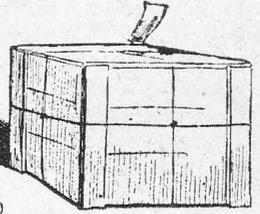




Bunter and the Box



*A Humorous, Short, Complete Story of the
Chums of the Remove*

By PETER TODD

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Billy's Box

"I SAY, you fellows——"

A pair of huge spectacles glimmered in the doorway of Study No. 1, and the figure of William George Bunter, of the Remove at Greyfriars, insinuated itself into the room.

"I say, you fellows!" repeated Bunter earnestly. "That box——"

"Buzz off!"

"Outside, Billy! We're busy!"

"But—but, I say, you know! That box——"

"Skidaddle! Scoot!" snapped Bob Cherry, without looking up. "Travel, porpoise!"

But Billy Bunter did not "travel," nor did he "skidaddle," or "scoot." He rolled calmly forward, and his eyes blinked greedily behind the goggles, as they rested upon the box lying on the table, and round which the Famous Five were gathered.

Only a minute before, that box had been brought to the school by Cripps, the carrier, from Courtfield. And, as was usual when a parcel or box arrived at Greyfriars, it wasn't long before W.G.B. followed it to its destination.

"Oh, really, Cherry!" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "It's most important. There's some mistake! You see, I'm expecting a box myself by post——"

"Rats!"

Bunter glared as that exclamation came in a simultaneous chorus from the Famous Five.

"I hope," he remarked with dignity, "I really hope you fellows don't doubt my word! I decline to be associated with fellows who doubt my word. It's low, and shows a mean, suspicious nature! You'll excuse my saying so, Wharton, but I consider you're a mean, suspicious beast—and jealous! In fact you're all jealous—jealous of my good looks and wealthy connections! I hope you don't mind my being candid?"

"Not at all," said Harry Wharton, cheerfully. "We like you best, Billy, when you're being candid—it's such a refreshing change, you know."

"That's all right, then," said Bunter. "And now about that box! Now, I'm expecting a box—a whacking great tuck-box, in fact. It's from one of my titled relations, you know——"

"Which one?" queried Nugent with interest. "Your uncle, the Duke of Spoofemall?"

"Or your great-uncle, the Marquis of Hookeywalker?" asked Johnnie Bull.

"Fortunately, the box has come!" went on Bunter firmly, nodding his head towards the table. "And that looks jolly suspiciously like it! You see, there's been a mistake. My uncle—I mean my cousin, has addressed it wrong. It's addressed to H. Wharton by mistake. I explained the error to old Cripps, and told him plainly it was really for W. G. Bunter. But—you fellows will hardly believe me—he wouldn't stomp it up—he doubted my word! In fact, he told me to go and eat coke! Still, now you fellows know the box belongs to me, I'll take it with me, and——"

"That you jolly well won't!" snapped Johnnie Bull.

"One moment!" said Bob Cherry, shaking his head gravely. "This is a serious matter—for Bunter. And Bunter's claim must be investigated. You say you are expecting a box by post, Bunty?"

"Certainly, Bob, old fellow," smiled Bunter, affectionately. "From a titled relation—my uncle, in fact. I say, I'll take it with me now; and—look here," went on Bunter with one of his rare bursts of generosity, "if there's any grub left—I mean—that is to say, when I've checked the contents, I'll bring you fellows some. I can't say fairer than that!"

"But this box came by passenger train," said Cherry blandly.

"D-di-did I say by post?" ejaculated Bunter. "Quite a mistake! I—I meant to say by passenger train. Certainly! Now I wonder what made me say that? My pater—I mean my uncle—I should say, my cousin, always sends all my tuck-boxes by passenger train. And——"

"However," continued Cherry, thoughtfully, with a wink at his chums. "If Bunter really is expecting a box, it would be a sin and a shame to rob or disappoint him. What do you chaps think—shall we give him one?"

"Certainly!" came the grinning chorus.

"Very well, then," observed Cherry resignedly. "But are you sure, Billy, that the box I am about to give you is the one you're expecting?"

"Oh, really, Bob," smirked Bunter with an expansive smile. "without a doubt! Of

course it is! The very one, in fact! Give it me now, Bob, old fellow!"

"Here you are then, Bunty dear!"

Slap!

"Yaroooh! Oh, my ear! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter leaped back, rubbing a fat ear that burned red from a hearty slap from Bob's hefty fist.

"There's your box, you fat fraud!" chuckled Cherry. "Now, take it outside with you. We're busy!"

Bunter's glasses fairly glittered in the gaslight as he glared at Bob Cherry. It was plain the box he got was not the box he had been expecting.

"Beast!" he howled. "You did that on purpose, Cherry! You're all beasts! Ow! Ow, my ear!"

"Why, don't you like the box now you've got it?" ejaculated Bob Cherry in surprise. "Well, try this one——"

But Billy Bunter did not stay for that one. At the door he turned a Hunnish glare upon the laughing Five.

"Yah! Beasts!" he howled viciously. "Keep your mingy box. Yah! Greedy pigs!"

Then Bunter hurriedly departed.

But of course his departure, though hurried, was not permanent. When Bunter was on the trail—of grub, at any rate—he did not give up so easily. Bunter hadn't the slightest doubt that the mysterious box was chock full of good things to eat. And William George Bunter was determined to have some—somehow.

At the end of the passage he paused; then he tiptoed back to No. 1, and applied his eye to the keyhole.

He could not see much—just the legs of the table and a corner of the tablecloth. But he could hear whispering inside, and he put his fat ear to the keyhole instead. Then the whispering suddenly ceased, and the occupants of the study were suspiciously silent.

The fact might have warned Bunter. But it didn't. And once again the unfortunate Owl got it in the ear—so to speak.

"Whoosh!"

A stream of black liquid shot through the keyhole, and Bunter yelled in sheer surprise.

He yelled harder, however, as he overbalanced and his head struck the passage wall with a tremendous thud.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Framed in the doorway were the laughing faces of Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, and Hurree Singh.

Bunter blinked at them speechlessly.

"Hallo! Haven't you gone yet, Billy?" grinned Cherry in surprise. "Here, there's just a drop of ink left. I'll——"

But again Bunter did not wait. The sight

of Cherry advancing, squirt in hand, was enough for him.

With surprising agility, considering his bulk, he swarmed to his feet and scudded along the corridor.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Caught!

It took quite ten minutes' vigorous application of soap and water to remove the ink from the bespattered countenance of

William George Bunter. And the operation was a very unpleasant one indeed for W.G.B. It meant work, for one thing; it also meant the unsparing use of soap and water. And Bunter hated work, and he also hated to waste soap and water—upon himself.

But at length the Owl of the Remove emerged from the bathroom feeling much cleaner, but by no means happier.

Some fellows would have dropped the trail then. But not so Bunter. He wandered dis-

consolately along the passage, and, despite his late unfortunate experiences, his footsteps were drawn irresistibly towards the end study.

For some time he hovered around the door like a moth fluttering around a candle flame. Then he took the plunge and put his ear to the keyhole; but more warily this time.

Creak! Creak!

Bunter jumped. It was without a doubt the sound of a box being opened. Bunter shivered with excitement.

"Got him!" came Cherry's eager voice.

"Now for it! Have we time for just one before bed, Harry?"

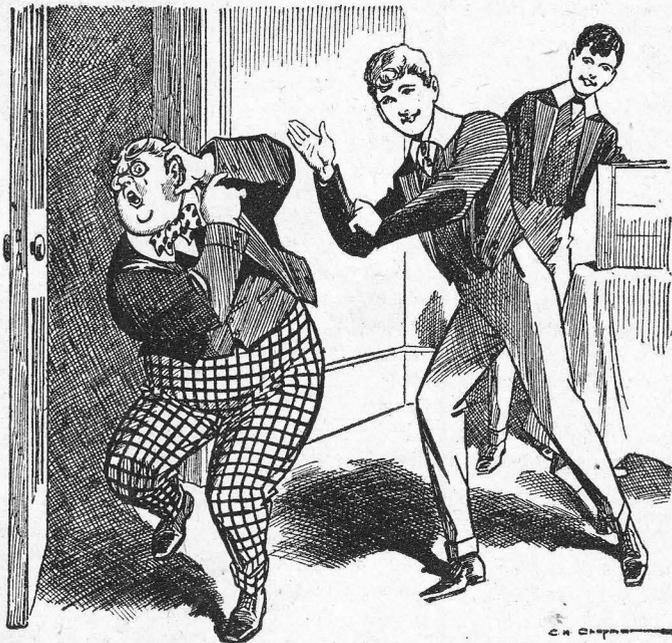
"Just about, as we've finished prep, old man," came Wharton's cool voice clearly. "But buck up! The blessed bell will go in a tick!"

Then came a sound that Billy couldn't quite place. He decided that it was the study clock being wound up. And Billy didn't worry about that.

The thought of those greedy bouncers inside scoffing all the grub themselves—

Bunter groaned in anguish of spirit. He fancied he could hear Cherry's teeth cutting through a choice slice of plum-cake, while he was almost certain he could hear the gurgle of ginger-pop—or was it home-made cherry wine?

"Oh, dear!" murmured Bunter enviously. "If I could only get them out of the study for five minutes—my hat!"



Slap! "There's your box, you fat fraud!" said Bob Cherry. "Take it away with you!" (See page 6.)

Bunter suddenly straightened himself, and his face broadened into a cunning grin. Next moment he was tiptoeing towards a large cupboard in the passage. The cupboard was empty, but it was a tight squeeze for a fellow of Bunter's bulk.

Bunter crouched down inside, and, pulling the door to, got to work. And a moment later, Mr. Quelch's voice—or what seemed to be that master's voice—echoed down the passage.

"Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, Singh—come here at once!"

Bunter chuckled gleefully as the door of the end study flew open and the occupants filed out.

They viewed the deserted passage in surprise.

"My hat!" gasped Wharton. "I'd swear I heard——"

"Do you hear me, boys? Come here at once!"

Wharton grunted and led the way towards Mr. Quelch's room, whence the voice appeared to proceed.

"Old Quelch is in a blessed hurry," growled Wharton. "What the dickens does he want now?"

Bunter heard the remark from his hiding-place, and he chuckled. But Bunter had chuckled too soon; he hadn't bargained for accidents. Almost before the five reached the study door, an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown appeared. It was Mr. Quelch himself.

"Well, Wharton, what is it?" queried the master, for none of the juniors moved to let him pass.

"You called us, sir," answered Wharton in surprise.

"Called you—nonsense!" said Mr. Quelch testily. "You must have imagined it. You should be in your dormitory now, boys. It is already past your bed-time. Go, at once!"

And the master whisked along the passage.

"Well, this is a go!" gasped Wharton. "I'd swear I heard him——" Wharton stopped suddenly. From the cupboard along the passage came a half-stifled sneeze.

Wharton grinned.

"Bunter!" he breathed softly and grimly. "Not a sound, you chaps! My hat, we'll give

that fat fraud ventriloquism! Follow on, brothers!"

On tiptoe, Wharton slipped to the cupboard—and next moment a startled gasp came from Billy Bunter as the cupboard door was wrenched open.

"Out you come, you fat spoofer!" exclaimed Wharton.

Billy Bunter blinked apprehensively at the victims of his ventriloquial skill, and hesitated. It was extremely uncomfortable crouched inside the cupboard; but he had an idea that it would be far more uncomfortable outside.

"Re—really, you fellows——" he began.

Bunter was not given time to say more than that. Ungentle hands gripped him, and he was yanked out and rolled with a bump on the passage floor.

"Yow! You beasts!" he yelled. "Oh, you've broken my back! Yow, wow! I'm hurt!"

"I'm not surprised," grinned Bob Cherry. "And we'll hurt you some more yet. Bump him, you chaps! We'll teach the prize porker to work off his ventriloquial stunts on us!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

Four times the Owl of the Remove was bumped, each bump eliciting a corresponding howl from the victim.

"There," said Wharton when the operation was over, "that will teach you not to be so beastly inquisitive about other people's boxes. And now, chaps, to bed, or old Quelch will be getting ratty."

Billy Bunter rose, angry and dusty. Then his little eyes glittered as the other fellows began to move along the passage. Instead of following them, he began to roll casually in the opposite direction. But he jumped as a hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Nunno! No, you don't, Billy!" chuckled Bob Cherry, turning back suddenly. "You'll come back with us, old son. Yank hold of him, someone! We'll put Billy to by-byes! It's his bed-time!"

"I—I—I—I say, you fellows—— Here, hands off! Gerroff! Leggo! I was only going to——"

The Removites knew perfectly well what Billy was going to do—at least the owners of that mysterious box did. And they didn't

wait to hear it. And the next instant Bunter was being frog-marched along the passage. Then with sundry bumps and howls from the passenger, the procession wended its way upstairs. Nor did the Removites leave Bunter until he was safely tucked under the sheets.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

In the Night!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER lay in bed and fumed. His little ruse to sample the contents of the box had failed miserably. In fact, it had been an unfortunate night altogether for Bunter. But his night's adventures were not over yet by any means.

For, beside being sore and angry, Bunter was hungry—very hungry. And when Billy Bunter was hungry sleep was not to be thought of. But how to appease that hunger was the question. And as might be expected, Bunter's thoughts were centred upon the box in Study No. 1, the contents of which he had no doubt would cure his sleeplessness.

For an hour Bunter concentrated on the problem, then he decided the time for action had arrived. Sitting up in bed, he blinked cautiously round the dark dormitory.

"I say, any of you fellows awake?"

No answer.

The Owl listened breathlessly to the soft breathing of the Removites, then he rolled out of bed.

Smiling a smug smile of anticipation, he carefully felt for his spectacles, and jammed

them upon his podgy nose. After which he put on his slippers and tiptoed to the door.

Bunter chuckled softly as he blinked out in the silent, deserted corridor. With infinite care he moved to the head of the stairs, and began to descend.

At the door of the end study he stopped and, softly pushing open the door, blinked inside.

The room was dark and shadowy, but Bunter could faintly make out the shape of the table, and—yes, the box lying there, just as the Famous Five had left it.

Billy chuckled again and entered.

What happened after that Billy never could clearly remember, or he didn't wish to. He remembered fumbling about the box in the darkness, then followed a sudden whirring sound that made poor Bunter's hair stand on end. To Bunter it sounded like the noise he imagined a bomb would make before it exploded.

But Billy had no intention of staying to see if this were a bomb. With an involuntary yell of terror the fat youth shot for the door.

Biff! Crash!

A loose bit of carpet tripped the Owl, and his head struck the edge of the door with a

thump that brought a million stars before the terrified junior's eyes.

"Yaroo! Fire! Oh, help! Murder! Thieves!" howled Bunter.

"Police! Burgla—"

Bunter ceased his yells in sheer terror, for the whirring noise had ceased. But it was not followed by the crash Billy expected, only by the brazen tones of a man's voice.



Billy was in a hurry to get upstairs, and Mr. Quelch was in a hurry to get downstairs. It ended in both going downstairs! Bump! Bump!

Coming suddenly in the silence of the night, it was sufficiently startling for all that, but when the voice in a clear tenor began to sing something about "A Perfect Day," Billy lost his head completely.

"Help! Fire! Murder!" he howled frantically, and streaked through the doorway.

Poor Billy had lost his gig-lamps, and it was a marvel how he found his way in the darkness; but he struck the stairs at last. And leaving the clear clarion voice to echo and re-echo through the silent school, he bounded up those stairs two at a time.

But again Bunter's luck was dead out. The noise, of course, had aroused the whole school. Fellows were crowding out into the corridors, and amazed voices were questioning everywhere. And one of the first roused was Mr. Quelch.

Bunter met him at the top of the stairs. The meeting was unfortunate for both, for Bunter had been in a hurry to get upstairs, and the master was in a hurry to get down. It ended in both going downstairs.

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

It was fortunate for Mr. Quelch that Bunter was underneath when they reached the bottom.

"Oh, help! Oh, dear! Good gracious! Who was that?" gasped the master feebly, sitting up on the cold passage floor.

Bunter also sat up, but he did not answer. He was gasping and puffing like a stranded porpoise, and could not have answered had he wished; but there was no necessity. Wingate, candle in hand, and followed by a crowd of startled boys, dashed down the stairs.

And the light soon revealed to Mr. Quelch's astounded eyes the familiar pyjama-clad form of Billy Bunter in all its beauty of outline.

Wingate and Coker stopped to help the dazed master to his feet. But most of the fellows, headed by the Famous Five, scudded along to the end study, where "The End of a Perfect Day" was well into its second spasm. The Famous Five, at least, were nearly exploding. It hadn't taken them long to guess what had happened, especially when they saw Bunter.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Wharton feebly. "That blessed idiot must have started our gramophone! My hat! The blind Owl must have been fumbling about with it. Quick! Light the gas while I stop the blessed thing! My only Sunday tile! Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent produced a match and lit the gas. A moment later "The End of a Perfect Day" came to an untimely end with startling suddenness.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The stopping of the instrument was the signal for a wild howl of laughter to break out. The fellows could not restrain themselves, and the Remove passage rang again and again. But it soon stopped when Mr. Quelch appeared, his brow black with wrath.

"Stop! Do you hear me?" he stormed angrily. "Stop this disgraceful noise! Have you all gone mad? Wharton, what do you know of this astounding affair? And to whom does this—this machine belong?"

"It—it's a gramophone, sir," stammered Wharton. "It belongs to me—I mean, to us. We club—that is, we subscribed to buy it. It only came last night. We unpacked it, put a record on, and wound it up, hoping to have just one tune before bed-time. But before we had time to start it we—we were called away; you yourself ordered us to go straight to our dormitory. So we left it on the table, just as it was. We certainly did not start it."

"I give you credit for more sense than that, Wharton," snapped Mr. Quelch tartly. "In any case, you had no business to bring such an instrument into the school without first consulting me. But someone did start it. I presume it was Bunter."

"Perhaps it was a mouse, sir," suggested Bob Cherry foolishly. "I've heard of—"

"Cherry!" rapped out Mr. Quelch icily. "You will do me two hundred lines to-morrow for your insolence! Bunter!"

"Y-yes, sir!" groaned the unhappy Bunter.

"You appear to be responsible for this business," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I demand to know what you were doing out of bed at this time of night?"

"M-m-me, sir! Nunno, sir! Not at all, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I've been fast

asleep—never left the dorm. at all, in fact. I wouldn't. I—I've only just woke up!"

"What?"

"Certainly, sir," said Bunter. "I never even thought of raiding Wharton's grub. Besides, there wasn't any grub, so I couldn't, could I, sir? And as for starting that gramophone, I never did! Certainly not! In fact, I didn't know it was a gramophone, sir. I thought the box contained grub. That's why I came down. Nunno! I mean that's why I didn't come down. I wouldn't dream——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Quelch, glaring around at the laughing juniors. "Bunter, you utterly foolish boy, how dare you tell such falsehoods? You will come to my room at nine to-morrow morning, when I shall require a truthful explanation of this affair.

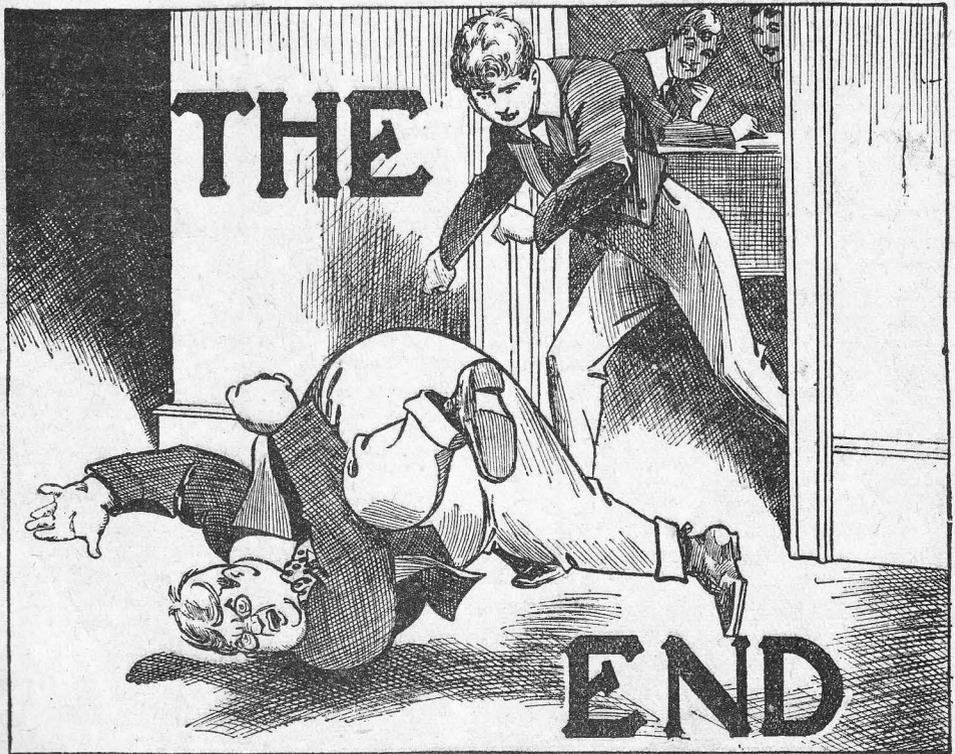
And now, enough of this. Wingate, will you be good enough to see these boys back to their dormitories at once?"

Bunter's face was the picture of misery. He had had the fright of his life, and he was still hungry. And now on top of all was the dismal prospect of an unpleasant interview in the morning with Mr. Quelch.

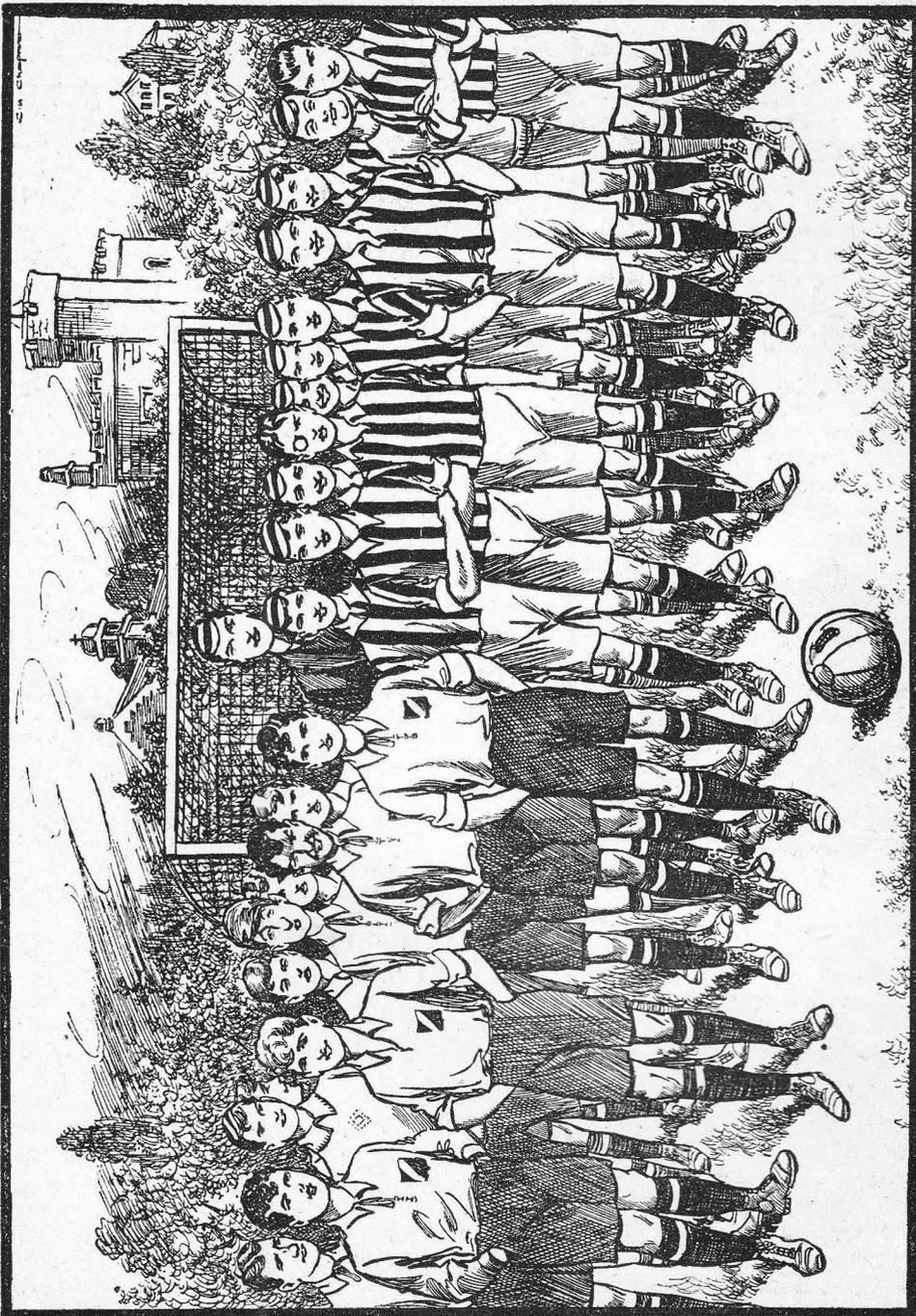
And Bunter rolled after the others to bed, feeling that life was not worth living.

But Bunter thought so more than ever the next morning when Mr. Quelch did get the facts of the case out of him. And the fat junior made a solemn vow never to go on midnight grub-raiding expeditions again as long as he lives.

And no doubt he won't—until he's hungry again.



THE GREYFRIARS AND ST. JIM'S FOOTBALL TEAMS



GREYFRIARS (reading from left to right): Vernon-Smith, Bull (Squiff), Field, Penfold, Cherry, Nugent, Todd, Bulstrode, Harre Singh, Linley, Harry Wharton (captain), Kildare (captain of St. Jim's), referee. ST. JIM'S: Noble, Tom Merry (captain), Blake, D'Arcy, Lowther, Redfern, Tabbot, Figgus, Kerr, Wynn, Levison.