



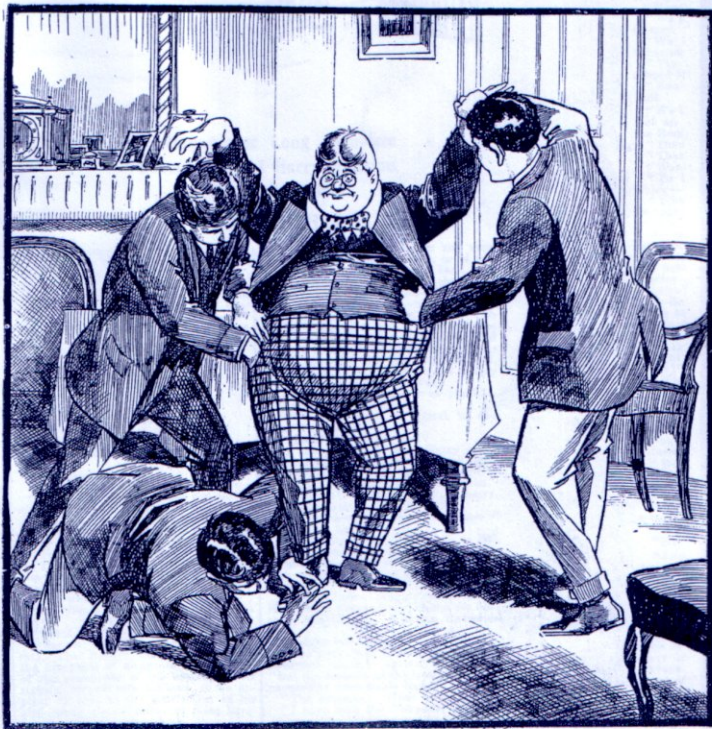
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THE GREAT BUNTER MYSTERY!



SEARCHING FOR THE MISSING CHANGE!

(A Very Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.) 26-7-19

The Great Bunter Mystery!



A Magnificent Long Complete
School Story of Harry Wharton
& Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter's Latest!

HARRY WHARTON was waiting tea in his study.

He was standing at the study window looking out into the Close, and had been observing with some interest the doings of Billy Bunter, who, in a corner of the Close, had been engaged in the unprofitable occupation of thinking—Bunter's thoughts being usually of little profit to himself or to anybody else.

But it was not Billy Bunter so much who occupied Wharton's attention. He was awaiting the arrival of his chums, and there was one of them at least—Bob Cherry—in the clutches of Billy Bunter, who had been roused from his thoughts by Bob Cherry's approach.

It was not difficult to guess the subject of the conversation. It related, Wharton had no doubt, to a belated postal-order. Upon that postal-order were concentrated all the mistakes of which the Post Office was guilty. Indeed, these were those who had come to disbelieve in its existence. It was a sort of Wandering Jew, going the round of the world in the endeavour to find a sphere of rest and usefulness in the keeping of Billy Bunter, and it never reached its goal.

However, on this occasion it was Bunter's misfortune to strike an unprofitable subject. Bob Cherry, on being buttonholed, wrenched himself free, and, with a remark, the purport of which Wharton did not catch, but which caused Bunter to back hastily away from his victim, strolled on out of sight. The astonishing thing, however, was that Cherry should yield even for a moment to the wiles of Bunter. Bunter's ways were known to every member of the Remove Form, and, as a general thing, Bunter's offensive was promptly met by a counter-offensive.

On this occasion it seemed that Bob was in a yielding mood, and quite a time seemed to elapse before he shook himself free from the clutches of the Owl of the Remove and came on into the House.

Wharton turned from the window as Bob came into the study.

"You're late, Bob!"

Bob Cherry flung the cricket-bat he was embracing down with a bump into a corner, and wreaked summary vengeance on a plate of toast in the fender.

"Sorry!" he said. "Bunter's been at me!"

"Same old story?"

"Well, no."

Harry Wharton stared.

"Not a postal-order?"

"Not this time."

"What, then?"

"Bunter made an appeal to me."

"An appeal! What for?"

"For a deserving object."

"A deserving object! What deserving object?"

"He didn't say."

"Do you mean to say—"

"Yes, I do. Bunter forgot the postal-order. I suppose he thinks that jape's worked out. But the fact is, he made an appeal to my honour, to my chivalry, to my better self."

"To do what?"

"To lend him a quid—well, not to lend him a quid; to hand him over a quid to be spent on some deserving object."

"But what object?"

"He didn't say—wouldn't tell me, in fact!"

"Great pip!"

Wharton could scarcely believe his ears. That Bunter, usually so prolific in the invention of means to conjure coin of the realm out of the custody of its rightful owners into his own, to be applied by him to the satisfaction of his own needs, should resort to these barefaced tactics was astonishing.

"Did he offer to pay you back?" queried Wharton.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"No. He said that if I knew what the object was I shouldn't require to be paid back."

"But he didn't tell you what it was?"

"No."

"Great pip!"

It really was the limit. Wharton could scarcely believe his ears. That Bunter

should venture to suggest to any sane member of the Remove Form, or of any other, in fact, that he should hand over to him—Bunter—a quid—a whole quid—to be expended by him—Bunter—on some worthy object—unknown—the donor of the quid to rest content with Bunter's assertion that if he knew the facts he would hand over the quid and approve of the object upon which it was to be expended by him—Bunter—well, that opened a new chapter in the history of the Falstaff of the Remove!

Only one explanation was possible. Wharton shook his head.

"We shall have to appeal to the Head!" he said.

"The Head! What for?"

"I always feared," said Harry sadly, "that Bunter's mind would never stand that extra maths Mr. Lascelles used to give him. He'll have to see a specialist."

"What-ho!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Completest! Fresh faces!"

"With a keeper in close attendance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It really was funny. After all, as Bob Cherry remarked, life at Greyfriars wouldn't be what it was without Bunter, with which remark his chum agreed.

"Hallo!"

It was Hurree Singh's velvet voice. He entered the study and closed the door softly behind him. Wharton turned to him.

"You're late, Inky!"

"The lateness is indeed terrific, my esteemed chum," agreed the nabob. "but the occasion of the lateness must excuse the honourable fact."

"The occasion! What occasion?"

"I have been the distressful victim of an appeal by the abundant and ludicrous Bunter."

"An appeal! What for?"

"I am the distressful victim of an extensive incapacity to answer my esteemed chum's question."

Bob Cherry broke in upon the even flow of his chum's weird and wonderful English.

"An appeal!" he cried. "For money?"

"From Bunter?" put in Wharton.

"For a worthy object?"

"That you would approve of if you knew what it was?"

Hurree Singh started.

"The chiefness of the late Sherlock Holmes has taken up its abode in the souls of my esteemed chums!" he said. "It will relieve my puzzlefulness if my chums will condescend to make an honourable explanation."

"Heard the latest?"

Johnny Bull was the next arrival. He had come suddenly into the study, and was standing at the door, looking at his chums with a cheerful grin upon his face. He repeated the question:

"Heard the latest?"

"We have heard something," said Bob Cherry.

"We certainly have!" added Harry Wharton.

"The headfulness is indeed terrific!" echoed Hurree Singh.

"You have heard, then?" queried Bull.

"We have heard," said Bob solemnly, "of an appeal to the better nature of the Remove."

"Then you have heard?"

"That Bunter—"

"Wants a quid—"

"To be applied to a worthy object which—"

"Which, if it were known to us, would be approved by us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny Bull joined in his chums' laughter.

"Bunter'll go far!" he said. "He's got patience and enterprise. I can see Bunter ending his days as a giddy millionaire! But the funny thing is, that even Bunter should be such a thundering ass as to appeal—"

"To our better nature—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows!" It was Frank Nugent's voice. "Have you heard the latest?"

"What, you, too?" cried Johnny Bull.

"Shut up!"

"We've heard all about it!"

"We have—we has!" added Bob Cherry.

Nugent's astonishment was amusing to witness.

"Do you mean to say—" he began.

"Yes, we do—we does!"

"That Bunter—"

"Tried to bag a quid—"

"On the distinct understanding—"

"That it was for a worthy object—"

"Well, I'm hanged!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Again the study door opened. This time it was Alonzo Todd.

"My dear friends," came Alonzo's gentle voice, "I have ventured to come to you at some expense to my feelings, because I should be most reluctant to betray a confidence reposed in me were I only sure that the confidence was one that it was my duty to respect; but I have learned by bitter experience that anyone who ventures to repose any trust in the asseverations of Bunter is likely to regret having done so. In the circumstances, then, I venture to say—Yarook!"

It was extremely doubtful whether this expression did set forth adequately what had been in the gentle Alonzo's mind when he entered the study. But it was extremely difficult to bring home to him, by any but violent means, the fact that his communication was devoid of interest for the assembled juniors. A sofa-cushion, hurled by Bob Cherry, not with undue force, but sufficient to make Alonzo aware of the prevailing sentiment with regard to his intrusion, sent him staggering.

"My dear Cherry," he began, "in view of the fact—"

Johnny Bull opened the door.

"Outside!" he said sternly.

"I have a communication—"

"Outside!"

"I merely desired to convey a warning that—"

Biff!

There was really nothing for it but the sofa-cushion. It took Alonzo Todd out with it into the corridor, and deposited him on the cold linoleum. After a moment's painful reflection on the insignificance of the world towards his benovolent spirits, Alonzo limped painfully back to his study.

"I say you fellows—"

"My only hat!"

"My sainted Aunt Maria!"

"The saintfulness of the esteemed Maria is terrific!"

It was Bunter.

Bob Cherry rushed to the door, and drew the blinking and suspicious Owl into the study. Frank Nugent closed the door behind him. Hurree Singh took an ink-bottle, and turned the contents of it into a teacup, and added thereto, with infinite care and tenderness, a spoonful of jam, another of mixed pickles, and a modicum of soot from the chimney.

"Come in, Bunter!" said Wharton.

"Come into the garden, Maud!"

"We're always at home to you, Billy. Come right in!"

Billy Bunter stared round suspiciously.

"What are you looking that door for, Nugent? I—I came here to make an appeal to you chaps—"

"To our better selves—"

"For which worthy object—"

"Of which you should approve if we knew what it was—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter set his glasses upon his fat little nose, and glared defiantly round the study.

"I came here," he began, "to make an appeal to you on behalf of a worthy object—"

"Oh, tell us something fresh!" sighed Johnny Bull. "Worthy objects are played out!"

"We're worthy objects ourselves!"

Hurree Singh said nothing, but his assiduous stirring of the mixture in the teacup was more eloquent than speech.

"I want a quid," went on Bunter, "from all or any of you. With a quid in his possession—"

"From each of us—"

"From each of you who happens to have one. I know you've had a remittance, Wharton."

Wharton moved across the room towards the speaker.

"Oh, you know that, do you?" he asked.

"Yes," pursued Bunter. "I overheard you talking to Cherry. And I know you've got a quid left. And I want to put it to you. There are other things in the world besides gawdang—other things, I mean. I want you to hand a few quid over to me to be expended, in accordance with my judgment, on a worthy object. Perhaps, some day—I don't know, I say perhaps—I may be able to show you a letter of gratitude—"

"A what?" gasped Wharton.

"A letter of gratitude," pursued Bunter. "from the—er—worthy object I referred to. I may not be able to show you the signature—in fact, it might not be signed. There might be danger in the handing it. It's quite possible, too, that the handwriting may be disguised. But you shall see the letter, if I get it—Yarook! Wharrer you at, Bob Cherry? If you break my glasses, you'll have to pay for them! Leggo my ear, Wharton! Help! Ow!"

It was too much. The chums had been prepared to be merciful. They would not have gone further than intimating to Bunter, in a politely forcible manner, that they were fed-up with his impertinence, if Bunter, on his part, had contrived to keep within the bounds of reason. But to ask for three or four quid, and offer in return a sight of a letter of gratitude in an unknown hand, from an unknown object—well, their fed-upfulness, as Hurree Singh expressed it, was terrific.

It was too, was the onslaught made upon Billy Bunter. Before that ingenious youth was aware of what was happening to him he was on the floor, the bottom item of a pile of struggling and kicking humanity. He was lifted from the floor and yanked on to the table. There Hurree Singh did something with his tenderly-cherished teacup, with the result that Bunter's visage assumed suddenly the hues of the rainbow.

He was yanked on to the floor again, and rolled about the room, propelled by a half-score indignant feet—it was like rolling a lawn, as Bob Cherry said—and, finally, after a brief sojourn in the fender, he was rushed to the door with a cushion over his face to stop the flow of noise from his mouth, and then:

"One, two, three!" cried Wharton.

And one, two, three, it was. Propelled through the air by the force of a half-score of heavy boots in violent collision with his body, Billy Bunter flew through the air like a stone from a catapult, and landed with a painful shock on the linoleum. Then the door slammed, and Billy Bunter was left to his own reflections.

"Yow! Gerooh! Beasts!" Having given utterance to these ejaculations, Bunter picked himself up from the linoleum, and rolled away disconsolately—still in quest—presumably—of the elusive quid, to be applied to some high and mighty purpose, unnamed and unnameable.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Tackles Mr. Queek!

"HALLO! What's the row? What you been doing to Bunter?"

Squiff was the speaker. He had come into the study immediately after the set-to, and was gazing on the scene with pardonable wonder.

For there was material enough in the study for wonder to grow fat on. Bob Cherry was nursing his nose, from which the claret was flowing. One of Billy Bunter's feet had caught Bob on the nose as Bunter was being yanked on to the table, and this little escape of the vital fluid was the consequence. Bob was seeking to cut it off at the meter, as Johnny Bull expressed it.

Hurree Singh, despite his efforts to ensure that the contents of his teacup should be expended upon Bunter's countenance, had managed to spill a quantity of it down Nugent's neck. It was certainly Bunter's fault for landing out with a fat foot just when Nugent's head happened to be under the cup; but that was not much consolation.

The other members of the Co. were engaged in repairing damages, and Squiff's surprise was not to be wondered at in the circumstances.

"What is it?" he asked. "I met Bunter in the corridor. He was muttering to himself about a quid he'd lost. Have you fellows heard anything about it?"

"We have—we has!"

"Have you taken it away from him or something?"

"No. Why?"

"I thought I heard him saying something about going to Quelch about it?"

"Going to whom?"

"Going to Quelch about it. Why?"

There was a moment's silence—the silence of consternation—in the study, and then there was a yell.

"Going to Quelch!"

"Bearing the tale braakfully to the esteemed Quelch!"

"The cad!"

"Quelch will never believe him," said Wharton at last. "If he's going to Quelch with a tale of losing a quid—that's what you said, wasn't it, Squiff?—Quelch knows very well that we shouldn't take it from him—if he's going to Quelch to tell him he's lost a quid in this study, he'll find himself in the wrong box. None the less, we may be called on to explain the ink and things. Perhaps we were a little bit rough—"

"Rough!"

"Rough! Oh, my hat!"

And Hurree Singh opined in his weird and wonderful English that the roughness had indeed been terrific.

But it was too late now. By this time Billy Bunter would be in Mr. Quelch's study, telling a story of disaster and—

"Stop a minute! It said Squiff suddenly. "There's time yet to stop him and make him hear reason. He'll have to clean himself first. It's most inconvenient, to say the least of it, to tell a story with the cad—"

"Mustard—" said Bob Cherry.

"And soot—" purred Hurree Singh.

"And jam—" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, with all those," grinned Squiff, "running down your face into your mouth every time you open it! He would go to the bath-room and get some of it off, anyhow. Let's catch him as he comes out of the bath-room."

A chorus of approbation broke forth.

"Right ho!"

"The rightfulness of the esteemed Squiff is terrific!"

"Good egg!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

No sooner said than done. Harry Wharton & Co. sped along the corridor to the bath-room. Wharton was there first; he flung open the door—the others crowded into the bath-room after him.

One look sufficed. Billy Bunter was not in the bath-room. It was a place, in fact, that presented very little attraction to Billy Bunter at any time. Perhaps there was nothing much to be astonished at in his not being there.

But where was he? Had he gone directly to Quelch's room, or what? Had he—

A whisper came from Nugent, who had been in the rear, and was standing just outside the bath-room door.

"Look! There he is! He's been and cleaned his face somewhere. Quick, or we shall lose him!"

It took the Co. some time to fall to on the new scent. Billy Bunter, apparently, had been down to the kitchen to get rid of his inky stains. There was clean water to be had there, if one was polite. He had been down, and was on his way up again when Nugent saw him.

With a whoop of delight his pursuers sped upon his track. Unfortunately, however, Bunter had had too long a start.

Before he could be run down—before, in fact, it was sure that Billy Bunter was aware of his danger—he had made his way to the door of Mr. Quelch's study, knocked, and received a reply, and was safe inside.

The Co. could only stand and grind their teeth at a safe distance from the door, and wait for Billy Bunter to come out.

Strange to say, however, Bunter did not reappear.

The chums waited a full five minutes. They could hear the murmur of voices in the study—the sharp, metallic voice of Mr. Quelch and the lachrymose utterances of Billy Bunter.

It seemed a long time. Mr. Quelch, they knew, was busy, very busy, on his "History of Greifryars," and was not tolerant of interruption at any time.

The chums fully expected to see Billy Bunter emerge from the study in double-quick time, either with Mr. Quelch, or with the pains of a caning for company; but whatever was happening in the study, Billy Bunter did not emerge. On the contrary, he seemed to be indulging in quite a lengthy conversation with Mr. Quelch.

At last the chums could bear it no longer. The suggestion came from Bob Cherry.

Cautiously and noiselessly the chums approached the study door—it was not quite closed.

A position was achieved from which it was possible to see and hear what was happening in the study.

Through the aperture between the door and the doorpost could be seen the figure of Billy Bunter and Mr. Quelch. Mr. Quelch had turned from his typewriter, and seemed to be interested, mysteriously interested in Billy Bunter's remarks.

"I have come to you, sir," Bunter was saying, "because I know that you are always ready to give help where help is required."

The Co. gasped. Was it possible that Bunter was trying to "touch Mr. Quelch for a quid"? It was not possible—it could not be possible; but things quite impossible have a way of happening in the world. The chums held their breath.

"I am badly in want of money," went on Bunter—"a considerable sum, in fact; but I am not in a position to disclose my reasons for wanting it. I ventured to think, sir, that, in view of my known integrity, of my reliability, in fact, you might be willing to advance me what I require. I am expecting a postal-order, in fact, sir—it had to come out sooner or later—Bunter simply could not help himself—and when it comes I shall cheerfully and willingly apply that to the purpose I have in view. But, whatever its amount, sir, it is not likely that it will suffice for my purpose. So I ventured, sir—I know your kind heart, sir—I've always said, sir, that your heart was good, although your manner may be rather against you—"

It was too much! The idea of Billy Bunter committing the unheard-of audacity of attempting to touch Mr. Quelch for a quid fairly flabbergasted the juniors. They retreated from the door.

"Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"Never!"

"The idea of Bunter—"

"Going to Quelch—"

"For a quid—"

"For a worthy object—"

Wharton held up his hand.

"Hush, you fatheads!" he said.

"You'll give the game away! It's too good to be missed!"

It was. With cautious steps the juniors approached the door again. Mr. Quelch was speaking.

"What do you say you desire to apply the loan to, Bunter?"

"To the relief of somebody in distress, sir."

"Who is this somebody?"

"I would rather not answer, sir."

"Possibly not. But I think it may be my duty to insist on an answer, Bunter."

"But I trusted to your honour, sir."

"My what?" Mr. Quelch could

scarcely believe his ears. "You trusted to my what?"

"To your honour, sir," went on Bunter cheerfully. "Of course, I know, sir, that for some purposes we stand in the relation of teacher and scholar, sir, but for other purposes, sir, I think I am entitled to consider that we stand in the relationship of friends—of father and son, in fact."

"So that of your idea, is it, Bunter?" murmured Mr. Quelch softly.

"Yes, sir," went on Bunter. "Of father and son. Well, sir, when a son—a son he loves and trusts—comes to his father and says, 'Father—'"

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Quiet, you fathead!" breathed Wharton. "You'll give the game away!"

"And says, 'Father,'" went on Bunter. "I want a fiver—"

"A what?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"A fiver, father, but I regret that I am not in a position to tell you what I want it for, well, then, sir, I venture to say the father, loving and trusting his son, relying upon his integrity, sir, produces a fiver, and says, 'There, my boy, do what you like with it, and pay me back if and when it's convenient. I shall pay you back, sir, if and when it's convenient.'"

There was silence in the study for a moment. Outside, the Co. was almost doubled up with laughter. Bob Cherry leaned against the wall and crammed his fingers into his mouth to keep himself from exploding. Wharton was not much better—in fact, the spectacle of Bunter presenting himself to Mr. Quelch in the light of a son was too funny for words—it was, really!

None the less, the juniors were puzzled—at least, Wharton was. Billy Bunter must be in want of funds badly—very badly indeed, or he would venture to approach Mr. Quelch on such an errand. There was something not yet explained about the affair.

"Bunter," said Mr. Quelch quietly, "go over to the cupboard, will you?"

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir!"

"Open the door—"

"Yes, sir."

"You will see a number of canes there—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Kindly refrain from such ridiculous ejaculations in my presence, Bunter. Bring me the cane that in your judgment would be most appropriate for the purpose of punishing severely a junior who has been guilty of an unpardonable piece of impertinence."

"But—but—but, sir—I—I haven't been guilty of an unrep-pep-ardonable piece of impertinence!"

"Did I say you had, Bunter?"

"Nunno, sir. Bub—but—"

"Do you suppose that I should consider a mere application for a loan for the purpose of relieving genuine distress a piece of unpardonable impertinence?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, kindly select the cane that in your judgment is likely to be the means of inflicting the severest punishment upon a person thoroughly deserving of punishment. I may as well tell you, in order that your selection may be quite unbiased, that I do not resent, and never shall resent, an application made to me in good faith for a loan to be applied to the relief of unmerited distress. Now, bring me the cane!"

Bunter's brow cleared. He went over to the cupboard, and after a moment's consideration returned with a cane.

"Thank you! Now, Bunter, kindly go to the door and bring in those—those members of my Form who apparently are so interested in the subject of our



"I know your kind heart, sir—I've always said, sir, that your heart was good, although your manner may be against you—" stammered Billy Bunter. (See Chapter 2.)

conversation as to be guilty of eaves-dropping."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Great pip!"

"My sainted Aunt Maria!"

"The saintfulness of the esteemed Maria is terrific!"

It was no good. Mr. Quelch's injunction to Billy Bunter had taken the Co. by surprise, and before they had sufficiently recovered from their surprise to make an attempt at escape Billy Bunter rolled out on to the landing. He grinned cheerfully at the spectacle of the abashed juniors.

"You're to come in, all of you. There's Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, Inky, and Squiff, sir—I mean, Singh and Field, sir. Come in, all of you!"

The crestfallen juniors filed into the study, where Mr. Quelch stood toying with the cane. He had risen from his typewriter, and had unbuttoned his coat as if to give his arms free play. It was an ominous sight, and the juniors drew the worst deductions from it.

Billy Bunter grinned cheerfully. It did not occur to him that there was anything in the situation that need excite apprehension in his breast. He hoped to have the pleasure of seeing the juniors squirming under what seemed to him well-merited punishment. His own skin experienced none of those preliminary creepings associated with the active anticipation of punishment.

"Now then!" Mr. Quelch's voice rang out sharply. "Are all of you implicated in this piece of tomfoolery!"

"Tut-tut-tomfoolery!" Billy Bunter began to wonder if his disinterestedness in the choice of a cane had not betrayed him. "Tut-tut-tomfoolery, sir!"

"Silence!" rapped Mr. Quelch. "I ask you, Wharton, was it at your instigation or with your knowledge that Bunter made this application to me?"

"No, sir."

"Then how came it that you were outside my door, evidently with the object of overhearing what Bunter had to say to me? Did you know he was coming here?"

"Yes, sir."

"For the purpose of making an application for a loan?"

"No, sir. We thought he was sneaking."

"Sneaking!"

"Well, sir, Bunter did make an application to us, sir—to all of us—and we endeavoured to convince him that his application was hopeless."

"I see."

"Then Squiff—Field, sir—overheard Bunter say something about coming to you, sir, and we—followed him."

"I see. So that it amounts to this: Bunter appealed to you for a loan, which you refused; then, fancying that he was about to divulge to me things that the custom of the School forbids him to divulge, you followed him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I'll deal with you presently. Bunter!"

Billy Bunter fairly jumped when the sound of his name, uttered in Mr. Quelch's harshest tones, fell upon his ears.

"Yes, sir?"

"I have told you, and I repeat, that if your application to me was motivated by a genuine desire to relieve distress, you need not fear. But in order to satisfy myself that your motive was an

unselfish one, and that you had no idea of appropriating this money to purposes of your own, I require you to tell me at once what you propose doing with this money if I should lend it to you. I may say that I shall act upon your information, and, if I satisfy myself that you really have some worthy object in view—well, then possibly you may achieve your aim. Now then! What were you going to do with this money?"

"I—I can't tell you, sir!"

"Why not?"

"Bub-bub—because it wouldn't be right, sir!"

"Wouldn't be right! Why not?"

"I am unable give you the information you desire, sir. I think, sir, that relying on my integrity—my known integrity, sir—you—"

"Silence!" Mr. Quelch's voice rang thunderously through the room. "I am sorry to say, Bunter, that I have good reason to doubt the existence of what you call your 'known integrity.' I have found you out before now in shameless inaccuracies. Unless you inform me at once, in order that I may verify the facts, for what purpose this money was required, I shall have no alternative but to have recourse to the sternest measures!"

"Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter's face was a picture. It was all too hideously true. There was a prospect, after all, that the cane might be put to uses of which he—Bunter—could not approve.

Emotions of various sorts expressed themselves upon Bunter's none too expressive face; and yet Wharton, watching him, was puzzled, for really there seemed

to be something in Bunter's demeanour that suggested a doubt as to whether he had not, after all, some idea in his head other than those relating to the satisfaction of his own internal needs. And yet, what idea could it be?

"I'm waiting, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I'm waiting for the facts, if you please. Where is this worthy object to be found? What are his needs? How much will be required in order to satisfy them? Answer me at once!"

"I—I can't, sir! I really can't!"

"But I insist, Bunter! I warned you that I should not consider you guilty of impertinence so long as I had reason to believe that your appeal was a genuine one. I warn you that if your appeal does not turn out to be genuine I shall consider you guilty of very grave impertinence, and shall deal with you accordingly. Now then?"

"But I really can't, sir!" Bunter's distress was piteous to behold. "I really can't, sir!"

"Why not?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I can't tell you that, sir, either!"

"Why not?"

"It's a secret, sir!"

"You have no business with secrets, Bunter. Now then, are you going to answer me or not?"

"No, sir—Ow! Yow! Yaroooh!"

"Now, Bunter, if you please"—whack!—"I am waiting to hear the name"—whack!—"of this deserving person"—whack!—"You may rest assured"—whack!—"that frankness will serve your purpose"—whack!—"better than reticence"—whack!—"You may rest assured that it is exceedingly unpleasant"—whack!—"for me to be compelled to administer this punishment"—whack!—"but you may rest assured also"—whack!—"that I shall not cease from doing so until my object has been achieved"—whack, whack, whack!—"despite the cost to my own feelings!"—whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

The juniors had never seen Mr. Quelch exert himself to such effect before. The cane rose and fell, and the dust rose from the trousers of the hapless Bunter in a cloud. It was like beating carpets. The juniors marvelled that Bunter stood it. He wasn't standing it, in one sense; he was lying down to it, making an attempt to roll under the cane, anywhere out of the rain of blows. But Mr. Quelch was not to be denied. If Billy Bunter's ideas of the paternal relation that should exist between Mr. Quelch and himself had been somewhat vague before, they must have acquired form and substance now. The most affectionate parent could hardly have set to with more vigour than did Mr. Quelch. At last the blows ceased. Mr. Quelch was breathless, in addition to which the noise Billy Bunter made filled the study.

"Now, Bunter"—Mr. Quelch was almost too shaken to speak—"this is a preliminary. I am determined to have from you the name of the person for whose benefit this loan was intended. It is exceedingly unpleasant for me to have to administer punishment, but unpleasant duties must be discharged. Come out from under that table!" Bunter came out.

"Stand up! Now then, Bunter, kindly inform me of the name of the person on whose behalf this loan was to have been expended, and the circumstances which make such expenditure necessary!"

"I can't, sir—I really can't! Ow!"

It was astonishing. What Bunter had already gone through would have taken the determination out of nine in ten of the juniors. Yet here he was defining the lightning of Mr. Quelch's anger with a courage worthy of the Greek hero who

defied the wrath of Jove, with results scarcely less disastrous.

"I'm waiting, Bunter!" Mr. Quelch's voice was ominously calm.

"I can't, sir!"—whack! "Ow!"—whack! "Yow!"—whack! "Yaroooh!"

"I shall persevere, Bunter, I assure you. You will find my determination as enduring as your own!"—whack, whack, whack, whack!

It was too much. Billy Bunter gave in. Mr. Quelch was surpassing himself. The short breather he had allowed himself had been turned to good account. The cane fairly sang through the air; Billy Bunter presented various portions of his person to the cane in the vain hope of discovering by bitter experience the place where it hurt least, but he soon discovered that the wisest plan was to stick to convention, and offer Mr. Quelch that portion of his personality that it required the greatest quantity of check trousers to cover; but it was no good, flesh and blood could not stand it. Billy Bunter shrieked out his willingness to give the information required, and the rain of blows ceased. Mr. Quelch laid aside the cane and wiped his brow.

The juniors looked at each other through the dust-laden atmosphere. They were to hear the truth at last—there was something in that, at any rate.

"Now then, Bunter"—Mr. Quelch's voice betrayed signs of the exertion he had gone through—"who is the deserving person for whose benefit this loan is required?"

"Me, sir!"

"What!" Mr. Quelch could scarcely believe his ears.

"Me, sir!"

"And for what purpose did you require this money?"

"To spend, sir."

"On what, sir?"

"On tuck, sir!"

"On tuck?"

"Yes, sir!"

The juniors looked at Mr. Quelch. Mr. Quelch looked at the juniors. It was incredible. That Billy Bunter should have had the impudence to seek a loan for the purpose of laying it out with Mrs. Mimble was not astonishing, but that he should have gone to Mr. Quelch for such a purpose was not astonishing—it was incredible! Wharton's conjecture was the right one, then. The extra toot had been too much for Billy Bunter. His mind was going—if not gone. There was nothing for it but complete rest, fresh scenes. As for Mr. Quelch, he nearly collapsed.

"Do you mean to say, Bunter," he gasped, "that you intended to spend this money on yourself?"

"Yes, sir!"

"On food?"

"Yes, sir!"

"And you came here in the hope that I should be so foolish as to make you this loan?"

"Yes, sir. I knew you'd just had your cheque, sir."

"My cheque for what?"

"For your quarter's salary, sir."

"And how did you know that?"

"Well, sir, I thought it was only right before venturing to make an appeal to you to satisfy myself that you were capable of acceding to it. I happened to overhear you saying to Mr. Prout, sir, that you should be glad of your cheque, and there was a registered letter for you in the rack this morning, sir—Yaroooh! Wharrer you at? If you break my glasses, sir, you'll have to pay for them!"

It was too much. Mr. Quelch leaped on Bunter like a fasting tiger, and in five full minutes the juniors saw Billy Bunter's check trousers through a cloud

of dust, evoked therefrom by the extraneous collision between them and the cane Mr. Quelch yielded. But it was over at last, vengeance was satisfied, and the hapless Bunter squirmed his way out of the study in a pitiable condition. What followed, though painful enough in ordinary circumstances, seemed almost pleasurable in comparison. Mr. Quelch, after a short lecture on the sin of eavesdropping, dismissed the juniors with two cuts apiece, and then sat down to his typewriter in a somewhat flustered condition.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A LOSS FOR COKER!

HORACE COKER had had a remittance, but Horace Coker was scarcely heedful of the fact. Remittances were no new thing to Horace Coker. His Aunt Judith, a person of means, with nobody to spend her money upon except her nephew and some half-dozen cats and dogs who were pensioners upon her charity, not unnaturally gave Horace the preference. Besides, the great Horace's tastes were more expensive than those of the cats and dogs. Anyhow, whatever the reason, Coker was usually in funds. He was in funds now. Potter and Greene, who shared his study, a somewhat onerous privilege, there being scarcely room for anybody but Horace Coker in any one study, were well aware of the fact that their friend was in funds, and awaited somewhat impatiently the time when Coker's thoughts should come under the influence of his appetite. At present, however, the great Horace was not concerned with feeding. Coker was the possessor of a wonderful literary gift, which, like murder, would out, and he was busy putting the finishing touches to a detective story, which in due course would find its way to the desk of some unfortunate editor, who, if he had time to be amused, would probably be almost grateful for the attention.

Potter and Greene, however, were not interested in literature; they were interested in the laying out of the remittance, and as the time went on, and the great Horace still pored over his confounded story, they began to bring to bear such pressure as they dared upon their study-mate, with the idea of giving his desires a definite shove in the direction of tea. At last Coker looked up from his MS.

"Do you think," he asked, "there's anything played out about the murderer dropping his knife beside the body, and the hero coming along and picking it up, and being caught with it in his hand? It is my own idea, in fact, but I may have been anticipated; somebody may have thought it out before, in fact. I want to be original, you know."

"It's a good idea, that of the knife," said Potter warily, in fear lest Coker should begin a fresh revision of his work. "A distinctly good idea. I shouldn't touch it, Coker. Let the knife stand. A knife's a good idea."

"Or a knife and fork," assented Greene absently.

Coker glared.

"Look here, Greene," he roared, "if you've no more sense than to attempt to cast ridicule upon literature—"

"Ahem!"

It was Potter's cough, and the great Horace turned upon him like a lion baffled of his prey.

"I beg your pardon!" said Potter. "I haven't got rid of my cold yet, old man. Go on with the story. I—I like it." Coker was mollified.

"Well," he said, "I will say this for you, Potter. You have got some idea of what's good." Potter had. He had an idea that Mrs. Mimble's cakes and the jam were good, but it seemed hardly the time to press his view. Coker had to get his detective story off his chest, so to speak, then perhaps he might be led to think of tea. "My idea, then," said Coker, "is for the murder to be committed by Stephen Gripe, the ex-convict—that means a man from prison; served his time, you know—"

"Thank you!" murmured Potter.

"What a mind you have, Coker!"

"Well," resumed Coker, "the millionaire had just got into his possession the diamond necklace which will prove the identity of his daughter, when Stephen Gripe—"Tripe!" put in Greene softly, but loud enough for Potter to overhear—"stabs him just below the clavicle—that's the collar-bone, you know. I explain these points for you, Potter, because I don't want you to miss anything—"

"Thanks, old man!"

"And empties the old man's pockets. He has had no food for a couple of days." "Poor devil!" interpolated Greene, with what looked like genuine sympathy; and Coker beamed on him graciously.

"Then he comes across the necklace. He sees at a glance that it is worth a fortune, he lets fall the knife—note that point, he lets fall the knife—and leaves it beside the corpse—"

"What would he eat his peas with?" queried Greene.

Coker turned angrily upon him.

"Look here, Greene, if you can't appreciate literature—here Potter's cough troubled him again—"you might at least hold your silly tongue, and let those appreciate it who can."

Potter interposed.

"Go on, Coker, old man! I'm getting quite absorbed; I can't bear your leaving off. I'm getting quite wrapped up in it. Go on, old man, please!"

Potter was getting desperate. Unless the story were brought to an end soon it would be too late to get the goods for tea. He lunged at Greene's foot under the table. Coker gave a yell.

"Who's that treading on my foot?" Potter realised that he had made a slight mistake. It was unfortunate, but it could not be helped.

"Sorry, old chap," he said, "but in my excitement I could almost see the millionaire, Stephen Swipe—"

"Gripe!" roared Coker. "Stephen Gripe! What a memory you've got, Potter—"

"Well, Tripe, then, if you prefer it!"

"Gripe!" roared Coker.

"Well, Gripe or Tripe. There's not much difference, after all. I could almost see Stephen—er—Gripe, the millionaire—"

"He wasn't the millionaire!" roared Coker. "He was the ex-convict!"

"Sorry!" murmured Potter. "It's only my unfortunate way of putting it. I mean the ex-convict, collaring the diamond, reckless, as you say, of consequences—"

"Diamond necklace, not reckless!" roared Coker. "What a rotten memory you've got!"

Potter let it go at that. To attempt to dwell any further on the matter would have aroused suspicion in Coker's mind that he had not been attending properly. He resigned himself to the inevitable.

"By the way," said Greene suddenly, "what about Bunter?"

Coker looked up from his story.

"Bunter?" he queried. "What about Bunter?"

"I was going to suggest," went on Greene, "that we have him here."

"Have Bunter here! What for?"

Potter and Coker stared in surprise. Coker, out of sheer lack of comprehension that anyone should desire the society of Bunter when he might be enjoying his—Coker's—reading of his story, and Potter from inability to follow Greene's line of thought.

"I was going to suggest," went on Greene, "that Coker should cross-examine Bunter."

"Cross-examine Bunter! What for?"

"Well, in my view, the man who can write a good detective story is the man to make a good detective."

Coker was mollified. It was true he did not yet see what Greene was driving at, but the scheme Greene had in mind was evidently one in which he—Horace Coker—was to play a leading role.

"Go on, Greene," he said graciously.

"Well, you know," said Greene, "there was a bit of rumour this morning about Bunter trying to borrow a quid off Quelch."

"Yes. What then?"

"Well, I believe," went on Greene, as cautiously as he could, "that the rights and wrongs of that affair weren't properly thrashed out in Quelch's study. There looks to me, in fact, like a giddy mystery somewhere, and if anybody can fathom it, it's the man who can write a story like that about Stephen Tripe—"

"Snipe, you idiot!" whispered Potter.

"About Stephen Snipe," went on Greene innocently, "well, that's the man to solve the Bunter mystery! What say you, Potter?"

Potter assented heartily. He did not as yet see what Greene was driving at, but he knew that Greene's desires took the same direction as his own. Anyway, he assented. Greene went on:

"It stands to reason Bunter didn't go to Quelch to borrow a quid. The idea is absurd. He went there for some other reason; the question is, what is it? It's up to us to find out what he went there for. In a matter like this—not in all matters, but in a matter like this, a matter calling for the exercise of a real detective gift—well, I'll stand down to Coker. I don't like admitting the fact; I don't admit it, in fact, as a general thing, but Coker's got the headpiece in this study. You agree with me, Potter?"

Potter agreed, outwardly. He didn't inwardly, but it was up to him to back up Greene's game, whatever it was.

"We'll have him in here," said Greene.

"We'll send him over to the tuckshop for the goods. When he comes back we'll stand him a tart or two."

Potter began to tume.

"And then, after tea, when we've allayed his suspicions, Coker can question him. I tell you what, Coker, old man; the man who can write a story like that ought to take up detective work. He really ought to, and the sooner he starts the better. What say you, Potter?"

Potter said ditto. He could grasp the idea now. Bunter was to be sent for, mollified by being despatched to the tuckshop on their errand. He would probably bag a tart or two, but that did not matter; and then, after tea, Coker could cross-examine him if he liked. Potter and Greene would not be present at the cross-examination; Coker would be left to exercise his detective gifts in the society of Bunter.

Coker fell into the trap. He was beginning to feel a bit peckish himself, and Bunter could always be relied upon to undertake an errand of this description. He fell in with the plan, and Greene was despatched to find the man of mystery—Bunter.

He soon contrived to do this. He had

no difficulty in persuading Bunter to undertake the errand. Bunter fell in with his plans with feverish eagerness, and Greene returned to the study in triumph.

The remittance—it took the form of a postal-order for two pounds—was unearthed. Bunter was given a list of the goods required, Potter and Greene joining very heartily in the work of advising Coker how he should lay out his cash, and Bunter went off joyfully on his errand.

It was tedious work waiting for his return, and Coker took up his manuscript again.

Potter broke in hastily:

"I should get Bunter to post that as soon as he comes back," he said. "You won't improve it, old man. Pack it up and send it off!"

"I've got no stamps," objected Coker.

"I've got some stamps!" broke in Greene with friendly interest. "Only tell me how many you want!"

"I shall register it, of course," said Coker. "A bob's worth, you do it, I suppose, if you've got a bob's worth." It's Horace had a bob's worth. He didn't like waste; but then, he didn't like Coker's story—of the two he preferred waste. He handed over the stamps, and Coker set to work.

"Horace Holmes," he said pleasantly, "is the name of my hero."

Potter grinned.

"What's the matter with 'Sherlock'?" he asked.

Coker disagreed warmly.

"Horace is a good name," he said.

"I don't say so because it is my own; it is a good name, in fact. It's Horace Holmes who comes on the scene and picks up the knife—there's blood on it—"

"Where the deuce has Bunter got to?" said Potter anxiously.

"And quite unthinkingly—" went on Coker.

"He gets some of the blood on his hands, old man," said Greene wearily.

"How did you know?" queried Coker in amazement.

"Well, you've been reading it, old man."

"I haven't read that part," said Coker suspiciously.

"Well, we had an idea," Potter tried to explain. "We could see the things shaping, you know—that's the idea in literature—to create an expectation in the mind of your reader, and—er—er—"

There was a knock at the door. Potter and Greene abandoned the argument and ran to open the door. They flung the door open wide, disclosing the figure of Bunter on the threshold.

Bunter indeed it was, but Bunter minus the goods. They yanked him into the study.

"What's the matter?" roared Potter.

"Where's the goods?" queried Greene.

"I—I haven't got them!" stammered Bunter.

"Why not? Is the shop shut? Is Mrs. Mimble ill, or what?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I've lost the money!" stammered Bunter.

"Lost the what?"

Potter and Greene could hardly contain themselves.

"Lul-lul-lost the money!" repeated Bunter.

"But where? How?"

"I dud-don't know!" wailed Bunter.

"I changed the order—"

"Changed the order? Mrs. Mimble would have given you change!"

"I didn't know; I—I thought I'd better change the order," said Bunter.

"You never know—the Post Office might

go broke, or something. Well, I changed it, and was coming back, when somebody bu-bumped into me and knocked it out of my hand. I've been lul-looking for it."

"Where did you lose it?"
"In the lane."
"He's a liar!" yelled Potter. "He's sticking to it!"
"I'm not!" groaned Bunter. "I tell you I lost it!"
"Search him!" yelled Greene. "I bet you he's got it on him!"

There did not seem much likelihood of this being the case. Bunter would hardly venture to stick to two whole quids, but nevertheless it was worth making the search; and Billy Bunter, despite his protests, was subjected to a thorough search, but in vain.

Then Coker seized the luckless Bunter by the ear.

"Come on!" he said. "Show us where you dropped it. Bring a light, Greene, Come on; it must be about somewhere!"
Two whole quid! It was maddening. The four rushed off to the lane, and spent a painful hour in unavailing search.

It was incredible that the money should have been lost, but although Bunter pointed out with particular care the exact place where he had been standing when he was bumped into by some unknown person, the search was vain.

At last the searchers gave in. They would have gone on if there had been the ghost of a chance of finding the money, but apparently there was not; and after taking it out of Bunter, Coker, Potter, and Greene returned to the study. All thought of cross-examining the delinquent had vanished from their minds, even from Coker's; but there was one thing that had not vanished from Coker's mind, and that was the thought of his great detective story. He turned up the lights.

"There is one blessing about it," he said.

Potter and Greene stared.
"What's that?" asked Potter.
Coker beamed.

"I can read my story right through to you now," he said, "without interruption. Here, where are you going?"

It was too late. Potter and Greene had fled.

They were fed up with Coker.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton & Co. Take a Hand!

"IT'S funny!"
Thus Harry Wharton.
The Famous Five, together with Squiff, were in council in Wharton's study. Wharton had been thinking.

The story of Bunter's unfortunate loss of Coker's two quid had gone the rounds of the school, and had been commented upon. However, the loss was Coker's, and none of the Remove felt it his business to be sorry for Coker.

Wharton's thoughts, however, were not directly concerned with Coker. He was reviewing in his mind the whole series of events of which the loss of Coker's two pounds was the culminating item, and he was inclining to a somewhat startling conclusion, which he now expressed for the benefit of the company.

"I'm beginning to think you know," he said, "that there is something in it!"

The Co. agreed. There was something in it without a doubt. There had been a hiding for Bunter and for themselves, and a loss of two pounds for Coker. Without a doubt there was something in it—rather too much, in fact.

"I don't mean that," said Wharton. "I mean that I'm beginning to wonder THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 568.

whether Bunter really did want the money for something!"

"Go hon!" said Bob Cherry.
"The go-onfulness is terrific!" submitted Hurree Singh. And the other members of the Co. corroborated. There really did not seem much doubt that Bunter really had wanted the money.

"Fatheads!" snapped Wharton. "Take the case of Coker's quids, for instance!"

"Well!"
"Go on!"
"What does my august chum conclusively determine about the sublime Coker's lamented quietlets?"

"Well, suppose," continued Wharton, "that Bunter did not really lose them. Suppose he wanted money so badly that he determined to stick to them."

"But they searched him!" broke in Bob Cherry.

"Quite so!" assented Wharton. "But Bunter, although he's a fathead, is not such a fool as not to foresee the possibility of a search. What would he do? He would hide the quids somewhere before he came back, and then get them afterwards."

A chorus of expostulations greeted Wharton's theory.

"Why, he's been stony!"

"Starving!"

"He tried to borrow a bob from me this morning!"

"The brokfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific!"

"Quite so!" assented Harry quietly.

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"But suppose Bunter didn't want the money for himself!"

Again the chorus of expostulations broke forth.

"Rate!"

"Rot!"

"Rubbish!"

"Are you off your giddy rocker, Wharton?"

"Peace, my infants!" said Nugent.

"Let us give Wharton his head!"

I really believe our worthy commander has got an idea in his head. Stranger things have happened. Out with it, Harry!

What is it?"

"Well, went on Wharton, "you remember Bunter's story of a great and worthy object?"

"Well, a do—does!"

"Well, suppose—only suppose—that Bunter has, in fact, got some scheme in hand, just consider how the facts seem to fall in with that idea. First of all, Bunter tries his hand on us. Now, I don't deny that Bunter's had many a bob out of us—"

"He has!"

"But, speaking generally, he has confined himself to demands for small loans. I think this is the first time he has ever asked for quids—that is from all of us at once, at least so persistently. Then it was not only ourselves—there was Quelch. Now, seriously for Bunter to apply to Quelch for the loan of a quid! Think of it, my children! Bunter applying to Quelch for the loan of a quid!"

The Co. pondered its leader's words. There really seemed some evidence to the effect that Bunter really had some game on hand.

"Go on!"

"On the ball, Wharton!"

"Give us a lead!"

"Well, then," went on Harry—"then we have the case of Coker's quids. Now, I venture to say that Bunter does not, and would not in ordinary circumstances, stoop to stealing. It is true that he is sometimes guilty of acts that are not much better; but if Bunter appropriates money outright it is usually money that he has some sort of claim on—from his own point of view—or he takes it as a loan, with the idea of paying it back if and when convenient."

"But he lost it, he says!" broke in Cherry.

"Peace!" rejoined Wharton. "I ask you to ask yourselves, all of you, whether in all the long and glorious history of Greyfriars Bunter has ever been known to lose money before?"

The Co. pondered the question. Tax their minds as they would they could not remember Bunter ever losing money before. Billy Bunter knew the value of money too well to lose it.

"Go on!" cried the Co.

"Give us the next instalment!"

"Ring up on the next act!"

"But wait a moment!" interpolated Bull. "Bunter confessed!"

"Confessed?" asked Wharton. "When, and where?"

"Why, in Quelch's room! He confessed that he wanted the money to spend on tuck!"

Wharton smiled.

"I'm coming to that!" he said. "Suppose—to carry out my theory—that Bunter had this scheme, one he could not divulge to Mr. Quelch. What was he to do with Quelch sailing into him with the cane like a carpet-beating machine? What could he do but confess to something?"

"True, O King!"

"Go on!"

"Pile in, Wharton!"

"Well, then," went on Harry, "the evidence seems to me fairly conclusive. Bunter wants money—wants it so badly



Cautiously raising themselves on their knees, the juniors peered over the window-sill into the interior of the ruined cottage. "Oh, I say, you know, Bessie, don't be greedy!" Bunter was remonstrating. (See Chapter 8.)

that he even goes to Quelch. Then luck befriends him. He is sent on Coker's errand with a couple of quid to spend, and he comes back with a tale of having lost it. Does the evidence, gentlemen, warrant a verdict of guilty? Wharton paused, like Mark Antony, for a reply, and the gentlemen of the jury responded with one voice:

"It does! It do!"

"Now, then," went on Wharton. "we will assume that Bunter has got the two quid. What does he want it for? Some of you may be inclined to suggest that he wants it to spend on himself in a way and at a place we all know; but I don't think so. Has anybody seen Bunter in the tuckshop? Has anybody seen Bunter with food in his possession?"

Nobody had. The jury pondered the question, and found for Bunter on the question of tuck.

"Well, then," went on Wharton, "since we are all agreed that it is a practical impossibility for Bunter to keep money in his pocket, in the face of the temptations offered by Mrs. Mibble and her wares, we must accept the conclusion that Bunter has got some deep scheme on hand. The question is—what?"

"Now," went on Wharton, "if Bunter were an ordinary youth, one of whose discretion we could be as sure as we can be of our own, we might leave him to his own devices; but Bunter is not an ordinary youth. He is a source of anxiety to us. We can't give him his head; we must keep an eye on him. Now, my idea is this. Bunter's got into the hands of bookmakers or somebody of that description, or one of those swindling concerns where you deposit five pounds or so. And

the firm lets you know when it's gone, and then you need some more."

"Are there any concerns like that?" queried Bob Cherry.

Wharton smiled at his friend's innocence.

"Of course," he said, "you get a run for your money—sometimes. I'm giving you the principle of it—that you have to send more as soon as it's all gone. 'Cover,' they call it."

"Must be fatheads!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Well, then," resumed Wharton, "if we could trust Bunter we might leave him to his own devices; but Bunter with five pounds is an invitation to swindlers. Now, my suggestion is that we form ourselves into a committee—a watch committee—and keep a watch on Bunter. If he is engaged upon private business, well and good—we won't interfere. If we see any reason to believe that Bunter is bent on disgracing himself and the old school, that's where we chip in. Is it agreed?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Now," went on Wharton, "my idea is this. We will take it for granted that Bunter has, or had, two pounds in his possession. I suppose he wants money like most of us, to spend it. Now, he either must spend it—in which case we must watch him when he does, and find out how it goes—or he has spent it, in which case we must find out where it has gone."

"Hear, hear!"

"Listen to the words of wisdom!"

"Well played, Wharton!"

"Now, my suggestion is that we go down to Courtfield and make inquiries. We can call at Mrs. Mibble's as we

pass, and see if he's been there. If he hasn't spent the money there it must have been in Courtfield. He hasn't been farther afield, that I'll swear, for I've kept my eye on him. If there's no sign of the money in Courtfield—well, then we must watch for letters. Now then, who volunteers for Courtfield?"

"I do!"

"I do!"

"We all do!"

"That settles it, then!" said Wharton. "We start work at Courtfield."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

An Astounding Discovery!

IT was on the following afternoon that the conspirators assembled in the Close, and, after a hurried confabulation, started for Courtfield. They were mounted, their iron steeds having been requisitioned for the trip. They had been keeping an eye on Billy Bunter during the day, and work had suffered somewhat in consequence; but as Hurree Singh remarked, "All's well that has a silver lining!" And the Famous Five, together with Squiff, got astride their wheels, and started gaily off upon their quest.

Arriving at Courtfield, they put up their machines at Uncle Clegg's, and discussed their plans over buns and ginger-beer.

There were not many shops at Courtfield, but there were enough to occupy the amateur detectives for some time; but then, as Wharton remarked, there was no need to inquire at all the shops.

There were some shops to which Billy Bunter could hardly be supposed to go by any stretch of imagination. There was the undertaker's, for instance, the chemist's, the penny bazaar, the marine stores, and the baby-linen warehouse—kept by two old maids—and the place where they kept mangies and domestic ironmongery. They couldn't quite see Bunter spending money at any of these establishments.

It was really a question of the confectioner's or the tobacconist's, and one or two more establishments of a similar character dealing in luxuries such as appeal to Young England.

Accordingly the chums separated. Cherry and Bull went together. They had the end of the village to work upon. Johnny Bull was left over when the various districts were parcelled out by Wharton, and accordingly Bob Cherry was given a subordinate in the shape of Johnny Bull. Bob was glad of company. He had the least promising part of the task to deal with, and set about his task with some reluctance.

The first place the two chums came to was the establishment whose stock seemed to consist mainly of footballs, fireguards, and saucapans, none of which articles, so far as they knew, made any appeal to Bunter. However, the chums put their questions with some tact, and were rewarded by the information that Billy Bunter had not purchased at that establishment—at least, anything in the way of domestic ironmongery.

At last Bob Cherry's patience gave out. They had been nearly the round of the district, and the only discovery they had made was the negative one that Billy Bunter had not visited any one of the shops. They seemed no help for it but to go back and confess to failure. There was only the baby-linen shop, and, really, when you come to think of it, the baby-linen shop was as hopeless as the undertaker's.

"Let's toss up for it!" suggested Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry assented, and the coin was spun.

It came down "heads," and "tails" had been Bob Cherry's prophecy. He took his courage in both hands and entered the shop. A nice-looking young lady was in charge, which made it worse. She smiled on the unfortunate Bob.

"What can I get you?" she asked pleasantly.

"I m-m-m-merely wished to inquire," said Bob desperately, "if you've sold anything to one of our fellows—recently, you know? We're Greysfriars chaps. Of course, I know it's all rot, miss; but if you could tell me—You see, there's a lot of chaps waiting to know." Bob was getting mixed again. "Have you sold anything—anything whatever to one of our chaps recently—quite recently?"

"Yes; I think we have," smiled the young lady.

"What!" Bob Cherry could scarcely believe his ears. "You have sun-sold goods to a Gug-Greysfriars chap—from here?"

"Yes; from here," smiled the young lady. "Why not?"

"No; of course, why not, as you say?" assented Bob helplessly. "Why not? Certainly not! Of course, as you say, certainly not!" Then he pulled himself up. "Wah-wah was it a fat porpoise, with eyeglasses you sold them to?"

The young lady seemed offended.

"The young gentleman was certainly inclined to be stout," she said, somewhat shyly, "and he may have been a little short-sighted; but some people wear

pince-nez for show, you know. It makes them look intellectual!"

"What did he come for?" asked Bob. The young lady hesitated. Bob cast a look round the shop in a wild endeavor to fix on some article of the many there such as Billy Bunter, in his maddest moments, might have required. There were babies' bonnets, mob-caps, and aprons, blouses, and a host of nameless things that Bob had certainly forgotten ever requiring himself. Surely Bunter would not have required any of them.

"Well," began the young lady, "it's not our custom to give information to strangers what our customers buy here, but if you'll be a good boy, and promise faithfully never to tell anybody, I'll tell you!"

"I pip-pip-promise!" stammered Bob. "Well, then," said the young lady, "Master Bunter came here for a—Bob listened with all his ears—"for a nightgown and a packet of hairpins."

"A nun-nightgown and a pip-pip-packet of hairpins, miss!"

"Yes, a nightgown and a packet of hairpins."

"Thank you, miss! I—I'm much obliged to you. Goo-good-morning!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's Scheme!

IT was not morning, but Bob was quite unaware of the fact. His brain was reeling. He groped his way out of the shop.

"A pip-pip-packet of hairpins—of hairpins! A nun-nightgown and a pip-pip-packet of hairpins! Oh, my hat! My only aunt! A nightgown and a pip-pip-packet of hairpins! Great pip!"

He was roused by Johnny Bull's hand on his shoulder, and Johnny Bull's voice in his ear.

"Where are you going?" queried Johnny Bull. "What's the matter with you? What has happened?"

Bob stared at him blankly.

"A pip-pip-packet of hairpins!" he stammered.

"What!" roared Johnny Bull.

"A pip-pip-packet of hairpins!"

Johnny Bull was a youth of resource. He came to the conclusion that his poor chum had suffered some dreadful shock. There was a horse-trough near by. Bob was still stuttering helplessly, so Johnny Bull acted. He took his poor chum by the scruff of the neck and plunged his head into the cooling water in the trough.

"Groggohh! Leggo, you idiot! Wharrer you doing!"

Bob broke away from Johnny Bull's grasp, and clenched his fists.

"Wharrer you at!" he roared.

"Trying to bring you to your senses!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"To bub-bub-bring me to my senses?"

"I thought you were off your rocker. You were muttering something about hairpins. What's the matter?"

Bob's brow cleared. Perhaps he had been a little bit strange in his manner, but it was not to be wondered at.

"Bunter's been there!" he gasped at last.

"Been there! What for?"

"For a nightgown and a packet of hairpins."

"For a what?"

"For a nightgown and a packet of hairpins."

"For a pip-pip-packet of hairpins—for a pip-pip—"

"Here, come along, quick," chuckled Bob—"over to the water-trough! It saved me, perhaps it will save you."

Johnny Bull shook himself free. The chums looked at each other.

"A packet of hairpins!"

"Yes. A nightgown and a packet of hairpins."

"We must tell Wharton at once."

"We must."

"Come on!"

They made their way back as rapidly as possible to Uncle Clegg's, where the others were already awaiting their arrival. All were there. Wharton looked somewhat anxious, but the others were their customary selves. Cherry and Bull disclosed their news.

The effect was electrical.

"A nightgown!" chuckled Nugent.

"A packet of hairpins!" echoed Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was Wharton who recalled the attention of the Co. to the fact that it was late.

"It's time we were getting back," he said, "unless we want to be late for call-over. Besides, I want a talk with you chaps."

Bob Cherry looked at him in surprise.

"You seem to take it seriously, old man," he said.

"Yes," replied Wharton enigmatically. "I am inclined to take it seriously. Now, not another word until we're safe home. Then I've got something to say to you chaps."

The chums reached Greysfriars safely, and after call-over assembled again in Wharton's study. It had been hard work to repress the curiosity excited by Wharton's enigmatical remarks, but Wharton had refused to answer any questions. Cherry and Bull learned from the other members of the Co. that other facts had come to light in the course of the investigation. Bunter had made a few other purchases here and there, mainly of provisions. None of these other purchases, however, were suggestive of more than that Bunter proposed having a feed, or standing somebody else a feed, which was less likely; but Wharton had declined to be drawn as to the nature of his suspicions. However, when the Co. was reassembled in the study, Bob Cherry broke silence.

"Now," he said, "what's the giddy mystery? What is it?"

Wharton, instead of replying, asked a question, strange question.

"Any of you got any money?" he queried.

"Why, what—" began Bob Cherry.

Wharton held up his hand, and repeated his question.

"Any of you got any money?"

The chums searched their pockets. Between them they managed to produce a decent sum. Nugent, in particular, had a pound note.

"That is as well," said Wharton shortly. "We may want it."

"But why?"

"What for?"

"The whatfulnessness is terrific, my esteemed chum!"

"We're going," said Wharton quietly, "to invest it."

"Invest it! What'n?"

"We're going to invest it," went on Wharton, "in a worthy object, that we should approve of if we knew what it was."

There was no mistaking the import of these words. The money was to be invested in or with Bunter—with Bunter, of all people—to be invested in baby-linen, or at least hairpins, since Bunter's weakness took that form. For a moment longer silence—the silence of stupefaction—reigned in the study, then Bedlam broke forth.

"Invest it in Bunter!"
 "To blue on hairpins!"
 "And nightgowns!"
 "My only aunt!"
 "Shush!" Wharton held up his hand.
 "Let your angry passions cease, my infants. We agreed, did we not, that it is up to us to keep an eye on Bunter? Didn't we?"

"We did—we does!"
 "Well, then, Bunter means to keep his secret, so we've got to use strategy. If Bunter won't tell—well, we must find out."

"But wherefore the cash, my esteemed chum?"

"I'm coming to that," went on Wharton quietly. "But I was going to say that I don't think you fellows appreciate the significance of those hairpins. They signify, if you'll allow me to finish what I want to say, that there is a woman in the case."

"A woman in the case?"
 "Great Scott!"

"The greatfulness of the esteemed Sir Walter is terrific!"

"At least, a girl," Wharton corrected himself. "Bunter's buying nightgowns and hairpins—not for himself, I suppose you'll agree, but for some girl or other. Now, in view of that fact, I can only come, I am afraid, to one conclusion, and that is that our friends up at Cliff House are in some danger of annoyance from Bunter. Stop a moment, Bob." This was to Bob Cherry, who was somewhat sensitive on the subject of Marjorie Hazeldene. "I don't say it is so, but that is about the only conclusion I can come to on the facts. Our motto, therefore, must be 'Cherchez la femme,' in Bunter's own interests. But it may not be so easy as it seems. Suppose—only suppose—that Bunter should be simply the emissary of some young lady who would refuse to betray him, we should look pretty fools if we went over to Cliff House with no evidence to show. No; we've got to catch Bunter in the act. Now I come to the cash—"

"I say, you fellows!"
 "Grege, Scott! Who's that?"
 "Oh, my hat!"
 "It's Bunter!"
 "Out with him!"
 "Bump the rotter!"

This was from Bob Cherry, who had been somewhat upset by the idea that Billy Bunter might be making a nuisance of himself to Marjorie Hazeldene.

"Stop!"
 It was Wharton who kept his head in the midst of the general uproar caused by Billy Bunter's startling appearance. It certainly seemed for the moment as though Bunter had been listening to their talk, yet it seemed unlikely he should have heard.

The chums were gathered round the table, and Wharton had been speaking in low tones. None the less, Billy Bunter would have gone out of that study, even more surprisingly than he had come in if it had not been for Wharton. Wharton went over to Bunter quietly, keeping his chums away.

"What is it, Bunter?" he asked.

"What do you want?"
 Bunter, thus encouraged, told his tale.

"Well, really, Wharton," he began, "I only wished to make an appeal to you—"

"For a worthy object?" broke in Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—" Bunter backed away at the sound of Bob's voice.
 "I'm sorry," said Wharton—and his chums marvelled at the softness of his voice—"but we're discussing business now—particular business—if you don't mind coming back, in half an hour, say."

"Really, Wharton, it's very good of you—"

"In half an hour's time, Bunter!"
 Harry shut the door gently on the astounded Owl. Babel broke out as he turned back into the study.

"What's the matter?"
 "Why didn't you pitch the boulder out of his neck?"
 "Why didn't you?"

The Co. suddenly ceased to expostulate. Wharton was making signs for silence. His hands were outstretched as in appeal.

"You see," he said, "there was no occasion for violence. Bunter has gone. When we have finished discussing Nugent's loss, and what we are to do about it—"

"My what?" Nugent began to voice his amazement, but was quieted again by a movement of Wharton's hand.

"If you lost the quid," went on Wharton calmly, apparently oblivious of his chum's growing wonder, "in the Close under the study window, it will be safe there till morning."

"Lost a quid?"
 Wharton quieted his chum again.

"In the morning," he went on, "we'll get up early and go down and find it. It'll be all right there till morning, anyway."

Through the flabbergasted silence that followed upon Wharton's words there came the sound of stertorous breathing from somewhere without the study. Bob Cherry—at least, with the exception of Wharton—was the first to realise what it meant. Bunter was at his customary post of observation—the keyhole. Bob rose from his seat, seized a ruler, and went cautiously across the room.

Wharton seized his arm and held him.
 "Let me go!" breathed Bob. "Let me go! He's listening! He'll be gone!"

"I want him to go!" breathed Wharton, in answer. "Quiet, Bob—quiet! I'll explain in a moment. Now"—after a moment's pause—"you can go, if you like."

There was a sound of footsteps in the corridor—the footsteps of somebody in rapid retreat. Wharton himself dashed to the door, and flung it open. At the end of the corridor was visible the flying form of Billy Bunter. Wharton flung to the door and rushed across the study to Nugent.

"Give me that pound note, Franky!" he breathed.

Without a word Nugent handed it over. Nugent was beginning to see daylight. Wharton went to the window, opened it, dropped the fluttering note out into the Close, and shut the window softly. Then he came back. A roar of expostulation greeted him.
 "Bunter heard every word!"

"He'll get that quid as safe as houses!"

"I want him to get it," said Harry calmly.

"Want him to get it!"
 "Great pip!"

"The greatfulness of the esteemed pip is terrific!"

"Peace, my infants," Wharton held up a warning hand. "I thought I had made myself clear, but apparently I haven't. I want Bunter to get the money. I want Bunter to overhear us speaking about it—that's why I referred to particular business in his hearing. I guessed that would render him incapable of leaving the keyhole. I want him to find the quid. I want you all to go down and pretend to look for it in the morning, so that he shall not guess we suspect him of having overheard and finding it. It's true, we might have lent it him, but he might have suspected a trap. Now do you see?"

"Yes!" broke in Bob. "But what now? Bunter's got the money—but what's the good of that to us?"

Wharton smiled.
 "Don't you see," he said, "Bunter will spend the quid. It's a half holiday to-morrow. It's almost sure to be spent to-morrow. When he spends it, one of us, disguised if necessary, will follow him, and see where he spends it. And another of us, all of us if necessary, will see where he takes the goods. Then we shall know what the game is. We shall know what or whom Billy Bunter buys hairpins for. Now do you see?"

"My hat!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"With any luck," said Wharton, "to-morrow will solve the great Bunter mystery!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Secret Out!

AS soon as morning lessons were over the next day the conspirators set a careful watch on Billy Bunter. From the satisfied expression on his fat face they had no doubt whatever that he had found the pound note that had been so carefully "planted" for him to find. He had taken the bait, and the juniors were on the qui vive to see him walk into the trap.

They were not disappointed. Immediately after dinner the fat junior rolled away to the cycle-shed and selected a machine. The cycle Bunter selected was, as a matter of fact, a new one belonging to Ogilvy, but Ogilvy was not there, so Bunter borrowed it without troubling to ask Ogilvy's permission.

The fat junior pedalled off in the direction of Friardale; and at a safe distance behind him Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh pedalled off, too, in the same direction.

"Now we sha'n't be long!" murmured Harry Wharton.

"We're on the track of the giddy criminal!" chuckled Bob Cherry. And Hurree Singh agreed that the trackfulness of the honourable criminal was terrific.

Billy Bunter did not hesitate, nor did he once look behind him. He rode straight into the village, and pedalled direct to the little confectioner's shop in the main street. Leaning his machine against the shop-window, he popped inside, with a grin on his fat face.

"No mystery about his blessed shopping to-day, anyway!" grunted Frank Nugent. "The fat porpoise is simply blinding our quid on grub!"

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful. Were they on a wild-goose chase, after all? There was certainly no mystery about Bunter's present movements. It was the most natural thing in the world for the fat junior, finding himself unexpectedly in funds, to go straight off and expend his ill-gotten gains on a feed for the sole delectation of William George Bunter.

"We'll wait here a bit, out of sight, and watch!" said the captain of the Remove. "If he doesn't come out soon, one of us will go in and see what he is doing."

"Not much doubt about what the fat beast is doing!" grunted Bob Cherry. "Gorging, of course!"

"I'm not so sure," said Harry Wharton. "Anyway, let's wait and see for a bit!"

And the juniors settled themselves down to carry out this sage piece of advice.

And Harry Wharton's advice was soon justified. In less than ten minutes

Bunter emerged from the shop with a huge parcel, which he carefully tied on to the carrier at the back of Oglivy's new cycle.

Then he mounted, and rode rapidly off, with Harry Wharton & Co. following, still at the same safe distance.

Bunter took a road which led over a wild stretch of moorland towards the fishing-village of Pegg. Long stretches of the road were bare and quite devoid of cover, and had Bunter looked over his shoulder occasionally he could not have failed to see the four juniors riding after him.

But fortunately the fat junior did not once think of looking round.

He pedalled along at a brisk rate until he got to the wildest part of the moorland road, where a cart-track branched off towards the ruined shaft of a disused mine. A half-ruined and disused cottage nestled up against the broken-down mine-shaft.

Billy Bunter turned off the road, up the rough track, cycling slowly and gingerly over the rough ground.

"My hat! He's going to the old mine!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in astonishment. "What on earth is the fat duffer up to?"

"We are on the brink of discovering the deadly secret!" grinned Nugent. "Lead on, my dear Watson—I mean, Wharton!"

"Let's leave our bikes here, just off the road," said Harry Wharton. "We can cut across to the old mine and come up to it from the back. There may be somebody watching the road from the ruins."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors deposited their bikes in the heather, and cut across the moor at an angle which would bring them up to the ruins from the rear.

By this time the figure of Bunter could be seen walking his bicycle over the rough stones and debris which littered the approach to the mine.

The watching juniors then saw him stop and unstrap the big parcel from the machine. Then he let the cycle down on to the ground, and walked on to the tumbledown cottage with the big parcel in his arms. In a twinkling he was inside the cottage, and there was not a moving figure on the landscape.

"The juniors looked at one another. "Well, this beats the band!" said Harry Wharton. "There's a mystery here somewhere!"

"The beat-andfulness is terrific, my esteemed chum!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"Well, let's get on, and—have a peep into the cottage," said Nugent almost nervously.

And the juniors walked on warily towards the cottage, taking advantage of every bit of cover to conceal their approach, as if some deadly enemy were on the watch in that ruined cottage.

Truth to tell, the juniors were puzzled and not a little uneasy. There was something eerie about that desolate place, and they instinctively approached cautiously. Though what they expected to find in the ruined cottage not one of them could have told.

When within fifty yards of the cottage Harry Wharton made a sign, and the four juniors went down on their faces and wriggled through the heather, making use of all their scoutcraft to avoid the possibility of being seen or heard.

Harry Wharton was within a yard of the low sill of a gaping, paneless window when the sound of Billy Bunter's voice from the interior of the cottage, within

a yard of the crouching junior, made him start suddenly.

"I could only get one of these pies; it was all they had at the shop, you know!" came the well-known voice of the fat junior. "But it's a big one—it ought to do for us both!"

Instantly came a second voice in reply; and it was also a voice that Harry Wharton and all the juniors knew. And at the sound of it they looked at one another in amazement mingled with amusement.

"You're a pig, Billy!" said the second voice vehemently. "That pie's for me—I'm starving! It's just like you to want half of it! You're a pig!"

The voice, with its fat, oily tones curiously like Billy Bunter's, was the voice of Bessie, Billy Bunter's plump sister, of Cliff House School!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Explained!

THE juniors looked at one another with expressions that were almost idiotic. So the secret was out at last! It was for his sister Bessie that the fat Removite had been making his extensive purchases. But what—

The juniors were still puzzled. At a sign from Wharton they crawled nearer, and, cautiously raising themselves on their knees, peered over the window-sill into the ruined interior of the cottage.

Yes, there was Billy Bunter, and there was his sister Bessie, both sitting on the floor, and between them was spread a noble feed—tarts, buns, cakes, and pasties, and one large pork-pie. It was this latter succulent comestible that was evidently the subject of present discussion between the brother and sister.

"Oh, I say, you know, Bessie, don't be greedy!" remonstrated Billy Bunter. "I am—W-w—what's that?"

"Atishooooo!"

"That" was a loud sneeze from Bob Cherry!

Bessie and Billy Bunter simultaneously turned their heads towards the gaping window.

Billy Bunter gasped speechlessly. Bessie gave a loud shriek.

"Oh! Ow! Help! Who's that? Help, Billy!"

But Billy could only gasp, and stare at the four Removites as if he could not believe his eyes.

Harry Wharton & Co. rose to their feet somewhat sheepishly, and lifted their caps to Miss Bunter. Bob Cherry's unlucky sneeze had given their presence away before they had made up their minds what to do or say.

"You nasty, spying boys! Go away!" screamed Miss Bunter, grabbing at some cream-cakes with both hands. "You've been spying on us—and there's not enough here for two, let alone six!"

Harry Wharton coughed.

"Please excuse us, Miss Bessie! We did not come here for the feed—really we didn't! We saw Billy come into the cottage here—"

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors indignantly. The power of speech seemed to have returned to him at last.

"Oh, really, Wharton!" he exclaimed. "I'm surprised at you! It's a mean trick, spying on a fellow like this, you know!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Nugent. "You spent my quid on grub, and carted it all the way up here—"

"Oh, really, Nugent! It wasn't your quid at all!" said Bunter, blinking indignantly. "I—I found it, you know—I really did!"

"Yes—found it where we dropped it for you to find, nas!" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent!"

"It—it's all up now, Billy!" wailed Bessie. "I shall have to go back now—everything is discovered!"

And Miss Bessie lifted up her voice and wept—loudly!

"Oh, shut up, Bessie, do!" growled her affectionate brother. But Bessie only wept the louder.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders, and looked longingly at the door for a moment. Then he stepped over to Billy Bunter, and laid a firm grip on his shoulder.

"Now, look here, Bunter," he said quietly, "there's some mystery here still—some mystery we don't understand."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And you've got to explain—see!" Bunter wriggled feebly.

"It—it's nothing, you know!" he stutered. "Just—just a little picnic, you fellows—"

"Sob!"—from Bessie.

"What about the packet of hairpins, and—the other things?" whispered Bob Cherry, his honest countenance turning red.

"Oh, really Cherry! I never bought them—I never got a nun-nun-night—"

"Shut up!" whispered Bob Cherry fiercely. "We know! Explain—before you're scragged!"

And Billy Bunter capitulated—and explained.

Bit by bit Billy Bunter told the story which cleared up the great mystery, while his sister's sobs grew less and less frequent as she listened to the recital, until she at last grew quite voluble in supplementing Bunter's explanation.

Harry Wharton & Co. learnt how Miss Bessie, after having been rebuked by Miss Primrose for greediness, decided to run away from Cliff House School. How she had written to Billy Bunter at Greyfriars, and then watched her chance to get away unobserved to the ruined cottage on the moor. How she had been living there for several days and nights in the warm July weather, and how her brother had visited her, and done some small errands for her at the village shops. And how, finally, she was, to tell the truth, getting a tired kind of being in the tumbledown cottage alone.

The whole story of the girl's absurd folly, and Billy Bunter's stupidity in encouraging it, was poured out into the now sympathetic ears of the four Removites.

To Billy Bunter's relief, Harry Wharton took entire charge of the situation.

He talked to Bessie Bunter so gently and patiently that the girl, foolish and obstinate as she was, yielded at length to his reasoning.

In the end all five of the juniors accompanied the truant back to Cliff House, where the relief of Miss Primrose was so great that the question of punishment for Bessie was relegated at once to the background. The telegraph-wires were set buzzing, to relieve the anxiety of Bessie's family. Various search-parties, which were even then scouring the country, were hastily recalled.

Harry Wharton used all the power of his handsome face and persuasive voice to plead the cause of the culprit with the prim headmistress of Cliff House, with whom, indeed, he was persona grata.

So that it is more than probable that the punishment that Bessie received for her escapade was very much less than her deserts—if, indeed, it amounted to anything at all.

Harry Wharton & Co., satisfied in mind, collected up their cycles and returned to Greyfriars—Bunter with them.

Oglivy was waiting at the cycle-shed for an interview with Bunter. The in-

interview took place; and, judging by the howls that proceeded from William George Bunter, it was a painful one—for the fat junior!

"Well, I've lost my quid for good and all!" remarked Nugent, when the chums regained their study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. "It was all for the good of the cause, I suppose!"

Harry Wharton laughed. "We'll all share the loss of your quid, Franky!" he said. "There's no doubt that it is gone for good!"

"The gone-for-goodfulness is terrific, my worthy chum!" purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"All the same, it was worth it!" said Harry Wharton. "It was that pound-

note that enabled us to clear up the Great Bunter Mystery!"

THE END.

(Don't miss "BUNTER'S 'AUNT SALLY'!"—next Monday's Grand, Long, Complete Story of Greyfriars School—by FRANK RICHARDS.)



SYNOPSIS.

Johnny Goggs comes to Kilmombe Grammar School from Frankingham with his chums Trickett, Blount, and Waters.

Goggs is a jiu-jitsu expert, a clever impersonator, and the organiser of many brilliant japes. He leads an expedition of Grammarians to St. Jim's, and accomplishes one of the most daring night raids ever perpetrated.

Gerald Cutts of St. Jim's falls foul of Bingo the butcher, and after a scrap, in which Cutts is worsted, Bingo picks a quarrel with Goggs.

Meanwhile, the juniors prepare a spread at Mrs. Murphy's, which is doctored by Larking & Co. with pepper, etc. Baggy Trimble makes his arrival, and the juniors generously offer their feed to the fat junior.

(Now read on.)

Eingo's Messenger Arrives!

THE Esmirk that had begun to dawn upon the podgy face of Baggy faded quickly away. It was plain that there was some catch here. A few seconds' more hard thought gave him the notion that the food had been doctored. If he had had time for yet a little more thinking he might have arrived at the conclusion that Larking & Co. had been responsible for the doctoring.

But now his attention, as well as that of the rest, was demanded by Mrs. Murphy.

The good dame was honestly indignant, and with cause.

Everything about those pies had been of the best. Sound, fresh meat and excellent pastry had gone to them. The salads had been prepared with no less care. Mrs. Murphy, ignorant of the infesting of the next door Eden by three such serpents as Larking & Co., was certain that there could not possibly be anything wrong with the food.

"Which it's too bad!" she cried, her stout face red, her eyes watering. "And you young gentlemen ought to be ashamed of yourselves to play tricks on a lone widow-woman! Which such pies as them I never made before—my best I did—and it grieves me to the heart, so it does, to—"

"Dear soul, will you taste a piece of one of my own pies, inquired Carrow kindly.

"Don't let Baggy go!" said Manners. Baggy had been edging towards the gate. He had somehow got the notion that this was no place for him.

"And of course I will, and right gladly!" replied Mrs. Murphy.

Carrow herself had done no tasting. A sniff had been enough for him. And those who had tasted felt now that they also would have been more satisfied with a sniff.

Someone placed a liberal helping of pie upon a plate, and someone else added salad. Mrs. Murphy sat down with a great air of combined appetite and resolution. She was too proud to sniff first.

She took one mouthful, and then she bounded to her feet, and rushed spluttering from the garden. Baggy, again trying to

muzzle, got into her way. She bowed him clean over, and he lay howling dimly.

Mrs. Murphy had left no one in doubt as to her opinion of the pie.

"See here, you fellows, that's the rotter who did it!" cried Kerruish, pointing to the prostrate Baggy.

"I take my oath I didn't! I— Oh, it wasn't me! It was him! I saw him!"

The person whom Baggy indicated was a new-comer. He had entered the gate in rather a doubtful manner, like one not quite sure but that he might be resented as an intruder, and he had narrowly escaped being tumbled over by the fleeing Mrs. Murphy. Now, as a rush was made at him, he turned and bolted. But Kangaroo and Frank Monk seized and held him.

"Wharrer doing?" he demanded, rather tremulously. "I ain't done nothin'!"

"Why did you bunk, then?" asked Tom Merry.

"Cause you all run after me."

"But we didn't start to run after you until you began to bolt," said Gordon Gay.

"I see you was goin' to, though," quavered the supposed culprit.

He was a village lad of seventeen or so, with short hair of the hue of wheat nearly ripe, and a face like that of a not particularly intelligent sheep. On the whole he did not look at all the person likely to have played tricks with the spread.

"Look here," said Talbot to the crowd. "I don't a bit believe this chap had anything to do with it. He's only just come along, as far as we know, for one thing. And, for another, Baggy's a beastly liar—always was and always will be."

"I ain't!" howled Baggy. "I defy anybody to say that I'm truthful—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I ain't done it!" said the sheep-faced youth. "What were you after, then?" asked Blake.

"Yass, wathab! That's the question, deah boy! What were you aftab?" chimed in Gussy.

"I came along to see a feller by the name of Goggs, or some such. I bin to the Grammar School, an' him at the gate told me as I'd better come along here. But I wouldn't have came if I'd knowed I was goin' for to be handled like this."

Goggs stepped forward, and as he did so Kangaroo and Monk loosed their hold upon the village youth.

"I really think that his story is correct," said Goggs. "I was expecting a messenger from the village, and left word that he might follow on here. Trimble, I fear—I really do fear—that you have departed from the path of veracity!"

Baggy was on his feet again now, looking sulky.

"Well, I own it wasn't him!" he whined. "But it wasn't me, either; and you were all going for me. Any chap would sooner have another chap put through it than be put through it himself—that's only sense!"

"I consider we owe you an apology!" said Goggs politely to the sheep-faced youth. "I

have not the pleasure of your acquaintance, but I may say that my name is Goggs, or some such, as you eloquently phrase it. May I ask you your cognomen?"

"My whatter?"

"Name, ass!" snorted Wagtail, who happened to know that word.

"It ain't 'ass' at all; it's Heavins—Eldred Heavins!"

"Well, Mr. Heavins, I and my friends all regret that you should have been put to any annoyance. I trust, we have your pardon?"

"Oh, 'tain't nothin'!" replied Eldred Heavins. "I weren't hurt, though I thought as I was goin' to be one time. But I'd like a minute or two with that podgy, ugly chap, that I would!"

And Eldred looked rather less sheepish as he glared at Baggy.

That hero took shelter behind Dick Julian and Kelly.

"If I was up to his weight—" he said.

"But you are," said Jack Woodton.

"I ain't! He's ever so much taller, and—"

"Buzz off, Baggy!" snapped Digby. "We've something more interesting than you to attend to!"

"Baggy doesn't buzz off yet!" said Ernest Levison grimly. "We want to know who played with the pies before he's allowed to go!"

"I say, you ain't the chap what's goin' to fight Bingo, are you?" asked Eldred, regarding the slim form and thin limbs of Johnny Goggs critically.

"I have that honour!" answered Goggs.

There was a hum of interest and excitement. The St. Jim's juniors knew something about Bingo; and the Grammarians, who also knew of him, now learned for the first time that Goggs was to meet him. Bags, Tricks, and Wagtail had known, of course; and Larking and Snipe had told Carpenter.

But Gordon Gay and the rest had heard nothing about it.

For the moment the spoiled spread was forgotten. But as they stood there Mrs. Murphy came hurrying back bearing another pie of immense proportions, and behind her came her aides, similarly loaded.

It looked as though the wrecking business was going to turn out rather a frost after all; and Larking, Carpenter, and Snipe, in their hide-place, felt like groaning.

They had a more serious cause for being troubled. Tower was sniffing at the shrubbery.

Tower was not exactly the sleuth-hound Herries believed him; but he was a dog, if a duffer, as Digby said.

It seemed inevitable that before long he would find them, and if Tower found them they could hardly escape being hauled out and dealt with.

"Wi, he'll est you up!" said Eldred, with a snigger.

"I believe that he himself has some such notion," replied Goggs. "I hope to show that he is in error."

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"I say, you know, Goggles, you can't fight that chap!" said Gordon Gay.
 "He's ever so much above your weight," Tom Merry said.
 "He licked Cutts, and Cutts is nearly double your size," said Blake.
 "We witnessed his victory over Cutts," said Goggles. "I do not consider that that really proves anything at all, however."

"You fellows have never seen our Goggles really on the job," said Gordon Gay.
 "He'll open their eyes when they do see him!" chimed in Wagtail.
 "Bingo, he says there ain't to be none of the hanky-panky like you give him afore!" Eided said.
 "A'reed!" answered Goggles.
 "What was the hanky-panky?" asked Clive.
 "Some of Goggles' jiu-jitsu, I guess!" said Manners. "He's a dab at that game!"
 "And, if it suits you, he thinks as Monday afternoon, about five o'clock, to five, would be all right!" went on Heavens. "Tain't a killin' day!"

"I am very glad of that," said Goggles.
 "Though, if I really am to be eaten, it might be more comfortable to be killed than that."
 "He means it isn't a slaughtering day at the butcher's," explained Kerruish.
 "Thank you very much!" replied Goggles.
 And Kerruish could not understand why so many of the Grammarians grinned.
 "Do it suit you?" inquired Heavens.
 "Quite well, thank you!" said Goggles. "You may depend upon me. Give the dear Bingo my kindest regards, and tell him that I will not see him more than absolutely necessary. He strikes me as one of those fellows who can hardly be thrashed without being hurt a bit. Assure him that there shall be positively no hanky-panky, in any event!"
 "A'reed! What's old Towser after?" said Herries.

"There's something ready for you to begin on now, young gentlemen!" called Mrs. Murphy.
 "Ow! Yow!" came a shriek from the shrubbery.
 "The bolt was towards the shrubbery, not the tables."

Towser dashed in among the shrubs. He followed him.
 Snipe was hanging to the top of the wall, which was nicely ornamented with broken glass. Carpenter and Larking had managed to get astride the top, but in doing so had got rather entangled with the spikes.
 "Yow! Take him away!" shrieked Snipe, as Towser snapped at his legs.
 "I told you so!" hooted Gordon Gay.
 "The rotters!" gasped Gordon Gay.

The Reckoning!

HERRIES had grabbed Larking by the leg. It was not often that George Herries got in first; but he was first this time, and he was really quite a hefty person for the place. Herries had a grip that lacked little of being as grim as Towser's.

Carpenter might have got away, for he eluded the clutching hand of Gussy, and had both legs on the outside of the wall before anyone could grab him.
 But he put them back again, and dropped down, his face sullen.

Larking or Snipe might have done a bolt, and left their comrades to it—but not Carpenter. In his eyes always showed that strain of something better that might have made a thoroughly decent fellow of him had he not been so weak.

Snipe fell on his back with another howl of fear. Larking came down with a mighty thwack. Around them swarmed the vengeful crowd, as one man in their resolve to make them pay dearly for their blackguardly trick.
 "Good dog, Towser!" said Herries.

"The base destroyers of the pie."
 "Will now receive it in the neck!"

It was Jasper Weir who had begun that couplet, but it was not he who had finished it.
 "He looked round at Goggles.
 "Poetry is much, but truth is—er—wucher, Weir!" said Goggles gravely. Then he looked round. Heavens was just going out of the gate. "Hi, Mr. Heavens!" he shouted.
 The village lad turned.
 "Wodjer wawt?" he asked.
 "Eided—may I cwi you Eided?—It is such a nice name, you know—will you not

stay and—er—partake with us!" asked Goggles. He turned to Tom Merry, and said politely: "It is rather a liberty that I am taking, my dear Merry, but—" "Don't mention it, old chump!" returned Tom. "We shall be very pleased to have Eided, and it looks as if there were going to be plenty, after all. Anyway, he'd be welcome to a share of what there was."
 "So, larks?" asked Heavens, rather suspiciously.

"My dear fellow, I am incapable of anything of the kind!" answered Goggles. "I have a character for seriousness to maintain." Heavens joined the crowd. He looked at the surprised Eided.
 "I know what us chaps would do with them," he said.
 "And what would—er—us chaps do with them?" asked Goggles.

"Oh, lark! 't's the grub what they've spe'lid!" said Heavens.
 "An excellent suggestion!" exclaimed Goggles. "Our thanks to you, friend Eided!" Larking wriggled and cursed. Snipe snatched at Carpenter and stoned Eided. Once again he had to go through it for something that he had been led into without ever really agreeing with it. But it would happen to him again and yet again, no doubt, unless he managed to break with his chums.
 "The chap," said Kangaroo to Dane, "isn't such a fool as he looks."
 "I thought of that myself," said Baggy. "I say, I'll stay, too, as you've asked this chap."

"Aas, let Baggy stay," said Cardew, to the surprise of all who heard.
 "Weally, Cardew—"
 "The fat cad—"
 "After the way he's lied!"

"Oh, lark! I know that those sweps were there all the time!"
 "It's all right, my infants!" said Cardew blandly. "You don't suppose that it will be possible for three of them to wolf that lot, do you?"

He pointed to the spoiled pies and bowls of salad, which Mrs. Murphy had now removed from the tables, to make room for the second supply which she had so luckily had in hand.
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd, as Baggy's face went almost green.

"Here, I say!" spluttered the fat Fourth-Former. "You don't think I'm—! It ain't jolly well likely, you know—you don't catch me eating that much!"
 "I wathth think you will eat some of it, dear boy!" said Gussy.

"You bet he will!" Manners agreed, with grim resolution in his tones.
 "That's fair enough," said Cardew. "Why, those sweeps might have got away while he was setting us on to Heavens there, who had nothing to do with it."

"I won't! You can't make me!" Baggy howled.
 "We'll see about that!" said Talbot.
 "Better start them," Tom Merry said. "It's time we were getting on with it, you know."
 "You may be able to make Trumble eat that stuff," panted Larking, "and you may be able to make Snipe; but you can dashed well make me eat that!"

But almost before he had finished speaking he found himself down upon his back, safely held; and in that position he had to submit to having a big mouthful of the salad smeared on his face, and the pie transformed good, honest pie into forced in his mouth.

Someone held his nose, and he was obliged to swallow.
 "Ugh!" he gasped, nearly black in the face, when the stuff had vanished. "Ugh! I say, that's enough, you silly asses! It was only a joke, anyway."

"He's calling a new tune now," said Bags. "This is also a joke," Cardew said. "I call it a dashed good joke, too! Open your mouth, sweet Larking! There's plenty more yet."

Larking went through with it. He saw that he had to go through with it, and that any attempt at resistance would only make matters worse for him.
 Three mouthfuls of the pie and the salad he swallowed. Then he was suffered to get up.

He staggered out of the garden, feeling ill, and had to halt outside, feeling even more ill.
 Snipe was dealt with next, and he got no

more mercy than Larking. He coughed and spluttered and spat; and Goggles felt called upon to tell him that his manners were really not at all nice. He did not appear to mind that, but he appeared to object quite strongly to the pie, and he went more dead than alive.

It was rough justice; but it was justice. The plotters deserved all they got, and more. Baggy and Eided, however, were both let off more lightly. It would not have been fair to treat Baggy quite as Larking and Snipe had been treated; but perhaps no one could easily have explained why Carpenter should get less punishment. Probably the way he had got into the mess was to do with it. He did not bluster like Larking, and he did not howl and snivel like the other two.

Baggy drifted out. Carpenter stalked silently away. Mrs. Murphy brought fresh bread, and the delayed feast began. It might lack something of the noble amplitude of the original spread, but there was no real shortage.

"Sit by me, Eided, and entertain me with cheerful conversation," said Goggles, in more than a friendly way, though, I thought as this was a eating job," replied Eided. "I ain't much of a hand at talkin' while there's any grub about. But I'm all right with my teeth, if I ain't more than that tonight!"
 And Eided was certainly all right with his teeth. It was Goggles' whim that he should be treated as a favoured guest, and the rest bowed to it with a good grace, for Goggles had immense popularity in both camps. Eided was served first, and had cleared his plate before some of the others had received theirs. He was served again, and yet again, until it seemed that the addition of his appetite would entail a heavy strain on Mrs. Murphy's cooking department.

But it held out. There was enough of the savory stuff, and the plotters had had no chance to meddle with the sweets.

The meal was about half over when the podgy figure of Baggy Trumble was thrust inside the gate.

"I say, you fellows!" said Baggy, in pleading tones.
 "Scat!" ejaculated Blake.

"But I say, you fellows! Really, you know, I—"
 "Bunk!" growled Herries.

"But, really— Oh, I can't go without a mouthful! Tain't fair!"
 "You have had a mouthful, Baggybus, an' you're very welcome to a much more of the same sorce as you can stow away!" replied Cardew.

"I don't want any of that beastly stuff. You made me swallow it, and now I ought to 'ave somethin' to fret the horrid taste of it out of my mouth!"
 "Oh, let the fat clam have some!" said Tom Merry good-naturedly.

So Baggy was allowed to browse among the remnants of the meat-pies and salads, and did as well as anyone, except the possible exception of Eided, who was really something out of the ordinary in the teeth line. And after that Baggy turned his attention to tarts and bismarcks and cake and fruit, and beat even Eided in the table, but he sat quite contentedly on the grass, close to the dishes, removed or still to come. And it is safe to say that no one enjoyed that spread more than Baggy did, although those who had shared it might be inclined to think that forced eating had gone away, feeling that they would not want anything more to eat for days and days.

But Baggy was a wonder.
 In spite of the fact that the spread was a great success, and Mrs. Murphy beamed when she was congratulated upon the way in which she had overcome difficulties. Not until then did they learn that the second supply had been intended as part of a big lunch, she had to provide for the morning, and that the good luck would have to be up at break of day to make fresh provision. But the extra honorarium which a whip-round secured for her did more than compensate her for the trouble involved, and her good nature made light of the extra work.

"Tripping!" said Gordon Gay. "I've enjoyed myself no end! Thanks, Tommy and gentlemen all! We shall be ready for the return engagement all at any time."

"But you'll 'ave to stand the spread then," said Eided.
 "Not if the bimey's on the same footing."

replied Frank Monk. "As long as we've got the Grammar School with us on top, my pippen! Mind, I'm not saying it isn't on top without him; but he makes it a dead sure cinch every time!"

"Hear, hear!" cried the Grammarians. "May I ask you to give three cheers for our friends the enemy, and generous of heart?" said Goggs, standing on his chair.

The cheers were given with hearty good will.

"Three cheers for Goggs, and may he lick the butcher bruiser!" shouted Tom Merry. Again the cheering rang.

"But he won't," you know," said Eldred Heavins, shaking his head. "Not without the bloomin' hanky-panky he won't, an' that's off, ain't it? I like the chap, though he does look a bit of a softy, but it ain't in him to beat Bingo."

"-Bet you be will!" cried Bags. "You won't, you'll go, Goggles?" said Wagtail.

Goggs smoothed his shirt in the region which his waistcoat would have covered had he worn one.

"Just at present," he said, "I must confess that I do not feel like beating anyone whatever. It would be only fair if, between now and Monday, my friend Bingo, who has my respect and good wishes, should be put on a spot which should include between now and Monday in a really comprehensive and effective gorge. But I do not insist upon that. Eldred, dear boy, you have an eloquence that we had not divined. I am sorry that you should consider my appearance soft; but I live in hopes that the dear Binks will find me not altogether and entirely soft in other and more important respects. Did I observe a move?"

"He would have been blind had he not observed it." The crowd thought quite a heap of Goggs; but, as Carboy remarked, they could not stay all night to hear the boulder spout.

"My word, can't he talk?" said Eldred to Bags, as they drifted out side by side, well behind most of the rest.

"He can say a word or two—in season or out of season," replied Bags solemnly. "But you wait till Monday, old fella, an' I'll find that he can't say one or two other things like he can besides talking. Good thing Bingo's a butcher, isn't it? He'll be able to get steak for his black eyes at cost price!"

"He's all right, and I don't reckon he's really soft; but he can't beat Bingo!" persisted Eldred Heavins.

That remained to be seen, however.

The Great Fight Begins.

"My hat! We're going to have some of the best crowd!" remarked Bags, as he and his chums reached the Rylcombe Village Cricket Ground on the afternoon of the fight.

And it did indeed appear that there would be a very considerable attendance. The Grammar School sent quite a lot, of course. Not only were nearly all the Fourth-Formers present, but several of the Fifth and Sixth put in an appearance, and the fags were there in their four chums from Study No. 9.

There was the village crew, of course. Percival Binks—otherwise Bingo, the butcher—was quite a hero in Rylcombe. There was not a fellow within two stones of him among the local youths who could stand up to him. Some of them knew they could not, because they had tried; and some of them knew they could not without trying—and without any intention of trying.

St. Jim's had contributed an even larger number of spectators than either the Grammar School or the village.

Practically all the Fourth and Sixth had come along. The Terrible Three were there, and "Bags," the four chums from Study No. 9, the Fourth Form passage—Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby; and the trio from Study No. 9—Cardew, Clive, and Levison major. Kangaroo & Co. were there, though Bernard Glynn, the inventive member of the firm, had had to leave his latest and greatest invention to come. Julian & Co., Figgins & Co., Gore, Lumley, Lumley, Roylance, Durrance, Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins—they were there, with many more.

Wally D'Arcy and his little band of Third-Formers were in evidence, and already squabbling with the Grammarian fags for front places.

The Fifth had sent quite a big contingent, including Cutler, St. Leger, and Gilmore, who knew something about Bingo's

(Continued on page 16.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:
THE MAGNET, THE GEM, THE BOYS' FRIEND, GUCKLES, THE PENNY POPULAR.
Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Monday. Every Friday.
YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS CLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Monday :

"BUNTER'S 'AUNT SALLY' !"

By Frank Richards.

This is a story which will cause endless amusement. It is one long scream from beginning to end. Wibley's cousin comes to Greyfriars, and between them these two arrange the biggest hoax that has ever been perpetrated at Greyfriars.

On no account must you miss reading

"BUNTER'S 'AUNT SALLY' !"

A "POPULAR" QUERY !

One of my Glasgow chums, referring to the new series of stories now running in our Friday companion paper, "The Penny Popular," writes as follows :

"Dear Editor,—I should very much like to know if Mr. Frank Richards is going to send Harry Wharton & Co. or Vernon-Smith & Co. as far as Glasgow in their sporting journey. I do hope, and so do my chums, that the Greyfriars hortensia will come to Scotland, and that we shall be able to read of streets and places which are familiar to us."

A similar query has come to hand from a Welsh reader; while many readers hailing from the Emerald Isle have expressed a desire that the Greyfriars juniors may visit their country. These readers may set their minds at rest. I have no doubt that, when Mr. Frank Richards has exhausted all the English counties, he will send his tourists farther afield.

A WORD TO YOUNG AUTHORS.

"Florrie," of Reading, writes to say that she has tried her hand at writing a short story; and she wishes to know if I will do her the favour of reading it, and passing judgment thereon.

Certainly, "Florrie"! Send your manuscript along, and I promise you it shall have every consideration. This promise extended to other aspiring authors. Provided a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed with the story, I shall be happy to give an opinion on same.

"Florrie" also wishes to know if the Greyfriars juniors will come to Reading when they play the boys of Berkshire. The answer, "Florrie," is in the affirmative.

SAVE YOUR SURPLUS CASH !

If you don't, you will be badly let when the Bumper Annual comes out.

For I have little doubt, now, that such an Annual will appear, containing many magnificent stories, crowds of ripping illustrations, plenty of bright verse, and other features far too numerous to mention.

The Companion Papers Annual will be one gigantic edition of the MAGNET, the GEM, the Boys' Friend, and the Penny Pop. It will be the best thing ever published. And, unless you save for it, you may have to go empty away when the bumper book appears on the market.

Look out for a further announcement on this subject in due course.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS.

By the Editor of the Companion Papers.

The serial, which hoards of readers urged me to write, is like Chaeley's Aunt, still running. The story contains a record of the many and varied experiences which have fallen to my lot since I assumed the editorship of the Com-

panion Papers. It is not without excitement, and I have already received a goodly number of letters concerning the serial, which will be found in the GEM's Library. A long instalment will appear each Wednesday.

A MESSAGE TO A LOYAL CHUM.

Will Master James Clure, who wrote me such a splendid and enthusiastic letter a short time back, kindly accept my thanks for his continued loyalty to the Companion Papers. It is to the tireless efforts of such boys as Jimmy Clure that my papers owe a great deal of their wonderful present-day popularity.

YOUR EDITOR.

NOTICES.

Football.

Players wishing to join a local football team for next season should apply to E. Smith, 195, Great Dover Street, Borough, S.E.

Boys wanted for coming seasons—15-17—4 miles.—B. Slight, 70, Halo Avenue, Town Road, Lower Edmonton, London, N. 9.

RIVERDALE ATHLETIC.—Players wanted, including goalkeeper—16-2—Meyers (G. Wilday, 66, Mossou Road, New Cross, S.E. 14.

Men wanted for coming seasons.—15-17—A. Foulds, 49, Medway Road, Bow, E. 2.

Correspondence, etc., Wanted.

SPECIAL.

Edward Vaudin, 5, Salerie, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands, wants information of his chum, Fred Le Page, who went to England a year since.

Will Nicell, Binney Street, Eora, Victoria, Australia—wishes to read, 16, anywhere.

W. Taylor, 121, Lewisham High Road, New Cross, S.E. 14—wishes to read, 14-15, in England and Scotland.

Percy Duffield, c/o Messrs. McAdam & Tuckniss, Bank Chambers, Blackheath, London, S.E. 3, wishes to correspond with a reader in Alexandria, Egypt.

Victor Lock, 9, Great Stanhope Street, Mayfair, W. 1—wishes to read, 15-17, anywhere.

E. Botwright, 2, Chedington Road, Silver Street, Upper Edmonton, London, N. 18—wishes to read, anywhere, 16-17, subjects, stamps, coins, etc.

E. Banks, 74, Victory Place, Camberwell, London, S.E. 5—wishes to read, anywhere, 16-17, subjects, stamps, coins, etc.

Miss Gertrude Wilson, 50, Lady Lawson Street, Edinburgh—wishes to read in the Colonies.

Will H. T. Kitson, late telegraphist, R.N.V.R., Birmingham, kindly communicate with his old pal, J. T. Hayley, 6, Gaywood Street, London Road, Southwick, S.E. 17.

Charles Elliott, 4, Upper Meadow Street, Belfast, wants members for his Correspondence Club—amateur magazine. Stamp for particulars.

E. Levy, c/o Asiatic Commercial Company, Shanghai, China, wants correspondents interested in photography—18 and over.

Back Numbers Wanted.

E. J. Dougal, 9, Albany Road, Camberwell, S.E. 5—any back numbers of "Gem" and "Magnet." Please write, stating numbers. Does not matter being soiled or old.

G.ripp, 185A, High Street, Ryde, Isle of Wight—stories in "Tabot, Cardew, and Tom Merry's Double." Good prices given. Write first.

Ernest Watson, 391, Ivydale Road, Nunhead, S.E. 15—5/6s. No. 250, 393 (2s. 6d. offered for each), 379-383 inclusive, and 456 (1s. 6d. offered), and 6d. each, offered for 413, 414, 415-16-17, 419, 420-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-41-43-44-45-46-49-50-52-53-54-55-56-57.

Write first.

lent, though they knew very little in anything about that of his opponent.

And at the last moment, just before the light began, Kildare, skipper of St. Jim's, arrived, with Dorrel, Baker, Rushlow, Montfort, and met at the gate Delaney, the Grammar School captain, with three or four of the other Grammarian prefects.

Goggs had not anticipated anything at all like this. The fight was to rank as an occasion, that was evident. But Goggs modestly did not cause him to feel at all uncomfortable on that score.

As for the pugilist Bingo, he was in a state of excited delight. To him it seemed that his fame must already have become great in the land, when all who mattered in the two big schools heard by assembled thus to see him fight.

Bingo only wished that he had had an opponent better worth licking. He was absolutely certain that he was going to lick Goggs.

He grinned as he saw the bruised face of Cutts among the crowd, and wished that he were to be given a chance to operate upon another such opponent as Cutts. The sight of the seniors fairly made his mouth water. He would have liked to take them all one down, whether come on.

Bingo had never seen a good looking, great in the hand, when all who mattered in the two big schools heard by assembled thus to see him fight.

"You mean suffering from swollen head," said Manners, with the air of one making a needed correction.

"Wrong, dear boy! I do not. I have never seen anyone who appeared to be suffering from swollen—that is the correct participle, and I would not have a word to say for anyone who seemed to be getting quite a lot of enjoyment out of it."

"Monty's right," said Tom Merry. "I never looked at it that way before, but he's right. There's no suffering about it, and Bingo's certainly enjoying his swollen head no end."

"Pity there's no chance of Goggs' licking him!" said Talbot.

"Are you so sure there isn't any chance?" Tom asked.

"Why, you don't think there is, do you?" "Well, yes I do, then! Oh, I know it seems absurd, looking at them. I aren't in the same class for weight, and you'd say Bingo had three times the strength of Goggs, and he can box, that's certain, or he wouldn't have wiped the floor with Cutts. But, somehow, I can't see Goggs failing in anything he tries to do, and I'm sure he has a chance, at least."

That was the same conclusion to which Gordon Gay & Co., after much argument, had arrived. The confidence of Bags, Tricks, and Wagtail in their chums went for something; possibly the memory of the manner in which Goggs had dealt in the dormitory with Larking and Carpenter, neither a duffer, nor far more; but that went for most was their conviction that Goggs could do anything he undertook to do.

But, naturally, the great majority of the spectators had no faith in Goggs; and Larking and Snipe were already exultant at the prospect of his downfall.

The Kilmocke lads had staked out a ring, Bingo, grinning, told them that they ought to have provided seats, and made an admission charge.

"We'll do it next time, cockies," he said. "There's good money in it if they'll on'y put up a chap fit to face me from one school or t'other. But if you'd charged 'em anything to-day, they'd have been sure to be wanting their money back when they saw how the

blow-out had went, so it's as well we didn't charge."

Mr. Edward Heavis and another Ryckonby youth, named Wraggle, were the second of the great Goggs, Bags and Tricks were to second Goggs. Gay and Monk had wanted to, but had had to give way, and Wagtail was still sure that he had not been chosen.

With practically everything ready, a difficulty arose about referees.

None of the village lads was competent, and Bingo would not agree to any Grammar School senior.

"Can't you take it on, Kildare?" asked Cutts.

"I'm not keen," replied Kildare. "Can't you?"

There was a roar of laughter at that, for Cutts still bore the marks of Bingo's fists; and the butcher lad would certainly have accepted, being wanting to queer the pitch if he had offered.

"I can't. I've bets on it," replied Cutts, looking Kildare straight in the face.

It was open defiance, for he knew that Kildare strongly disapproved of betting, and that its introduction into this event would disgust him.

"I'm not refereeing any fight on which there are bets!" the skipper of St. Jim's said. A loud yell. Some betting had been going on, without any attempt at disguise, until Kildare and the other seniors had appeared. Then Messrs Racke & Crooke had ceased to show that they were offering five to one against Goggs, and Percy Mellis, clerk to those amateur bookies, had slunk behind them; and others had stayed content with the bets already made, and had not gone on to risk more cash.

"There you are, Cardew!" said Clive.

"My dear man, why reproach me!" replied Cardew. "Almost alone here I have had the temerity to back our friend Goggs. Shouldn't I be allowed to collect some twenty quid from the firm of Messrs. Racke & Crooke, and to relieve those outsiders of some of their superfluous wealth seems to me a goodly deed. I do not quite fathom the unctuous prettiness of Kildare. If he hits his way it will really be extremely rough on Cutts, who seeks consolation for his defeat at the hands of the redoubtable Bingo by backing that champion for—or rather more than for—himself."

The three from No. 9 were standing close by Cutts & Co.; and Cutts favoured Cardew with a black scowl in his cheek.

"Exc, never mind about the bets!" said Bingo. "I'll be pleased an' proud if you'll referee, sir!"

Kildare smiled at Bingo, but the smile had gone from his face when he turned it to Cutts again, smiling at a Puritan. He said:

"I'm not posing as a Puritan," he said. "I've come along to see this fight, though I'm not at all sure that it isn't rather old lines. But when betting's brought into it—well, then I decline to have anything to do with it. I won't even stay to see it. What do you think, Delaney?"

"I agree with you, Kildare!" said the Ryckonby skipper.

"If there is betting there will be no fight!" he said.

He did not shout, but his words came clearly to everyone around the ring.

It needed some moral courage to speak then, or he knew that to nine out of every ten present his defeat seemed a certainty, and that most of them were likely to think that he was trying to get out of it at the last moment.

Even to those whose belief in him was firm

his words came as a shock. For they saw what he saw—that he would be suspect of

of him. But there was no Park in him. He had had the betting business from the first; it made him feel uncomfortable and degraded. But he had not quite seen his way to protest. Now Kildare had given him an occasion, and he seized it.

"Do you mean you'll back down?" howled Cutts furiously.

Despite what Cardew had intimated, Cutts' bets were not really very heavy, for it had not been easy to find anyone to back Goggs, and Cutts was too sure that the whipper-snapper to bet the other way. But Cutts always resented hotly any attempt on the part of Kildare to interfere with his sporting proclivities.

"I mean that I will not fight," answered Goggs quietly.

"Good for you, Goggs!" cried Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" shouted Talbot.

"He's finking it!" gloomed Crooke.

"You're a liar!" snapped Gordon Gay.

All round the ring cheers mingled with hisses and catcalls.

Then something quite unexpected happened. Bingo stepped in to Goggs assistance.

"Look 'ere!" he yelled, making his voice heard above all the din. "I'm up against this bettin', too, an' I won't fight, neither. If it goes on! 'Cause why? 'Cause it's bettin' on a dead cert, an' that's not a sportin' thing to do, unnow. You're collin' five to one on me. If it was fifty to one it would be easy money. So I don't like it, an' I won't 'ave it! I'm goin' to lick this kid; that stands to reason. But anyone what says he finks me lies! There ain't any fank in him. I know that. For a party fact, I've chinked him, he's jist about as good plucked a one as ever I run up against. So, there! The bettin's got to stop, else there won't be no fight, an' if there ain't none it's 'cause I refuse as well as him, so don't go for to say he fanked!"

Bingo paused, quite out of breath. It was probably the longest speech he had made in his life. It was also a very curious mixture of bluff and bluffing. "I'm up against this bettin', too, an' I won't fight, neither," was the whole of the majority of those who heard it were inclined to think the better of Bingo for it.

And it certainly settled the frowled question. The would-be gamblers in their horns. Here and there agreements were made that the bets booked should stand, but there was no more open betting.

Kildare consented to referee. It was a fair question whether he, or any prefect of either school should be there at all, as he recognised; but apart from that he was really the fittest person to take on the job, as St. Jim's was not directly interested in the result.

The combatants stripped for the fray, and the big disparity between them became even more evident.

Bingo was at beefy as a man in good condition can afford to be. And he was in good condition; there was no possible mistake. He was muscular. He had weight, and he knew the game, as Cutts could testify.

Goggs looked a mere weed beside him. But those who knew Goggs well knew how deceptive that appearance of weakness was.

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