circumstances, is to give a brief review of the sporting events of the term now ending.

First for the results of the last week. Three matches only were played, and they have left the position in regard to the championship table very much as it was.

Greyfriars visited Claremont on Wednesday, and the fact that the score was 4—nil in our favour will indicate to you that we had little difficulty in beating our opponents.

Truth to tell, we found them a very moderate team, and we could probably have doubled the score had we set about it in earnest. But the Christmas spirit was in the air, and once we had made sure of our win, the game degenerated into something akin to a light-hearted rag.

Claremont, a very sporting crowd, took their defeat with great cheerfulness, and altogether it was a very pleasant afternoon.

St. Jim's fulfilled expectations by winning on the St. Jude's ground. The score was 4—2, and I hear that they had a harder task than we, the two winning goals being scored only in the last ten minutes.

In the last of the three games, Abbotsford, continuing their upward trend, beat Highcliffe 2—nil, and thereby promoted themselves to the sixth place on the list. As they have played two games more than their nearest rivals, however, they will have a hard job to retain their position next term. But I give them full credit for their achievement in obtaining 7 points out of four games, after losing a sequence of seven matches. Form is decidedly a fickle factor in footer!

Looking back on our record this term, I think we can congratulate ourselves on a very successful half-season. It's a disappointment to find St. Jim's at the top of the table after we had held the place so long. They are, however, only one point ahead of us, and we remain the only unbeaten team. Furthermore, we have the better goal average.

One curious circumstance is that two out of our three dropped points were lost in home matches, Redclyffe and Highcliffe both holding us to a draw on Little Side. On the other hand, we beat the leaders by three clear goals at St. Jim's. If we repeat that score when we entertain St. Jim's next term, we shall surely be good enough to take their place at the top of the table and stay there!

The record score out of all the games

played was our 8—nil win against Abbotsford. I shall be surprised if this doesn't remain a record for the whole season—though I admit there is a wide margin between the goal averages of the top and the bottom teams.

In Form matches, as in inter-school games, we have done exceptionally well.

The First Eleven also have done very well this term, their only lapse being their defeat on Big Side by St. Jude's.

There has been little else in the way of outdoor sport besides footer, and the only item calling for special mention is Redwing's fine win in the 5-mile cross-country run. This was a big score for the Remove.

And so, friends, we ring down the curtain on a rattling good term's sport in which we more than held our own.

I shall continue to pass on to you such sporting news as comes my way during the vac. Meanwhile, I will conclude with the season's merry greetings to you all!

### CHAMPIONSHIP TABLE.

|               | Goals       | P.W.D.L.F.A.Pts. |
|---------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1. ST. JIM'S  | 10 9 0 1 26 | 9 18             |
| 2. GREYFRIARS | 10 7 3 0 30 | 6 17             |
| 3. BAGSHOT    | 10 6 1 3 18 | 12 13            |
| 4. ROOKWOOD   | 9 5 1 3 18  | 12 11            |
| 5. HIGHCLIFFE | 11 4 3 4 20 | 19 11            |
| 6. ABBOTSFORD | 11 3 1 7 13 | 25 7             |
| 7. RYLCOMBE   | 9 2 2 5 13  | 20 6             |
| G.S.          |             |                  |
| 8. REDCLYFFE  | 9 2 1 6 9   | 16 5             |
| 9. ST. JUDE'S | 10 2 1 7 11 | 24 5             |
| 10. CLAREMONT | 9 1 3 5 7   | 22 5             |

"Five minutes late? What the merry dickens—"

"I suppose they got your message all right at the garage, what?"

"Of course they did!" said Blundell angrily.

"May have had a break-down, what?" asked our reporter.

Blundell's jaw snapped. His eyes gleamed.

"I'll jolly soon and out! I'll get on the phone to them at once! Five minutes late, eh? Be all the same if we had a train to catch! I'll tell the blighters what I think of them."

"But, Blundell!" interjected our reporter. "Didn't you say when you were talking of the old-fashioned Christmas how nice it was not to have all that rush and—"

But Blundell had vanished into the House like a raging tornado.

For reasons which we are unable to fathom, the delightful lack of punctuality so characteristic of the good old days had suddenly ceased to attract him.

## A GHOST HAUNTS BUNTER COURT!

Declares Billy Bunter

I suppose it's only natural that there should be a ghost at Bunter Court. The vast, ancestral home of the Bunter family is eggactly the place where you might expect to find some spectral spirit of the past.

As you wander through those grate halls and galleries and broad corridors, where countless generations of Bunters stare sombrely down on you from their magnificent gilt frames on the walls, you can't help saying to yourself: "Here, if anywhere, is the ideal place where a spook could cut his ghostly capers!"

As you stroll past the suits of armour which warlike Bunters of bygone days wore at the Battle of Waterloo and the Siege of Ladysmith, you feel that it wouldn't be in the least surprising if they came to life and started stalking across the floor before you! When silence falls on the grate areas of the stependous mansion, you instinctively prick up your ears—feeling sure you will

hear the blud-curdling wailing of some disembodied spirit or the sinister klanking of chains!

Deer readers, I can tell you for a fact that such intelligent antissipations are not far wide of the mark.

It is perfectly true that a ghost hawnts the hallowed precincts of Bunter Court!

I am not going to tell to you that I have actually seen this ghostly visitor. I haven't. But I have indisputable evidence that he eggists.

Times out of number, Wintringham, our imposing butler, has complained of weird, unaccountable happenings in the dead of nite. Doors open and shut. Furniture moves about. Soft spectral footsteps are heard padding about the richly carpeted floors.

Most mysterious of all, tuck has been known to disappear from the vast, medieval pantry!

My honoured pater, in confidential moments, has mentioned the matter to me. "Billy," he has said, in his deep, aristocratic voice,

"some more grub has been sneaked in the nite. A meer nothing, of course, to people of our fabulous wealth. Just a cupple of cold chickens a Christmas pooding and a duzen mince pies. A meer bagatelle, as you mite say. But it's misterious."

"You're right, pater," I have answered, nitting my brows thoughtfully. "You know, thinking it over, I shouldn't be at all surprized if it's the Ghost of Bunter Court. After all, I



suppose a ghost needs grub like anyone else, duzzent he?"

"My hat!" the pater has eggclaimed, with a sudden gleam in his deep-set eyes. "I never thought of that!"

I can recall several con-

versations on these lines between the pater and me—conversations that made me evenchally take the momentous step by which I hoped to solve the mistery.

I went down to the pantry myself in the dead of the nite—hoping to catch our specktral guest at his tuck-snooping task!

Most fellows would have been parrilised with terror at the meer idea of such a weird, melancolly vigil. But a Bunter fears no foe, whether in shining armour or specktral shroud. I went downstairs to the pantry and waited.

I have done so on many occasions since that time.

Have I ever seen the ghost? Deer readers, I cannot tell a lie. I never have. But I am absolutely certain the ghost has been there, all the same; and if you want my reason, here it is:

EVERY TIME I HAVE WATCHED OUT FOR THAT GHOST, LARGE QUANTITIES OF TUCK HAVE DISAPPEARED FROM THE PANTRY!

I consider that this proves my case entirely. Without a single shadow of doubt, a ghost—a ghost with a big appetite, too!—hawnts the ancient interior of Bunter Court!

There may be a flaw in my argument, somewhere. But I'm dashed if I can see one!

## ETIQUETTE FOR BOYS AT CHRISTMAS PARTIES!

By Barbara Redfern

I feel I shall be doing you boys a good turn if I give you a few hints on how to behave at a Christmas party. For, really, without being unkind most of you don't seem to have the foggiest notion.

Now, to begin at the beginning, when you arrive at the party, the first thing to do is say how-do-you-do to your hosts. This is not so simple as it sounds, judging by the way I've seen you do it in the past.

Some of you shuffle up sheepishly, mumble some inaudible remark, and rush off at once to join your pals; others shake hands as though they're working a pump handle, beam and grin all over their faces, and stand by for at least half-an-hour, making supposedly funny remarks designed to impress all hearers that they are the life and soul of the party!

The right thing to do is to shake hands, modestly, but cheerily, inquire of your hosts' health and say it was nice of them to invite you, then retire and mingle with the throng.

Having joined the throng, don't immediately assemble a little crowd of cronies and talk footer and school gossip for the rest of the evening. You'll help your hosts by making new friends and talking on matters of general interest.

Get out of your head all ideas about its being childish to enjoy party games, and please don't think that it's up to you to treat them with lordly indifference or grown-up appearance of boredom. You'd drop all that stuff like a hot brick if you knew what an ass it makes you look!

Don't for goodness' sake treat girls with lofty disdain, as though they were a race of inferior beings. We are already aware that you are stronger and braver and brainier than we are; but we begin to have our doubts about it when you greet our feeble conversational efforts with remarks like: "Oh, rot!"

When supper is served, don't make a wolfish rush for the eats—even though you do feel hungry! Do a little play-acting and pretend that you're more concerned for your girl friend's appetite than your own. She'll like you for it—and the tuck will probably taste better if you wait for it, anyway!

Dancing etiquette deserves your special attention. You probably imagine that you're Fred Astaire and Jack Buchanan rolled into one. But even if you are, it creates a pleasant effect if you say: "Sorry! My fault!" when you land like a ton weight on your partner's dainty toes!

And here's a very important point: whatever you do, don't swot up a penny book of jokes and riddles before the party and insist on unloading the lot of them on your unoffending fellow-guests. Remember that humour arises naturally out of good spirits; they'll get a lot more laughter out of the evening, if you're just yourself.

Finally, don't pull my leg too much over these hints if you happen to be invited to my particular Christmas party. They're probably not meant for you personally, anyway; but if the cap fits, well, I can only recommend you to wear it as gracefully as possible!