4 GORGEOUS FREE GIFTS INSIDE!

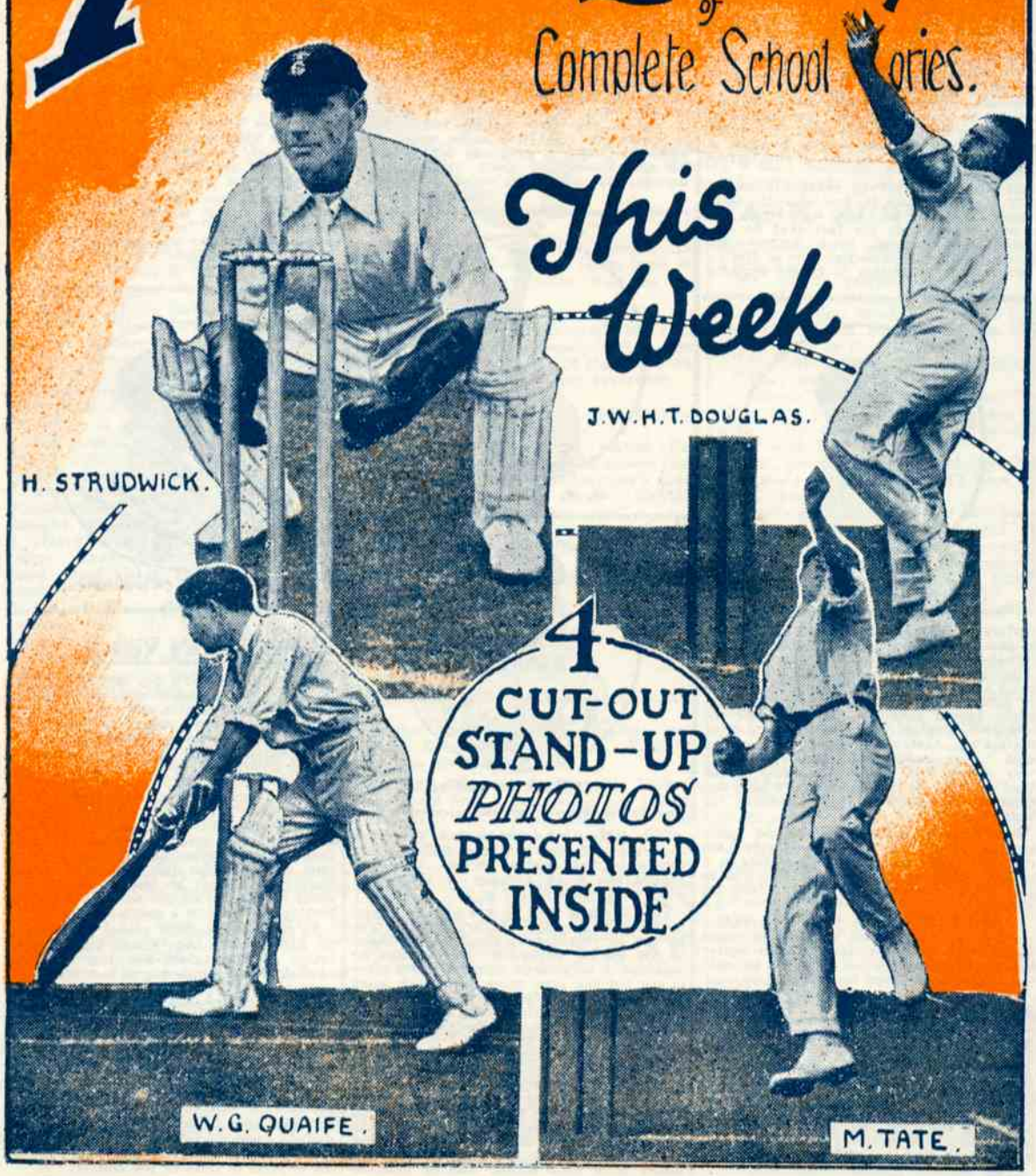
No. 916. Vol. XXVIII. Week Ending August 29th, 1925.

The Magnet 2d Library

EVERY MONDAY.

of Complete School Stories.

This Week



"BILLY BUNTER'S BOLT!" This week's rollicking story of Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of Greyfriars, on holiday.

ALL ABOUT THE 4 FAMOUS CRICKETERS

who form the subject of this week's beautiful FREE GIFTS!

A Real All-rounder.

J. W. H. T. DOUGLAS is the backbone and the most outstanding figure of Essex cricket. Few men in any other team can claim to have done so much sterling work in the interests of their counties. In the field he is untiring, and 1923 saw him top of both Essex batting and bowling averages.

Last year he did not come out so well, because he was lame from June onwards. When Essex went to Lord's to play Middlesex the first two days were blank owing to rain; when Douglas came out to bowl on the third day he slipped on the wet grass and injured his ankle.

Because Essex were so hard up for bowlers he took to the field again before he had thoroughly recovered from his injury, with the result that, despite his keenness to help his county, he found himself still further handicapped.

He was, however, well enough to accompany the Test Team to Australia—the third time that he had gone over with them. He is best known from the fact that he captained the England team against the Australians during their visit here in 1921.

He has the distinction of having scored a century on his first appearance for England against the South Africans; this was in the 1913-14 tour, when he made 119 at Durban.

J. W. H. T. DOUGLAS (Essex).

He played against the South Africans again at Lord's last year. During this match he gave an exhibition of the kind of batting which earned yells of "Johnny won't hit to-day!"—a play upon his initials—from barracking Australians during his second visit "down under." Douglas was scoring very slowly, and he did the same in the Lord's match—he scored one run in forty-five minutes, and made only four runs in the hour!

But Johnny can hit them when he wants to, and he has five times scored over 1,000 runs and taken more than 100 wickets in a season. The last time he did this was in 1923, when he made 1,110 runs and took 146 wickets.

J. W. H. T. Douglas is now forty-three years of age; he is still the best all-round player in the Essex team. With better health and better weather this year, he looks like improving on even his 1923 performance.

A Sussex Star.

MAURICE W. TATE was only seventeen years old when he first played for Sussex. He is a right-arm, medium-fast bowler; he seems to be untiring on the field, and this may be because he takes only a very short run before delivering the ball. He is said to be the best bowler that we have; proof of this lies in the fact that he and Gilligan between them dismissed the South Africans in the first innings of the first Test match, at Birmingham, for a mere 30 runs.

Also, Tate went over with the Test Team to Australia last year, when he broke all Test match records by taking thirty-eight Australian wickets. This was his first trip "down under."

The Sussex ground at Hove has been described as a real batsman's ground, so that Tate had had something to do to distinguish himself on wickets which are all in favour of the man with the willow.

He is a wonderful all-round cricketer, and for the past three seasons he has knocked up more than 1,000 runs and has taken over 100 wickets each season. His actual figures for 1924 were: 1,095 runs for an average of over 30 runs each innings—and it must be remembered that this season was a long way from being a good one for batsmen. He also bowled 930 overs and took 139 wickets; 293 of his overs were maidens.

M. W. TATE (Sussex).

H. STRUDWICK (Surrey).

It is interesting to note that Tate took a wicket with the very first ball that he bowled in Test match cricket. This was against the South Africans at Edgbaston, when M. J. Susskind fell to him.

Tate is young yet; he was born in Kingsbury Street, Brighton, in April, 1895, so that he can be regarded as about the youngest of our leading cricketers. He can also be regarded as an absolute certainty for a place in the England team when the Aussies come over next year. Tate won't say what is going to happen to them when they do come, but if England's run of bad luck doesn't change it won't be his fault.

"Good Old Strudwick!"

H. STRUDWICK received his second benefit last year; it was the Surrey v. Middlesex match at the Oval last August. He received rather more than £1,850, and he deserved every penny of it. He gave good value for money in this game, because he caught out three men. He bowled, too, for one over.

He is one of the most popular figures in the cricket world, and as a wicket-keeper he has no peer. When he went to Australia last year for his fourth tour he played in all the Test matches, and was instrumental in dismissing no less than seventeen Australian batsmen.

Perhaps his best record is that of 1903, when 91 wickets fell to him—a performance which is not always equalled by our best bowlers. Of this 91, Struddy caught out 71 and stumped 20, which says a lot for the quickness of his hands and his eyes. Last season he caught out 51 men and stumped 9 others.

Strudwick is now forty-five years old; this is an age when most men have retired from active sport, but England's premier wicket-keeper looks like staying behind the stumps for many more years to come.

The Australians will be over here again next year, and it is certain that Struddy will again "keep" for England; it is equally certain, too, that he will acquit himself fully as well as he has done in the past.

W. G. QUAIFE (Warwickshire).

Warwickshire's Veteran.

W. G. QUAIFE has been playing for Warwickshire ever since 1893, so that he is a real veteran in both experience and years; he was born in 1872. In fact, the Warwickshire eleven would hardly be itself without W. G. Quaife on the programme, and he certainly has the strongest batting defence in the eleven.

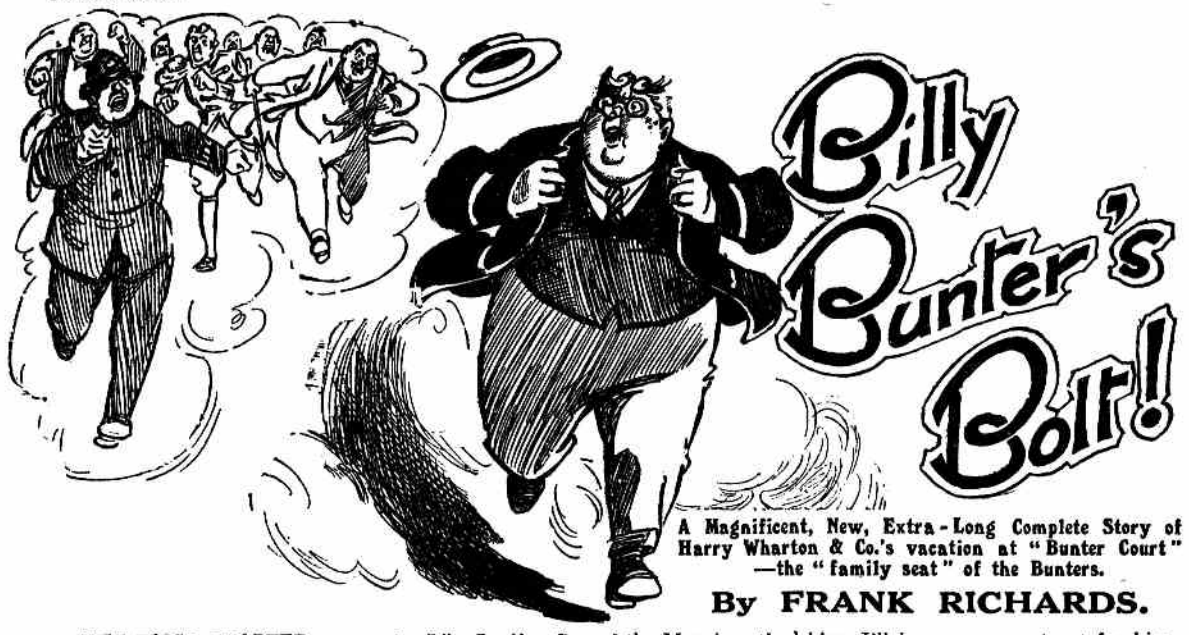
Bowlers know only too well that, once he is set, it has got to be a very hot-stuff ball that gets him out. He is not a spectacular batsman, but he gets the runs just the same. Even if last year he did bat against Derbyshire at Derby for thirty minutes without scoring, he finished his innings with 85 runs under his number on the board, having been batting for five and a quarter hours.

No one could possibly expect a veteran of his age to make huge scores, but the spectators at Birmingham saw him notch 141 against Glamorgan in August last year. And in 1923 he hit up 121 against Northamptonshire at Northampton; then he was caught out, not bowled. It was l.b.w. that dismissed him in the Birmingham game.

His best batting season was 1905, when he scored 2,060 runs in fifty-two innings; his highest innings was 255 not out, and he played thirteen other not out innings that year.

Despite his age, Quaife is still playing wonderfully good cricket, and not a few of our younger batsmen could profit by watching his displays in front of the stumps.

WANTED! The day of reckoning for Billy Bunter's dazzling but lawless career of reckless extravagance draws nearer. Not having the wherewithal to settle his obligations, Bunter "hits the trail"—with a crowd of angry creditors on his track!



Billy Bunter's Bolt!

A Magnificent, New, Extra-Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co.'s vacation at "Bunter Court"—the "family seat" of the Bunters.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Where is Bunter?

"BUNTER!"

"Billy Bunter!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter! Bunter!

Echo answered "Bunter."

At Greyfriars School Billy Bunter, of the Remove, liked to fancy himself a much-sought-after fellow. At Greyfriars, however, it never was really the case.

But there was no doubt that just now Billy Bunter was very much sought after.

Through the length and breadth of Combermere Lodge he was being sought, keenly and indefatigably.

Harry Wharton & Co. were seeking him. They sought him up and down and round about, and they found him not.

Mr. Pilkins, the estate-agent, was seeking him. Mr. Pilkins, with a golf-club in his hand, and a homicidal look in his eyes, was seeking himself assiduously, savagely, untiringly. A Red Indian on the trail of a foe could not have been more determined than Mr. Pilkins, and could scarcely have looked more bloodthirsty.

Walsingham, the butler, was seeking him. Thomas, the footman, was seeking him; Albert and Herbert, and all the other footmen were seeking him. Mr. Pilkins' clerk, Parker, was seeking him. And a stout gentleman in an official blue uniform was seeking him.

Never, indeed, in all Billy Bunter's fat career had he been so much sought after.

But with all those eager seekers on his trail, the Owl of the Remove was not to be unearthed.

Within the magnificent walls of Combermere Lodge, in the vast spaces of the mansion which Bunter had renamed "Bunter Court," the Owl of the Remove was not to be found; lately lord and master of that great domain, with no one to say him nay, with menservants and maidservants at his beck and call, Bunter was now hunted and pursued, and had fled ignominiously from the hunters and pursuers.

Like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, the lord of Bunter Court had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof!

Only a few short hours before he was monarch of all he surveyed, his right there was none to dispute! And now, as in the case of Cæsar of old, there was none so poor as to do him reverence.

"Bunter!"

"Bunter! Where are you skulking, you fat duffer?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry, in a voice that rang almost from end to end of Lord Combermere's great mansion, vast as it was. "Bunter! Bunty! Fathead! Show up!"

But Billy Bunter, if he heard, heeded not. If he was still within the walls of Bunter Court he must certainly have heard Bob's stentorian voice. Probably he was no longer there.

Harry Wharton & Co. came back to the great hall, a little tired and breathless from the search and in an exasperated frame of mind. Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham, the butler, joined them there. It was becoming clear that Billy Bunter was no longer in the house. At first it had been supposed that he had dodged into some hiding-place at sight of the policeman from Combermere. It looked now as if he had shaken the dust of Bunter Court from his feet.

"He's gone, I think," said Harry Wharton.

"The gonefulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Bunter has not much sense, but he has sense enough to go while the esteemed going is good."

Mr. Pilkins gave a furious snort.

"Gone! I'll follow him—I'll pursue him—I'll have a warrant out for him—I'll—I'll—I'll——"

Mr. Pilkins gasped breathlessly.

"That's all very well," said Harry Wharton rather testily. "I don't know that you can do anything of the kind, if you come to that."

"It's bilking!" roared Mr. Pilkins.

"Yes; but——"

"Officer," hooted Mr. Pilkins, "get after the young scoundrel! Lose no time! He may have taken valuables away with him!"

"Oh, rot!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Bunter's not a thief! Don't be a silly ass, Pilkins!"

"Forty guineas a week for this house, and not a penny paid!" hooted Mr. Pilkins. "Not a shilling! Enormous bills run up with all the tradesmen in Combermere! Nothing paid! Bilking all round! I'll make him pay! I'll make his father pay! I—I—I——"

Mr. Pilkins stuttered again.

The Combermere policeman came up with a heavy tread. He was calm and stolid, not sharing at all Mr. Pilkins' excitement. He had an official notebook and pencil in his hand.

"It seems that this here Bunter is gone!" he said.

"Bolted!" gasped Mr. Pilkins.

"What's the charge?"

"Bilking!" snorted the Combermere estate-agent. "The young scoundrel—the young villain—the—the—the——"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Pilkins!" said Walsingham. "We are losing time."

"The charge is bilking, obtaining possession of a furnished house under false pretences, kidnapping, false imprisonment——"

"One at a time, sir!" said the constable calmly. "Who's been kidnapped?"

"I have!" roared Mr. Pilkins. "I've been locked in the wine-cellars by that young villain, Bunter, locked up for days on end, days and days, sir, and Walsingham was locked in with me!"

"I don't know whether you can call that kidnapping," said the Combermere policeman calmly. "What else?"

"That young villain Bunter tricked Walsingham into letting him into the house while I was laid up by a motor accident."

"Mr. Walsingham let him in, did he?"

"I was led to believe, by a trick, that Mr. Pilkins had let him the house, and was arranging details with his father," said the butler.

"He imitated my voice on the telephone, speaking to Walsingham!" hooted Mr. Pilkins.

"And mine, speaking to Mr. Pilkins," said Walsingham.

"And locked us both in the wine-cellars——"

"We got out only this morning——"

"And now he's gone——"

"The young scoundrel!"

"Bolted!"

"The young villain!"

Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham joined in chorus, strophe, and anti-strophe, as it were. The Combermere constable held up his hand.

"One at a time, gentlemen," he said. "Who is this here Bunter, to begin with?"

"A schoolboy."

"He belongs to Greyfriars School—a schoolfellow of these young gentlemen."

"We were Bunter's guests here, officer," explained Harry Wharton. "Of course, we hadn't the faintest idea how the young ass had got hold of the house. We supposed at first it was his father's house, bought from Lord Combermere and named Bunter Court; then we found out that it was let furnished, but we knew no more than that till this morning."

The constable eyed the Famous Five of Greyfriars.

"You knew nothing of young Bunter's goings on?" he asked.

"Naturally, nothing," said Harry. "We should hardly have stayed here if we had known that he was bilking the owner of the place."

"Are these young fellers included in the charge, Mr. Pilkins?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Nugent; and the chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"No!" snorted Mr. Pilkins. "They were taken in by the young rascal, it seems—— Anyhow, they came and found us in the wine-cellars this morning and let us out."

"Very good! You young fellows know this Bunter?"

"He's in our Form at Greyfriars," said Bob Cherry. "We should hardly have come home with him for the holidays if we didn't know him."

"What's his full name?"

"William George Bunter."

"Description?"

"Fat as a barrel——"

"What?"

"With a big pair of specs stuck on a fat little nose something like an over-ripe strawberry——"

The constable started. He seemed scarcely to think that this description was suitable for official purposes.

"I can give you a complete description of the young scoundrel, officer," said Walsingham. "No time must be lost in effecting his arrest."

"I s'pose he can be taken into custody if he is perdooced," said the officer stolidly. "I don't know how the charge will go afore the magistrates when it comes out that he is a schoolboy. But I'll take him along to the station if he can be found."

"Poor old Bunter!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"He's asked for it!" grunted Johnny Bull. "What the dickens did he expect—bilking people right and left?"

"I don't think he expected anything!" grinned Bob. "Anyhow, I'm jolly certain he didn't expect this!"

Thomas, the footman, came up with a deferential cough, and a letter in his hand.

"I found this in Master Bunter's room, sir!" he said. "It's addressed to Master Wharton."

"A letter from that young scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Pilkins. "That means that he has gone—and left this——"

Harry Wharton took the letter and opened it. Evidently William George Bunter had scrawled a farewell missive, before shaking the dust of Bunter Court from his feet, and left it for the captain of the Remove.

The letter was in Bunter's well-known scrawl, and in his equally well-known orthography:

"Deer Wharton,—Just a line to tell you I'm gowing. You are a lot of beests not to stand by a chap when he's stood you a ripping hollyday. I shall settle up all the bills at Combermere as soon as I receeve a number of postal-orders that I have been expeckting for sum time.

"Untill then I shall have to lye low for a bit, so I am going away now to stay with some of my titled relaytions. Go and eet coke, the lot of you.

"Yours contemptuously,

"W. G. BUNTER.

"P.S.—I despise the lot of you."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Hook It!

"OH dear!"

Billy Bunter gasped.

He was running. Bunter did not like running. Walking was quite sufficient exercise for him—walking at a moderate pace, at something like the leisurely rate of progress of a tortoise. Considering the weight that he had to carry, walking was quite enough for Bunter; but now he was running. Regardless of avoirdupois, he was running his hardest. There were occasions when Bunter had to disregard even his own fat comfort, and this was one of the occasions.

Generally speaking, Bunter's comfort was the most important thing in the wide universe. Bunter, at least, had had no doubt of it. But now it was a case of "safety first."

The horrid vision of a man in blue haunted Bunter, and drove him unrestingly onward, as Io was driven on of old by the tormenting gad-fly.

Bunter had caught a glimpse of the policeman's uniform, as the gentleman in blue came up to the house with Parker from Combermere.

One glimpse had been enough for him.

He had been making preparations for departure—sudden departure. But that glimpse of the official uniform put an end to his preparations. He stayed not even to secure a packet of sandwiches. He just bolted, and now he was running as if for his life. He dared not go by the drive—he might have been seen from the many windows of Combermere Lodge—he might have been stopped by the lodge-keeper, a man Bunter had tipped liberally with cash borrowed from his guests, but who, he felt certain, would be ungrateful, and would turn on him now like the rest.

All the Combermere household had been munificently tipped by Bunter, though their wages had not been paid; but he felt instinctively that they were all against him now—butler and footmen, grooms and chauffeurs, lodge-keepers and gardeners, parlour-maids and housemaids and between-maids—the whole crowd would be down on Bunter now, as he realised bitterly—down on him from a sordid consideration of such a trifling matter as unpaid wages, now likely to remain permanently unpaid.

Really it was hard on a liberal, open-handed fellow like Bunter, who had generously handed out lavish tips almost as fast as he could borrow the money!

By paths through Combermere Park Bunter ran and ran, panting and gasping, with the perspiration streaming down his fat face.

It was fortunate—very fortunate—that he had disposed of a large lunch just before the crash came—it was likely to be his last meal for some time. It was fortunate in one sense, but unfortunate in another; for there was no doubt that that extensive lunch was telling on Bunter as he ran. A lunch like that required a nap to follow it, not a foot-race. And it was the foot-race that had fallen to Bunter's unhappy lot.

The crash had come suddenly.

Exactly how Billy Bunter had expected his remarkable tenancy of the Lodge to end no one could have said.

Indeed, Bunter himself could not have said.

In his usual style he had been satisfied with the present, and had given no more thought to the future than to the past.

Perhaps, like Mr. Micawber, he hoped that something would turn up.

It was a policeman who had turned up; but that, of course, was not what Bunter desired.

Now that the crash had come Bunter realised that he was "for it."

Somehow, his fat and fatuous brain had failed to realise the seriousness of the situation before. So long as he could stave off disaster, he was content to let matters slide in the comfortable hope that things would right themselves somehow in the long run.

But the sight of the official uniform had cleared his fatuous brain all of a sudden; it was as if the scales had fallen from his eyes.

He was "for it."

By a series of astounding tricks he had obtained possession of Lord Combermere's great mansion which was to "let furnished" at forty guineas a week; and he had not paid a single shilling.

Weeks and weeks of rent had piled up at the rate of forty guineas each, and Bunter had not given that matter a single thought. Enormous orders had been given to the local tradesmen, and gigantic bills had piled up—the local tradesmen had been quite happy to serve the big house on such a big scale. Their happiness was likely to be considerably diminished when they learned that their magnificent customer was a "bilk," and that he had bolted. All sorts of trickery, including the imitation of the butler's voice on the telephone, had enabled Bunter to keep the tradesmen at bay, as it were, till the crash came. Now it was pretty certain that the house would be invaded by a crowd of tradesmen clamorous for their bills; Bunter would be more sought after than ever!

Fainting and perspiring, Bunter pumped on.

If only he had had a little more time he might have cleared off in style, in the Rolls-Royce car, with a liveried chauffeur.

But those beasts—Harry Wharton & Co.—had given him no time.

They had discovered that he had locked up Pilkins, Walsingham, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in the wine-cellars; and they had collared the key and gone to the rescue of the prisoners—utterly disregarding the comfort or convenience of William George Bunter.

They had even seemed to think that Bunter was somehow to blame in the matter!

Yet it was quite clear to Bunter's powerful brain that his masterly strategy had been the only thing possible—in the circumstances.

Mr. Pilkins, enraged at finding Bunter installed in the house, would have turned him out ruthlessly; locking him in the wine-cellar had really been a masterstroke of strategy.

Walsingham had discovered him there; by sheer good fortune, Bunter had succeeded in locking the butler in along with the estate-agent.

Bunter's guest, D'Arcy of St. Jim's, had found out the state of affairs by accident, and insisted upon the release of the prisoners—a quite impossible demand, from Bunter's point of view.

What could Bunter have done, excepting what he had done—tipping D'Arcy into the cellars, and locking the door on him?

True, that was not the customary way of treating a guest, especially a distinguished guest like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's.

But it was the only way—in the circumstances! Bunter was willing to admit that it was a little unusual—that it might seem to lack the true spirit of hospitality. But he had to think of himself first!

That he had to think of himself first was a thing that admitted of no doubt whatever—to Bunter's mind.

All would have been well had not the Famous Five, on missing D'Arcy, insisted upon searching for him and finding him. That was what had put the lid on.

It was all the fault of those beasts ungratefully turning on Bunter after he had stood them an expensive holiday; extremely expensive, though not at his own expense!

Thinking it over, Bunter could not see that he had been to blame in any way.

But he realised that an unjust and carping world would not take the same view as his own enlightened mind.

Mr. Pilkins had the cheek to regard him as a common bilk; Walsingham considered him a swindler; D'Arcy had been distinctly unpleasant; even Harry Wharton & Co., who knew him so well, seemed to take the view that he had not done all that was required of a fellow of the most scrupulous honour and high principles.

It was hard! Hardest of all was the fact that Bunter, lately lord and master of Bunter Court, had to cut and run—clearing off surreptitiously and swiftly just as if he had been guilty of some wrongdoing!

That really was very hard!

But it couldn't be helped! He felt that it was useless to attempt to reason with Pilkins, with Walsingham—enraged by their imprisonment in the wine-cellars, though they had brought it on themselves! He felt that the policeman would not understand how entirely blameless he was in the whole affair. An obtuse lot, the police—supposed to maintain law and order and protect a decent fellow from ruffians like Pilkins and cheeky menservants like Walsingham! Yet here was a policeman actually after Bunter—actually seeking to tap him on the shoulder and walk him off to the police-station!

And that crying injustice actually would be perpetrated—if the policeman got near enough to Bunter to tap him on the shoulder!

All that Bunter could do was to keep out of his reach! To such a pass had things come!

Bunter was doing his best.

Perspiration streamed down his fat face; his glasses slid down his fat, perspiring nose.

Still he pumped on, panting and gasping.

He reached the park palings at last, where they bordered the Combermere road. There he stopped to take breath. If all the police in the county of Kent had been just behind Bunter he would have had to take breath before negotiating the palings.

He blinked round in terror.

But the park was deserted behind him, swimming in heat in the hot summer afternoon. Bunter panted and panted, and gasped and gasped. He mopped his streaming brow.

"Oh dear! Oh! Ow! Oh, my hat! Beasts! Ow!"

He clambered over the palings at last and dropped with a bump in the high road.

"Ow! Oh dear!"

He sat in the grass by the roadside and pumped in breath. What was he to do now? Whither were his fleeing footsteps to wend?

His first and urgent thought had been to get out of Combermere Lodge, to escape being taken into custody, by hook or by crook.

He had had a vague idea of getting to the railway-station and jumping into the first train.

Fortunately—very fortunately—he had borrowed a few pounds from D'Arcy a few hours before locking him in the wine-cellars. He was not in his customary impecunious state.

But—the thought chilled Bunter—suppose those awful beasts had telephoned to the railway-station? That unspeakable policeman might have asked the stationmaster to detain him if he showed up there.

"Oh dear!"

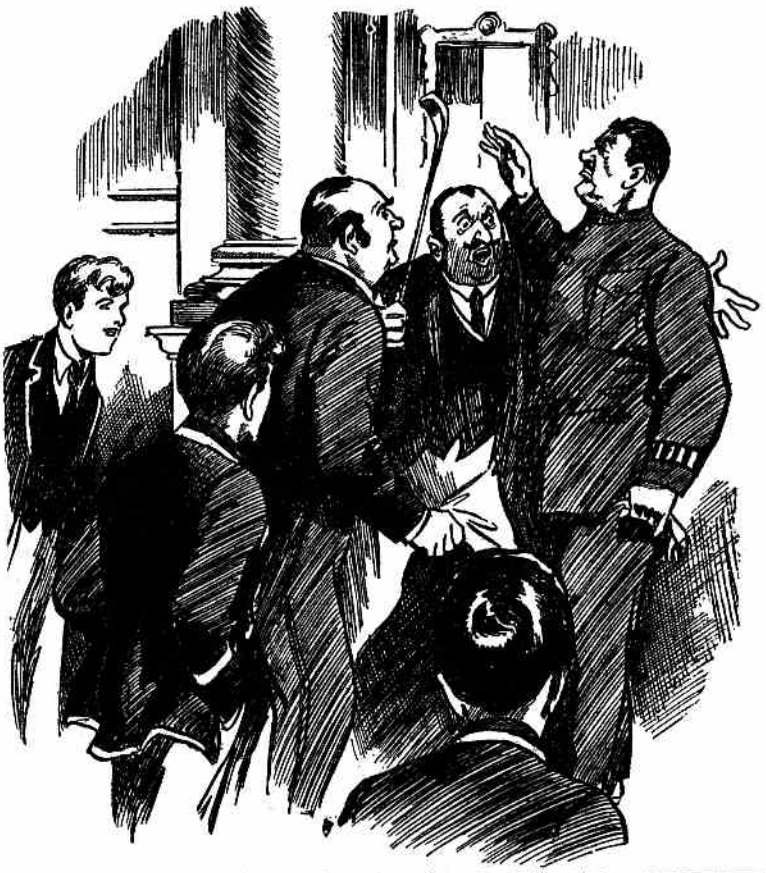
What was a fellow to do?

Hoot! Toot!

There was the hoot of a motor-horn on the road as a car came buzzing round a bend from the direction of the gates of Combermere Lodge. Billy Bunter blinked at the vehicle. It was a taxicab, and the roof was well stacked with baggage. And in the taxi sat a youth he knew well—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's.

Bunter blinked at him.

D'Arcy, evidently, had lost no time in getting away from Bunter Court. No doubt Harry Wharton & Co. were still



"That young villain Bunter," hooted Mr. Pilkins, "he imitated my voice on the telephone, speaking to Walsingham." "And mine, speaking to Mr. Pilkins," said Walsingham. "And locked us both in the wine cellars——" "We got out only this morning——" "And now he's gone——" "Bolted!" The Combermere constable held up his hand for silence. "One at a time, gentlemen," he said. "Who is this here Bunter, to begin with?" (*See Chapter* 1.)

there. D'Arcy was the first of the party to clear off; he was alone in the taxi. The expression on his noble face was grave and severe; possibly he was thinking of his extraordinary experiences as a guest of Billy Bunter.

Bunter jumped up.

He wanted a lift. He wanted it badly! And here was one of his guests coming along in the nick of time. D'Arcy had not treated him well—that was how Bunter looked at him. But at least he could not refuse his late host a lift in the taxi.

Bunter jumped out into the road, and waved a fat hand.

"Stop!" he shouted.

And as the taxidriver had to stop, or run over Bunter, he stopped.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Lift for Bunter!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY turned his eyeglass on Billy Bunter, standing panting in the road, in astonishment.

He was surprised to see Bunter there, and still more surprised that Bunter had the unimaginable impudence to stop him to speak.

"Buntah!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's.

Bunter rolled up to the cab door.

"Gussy, old man——"

"Weally, Buntah——"

"Give me a lift, old fellow."

D'Arcy gave him a look that might have penetrated the shell of a tortoise.

"I wefuse to have anythin' to do with you, Buntah! I wefuse to speak a word to you! I will not uttah a single syllable! I do not want to hurt your feelin's, Buntah, if you have any, so I will not tell you what I think of you. But of all the wottahs——"

"Oh, really, D'Arcy——"

"Of all the wogues——"

"Look here!"

"Of all the weckless and unscwupulous wuffians——"

"I say, you must be talking about somebody else, old chap!" exclaimed Bunter, in astonishment. "Have I done anything to offend you?"

"What?"

"If I have, I'm sorry," said Bunter. "Between friends, that's enough, I suppose?"

"Fwiends!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, old chap. We're old pals, ain't we?" said Bunter. "I've given you a good time at Bunter Court."

"You impwisoned me in the wine-cellahs!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You have tweated me in a wuffianly way, Buntah."

"Well, you asked for it, you know," urged Bunter. "You found that scoundrel Pilkins and that disrespectful rotter, Walsingham, there, and insisted upon my letting them out! What was a fellow to do?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Still, I'm sorry," said Bunter generously. "I can't see that I could have done anything else in the circumstances, but I'm sorry I had to do it. Can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"Weally, Buntah, I doubt whethah you are quite in your wight senses," said Arthur Augustus. "But I will not slang you, you uttah wascal, and I am goin' to let you off the feahful thwashin' I had made up my mind to give you. But don't speak to me any more."

"You see, I want a lift——"

"Wats!"

"There's a bobby after me!" gasped Bunter.

"I twust, Buntah, that you do not suppose me capable of impedin' the police in the execution of their duty?"

"Why, you—you—you silly ass!" gasped Bunter.

"Weally, Buntah——"

"It will all come right,' gasped Bunter. "Every penny will be paid. All damage will be made good. I only want time"

"You uttah ass——"

"You see, my pater will draw a cheque to cover the whole thing," explained Bunter. "But I've got to get home. You see that?"

D'Arcy hesitated.

He was a good-natured fellow, and if Bunter only wanted time to get home, so that his father could settle the matter, Arthur Augustus felt that he could not refuse the fat junior a lift to the station. Certainly if any other fellow had done what Bunter had done, D'Arcy would have regarded a prison cell as the best possible place for him. But really it was impossible to take Billy Bunter seriously. It was clear that Bunter not only considered that he had been in the right all along the line, but that he was surprised and a little grieved that D'Arcy could not see it, too. Evidently Bunter's amazing intellect worked in a way that was all its own.

Bunter pulled open the door of the cab, and D'Arcy, still hesitating, did not say him nay.

The fat junior of Greytriars plumped down in the seat beside the elegant St. Jim's fellow.

"Vewy well, Buntah!" said Arthur Augustus at last. "I am goin' to the station, and I will give you a lift there. But don't speak to me."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy——"

"I wefuse to have anythin' to say to you, Buntah."

"I say, tell the chauffeur not to keep on to Combermere," said Bunter anxiously.

"I am goin' to Combermere Station, Buntah."

"Don't be selfish, Gussy——"

"What?"

"Very likely they've telephoned to Combermere Station—it's a thing that scoundrel Pilkins would do," said Bunter. "He's an utterly unscrupulous man. You know these house-agents—downy birds, the best of them! Look here, take the train at Canterbury, D'Arcy, and drop me there."

"It is a vewy long wun to Cantahbuwy, Buntah."

"I'll pay the man," said Bunter.

"Wats!"

"Look here, I've got the money——"

Arthur Augustus grinned involuntarily. He knew whose money the Owl of Greyfriars had in his pocket.

"It is not a question of the money, Buntah. But I am not suah that I am justified in helpin' you to dodge justice in this way."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy——"

"If you assuah me that you are goin home, and that your fathah will see your cweditahs and settle with them for——"

"I suppose my word's good enough!" said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

Arthur Augustus regarded him dubiously. Perhaps he did not think that Billy Bunter's word was a very valuable asset. But he nodded at last.

"Vewy well, Buntah; I will chance it."

"That's right; get on," said Bunter, with an anxious blink back along the road.

D'Arcy leaned from the window.

"Dwivah, pway take me on to Cantahbuwy!" he said.

"Yes, sir," said the chauffeur, and the car ran on, and in a few minutes turned from the Combermere road and headed for the distant cathedral city.

Billy Bunter breathed more freely when the whole Combermere neighbourhood was left behind. No doubt it gave him a pang to part with the glories of Bunter Court. But in the painful circumstances, the farther he travelled from Bunter Court the more relieved he felt. He had been a great man in that great mansion; now he was more than willing to leave it to Harry Wharton & Co. to deal with the crowd of tradesmen who would be pouring in as soon as they heard the news.

Bunter settled back comfortably in his seat. All the chances had been against him in his flight from Combermere Lodge, yet here he was, travelling in comfort and safety, with the miles lengthening between him and the danger he had left behind. The experiences of Billy Bunter certainly seemed to demonstrate that there is such a thing as "fool's luck."

Arthur Augustus sat up very stiff and stately. He had not felt quite able to refuse Bunter assistance, but he was determined to remain unconscious of his existence.

But Bunter was not a fellow to be ignored. As his terrors lessened, his fat confidence returned. After five or six miles had been covered, he was almost the old Bunter again.

"I say, Gussy——"

No answer.

"Gussy, old man——"

"Pway do not addwess me, Buntah," said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I do not desiah to have anythin' to say to you."

"Not ratty about anything, are you?" asked Bunter, blinking at him.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"The fact is, D'Arcy, I hardly think I'd better go direct home," said Bunter. "The pater will be a bit surprised. I shouldn't wonder if he turns out quite waxy——"

"I think it is vewy pwobable, Buntah."

"You see, it may be better to break it to him gently by letter," said Bunter thoughtfully. "I've got to write to Lord Mauleverer, too—he's really responsible for the whole thing, as I should never have seen the house at all but for him. It was really through doing old Mauly a favour, in my thoughtless, generous way, that the whole affair came about. I'd better lie low for a few days, don't you think so, Gussy?"

"You will do as you think best, Buntah."

"I'm asking your advice as a friend, you know."

"I do not wegard you as a fwiend, Buntah."

"Oh, really, D'Arcy, that's rather thick, after enjoying my lavish hospitality for a week at Bunter Court."

"Oh, cwumbs!"

"The fact is, Gussy, I think I'd better come home with you."

"Eh?"

"I should be able to make myself quite comfortable at Eastwood House, say for a week," said Bunter thoughtfully. "That would give me time to turn round. See?"

"Weally, Buntah——"

"I don't like that young brother of yours, and your father's a bit of an old frump, but after all, a fellow has to put up with all sorts on a visit to a country house," said Bunter. "It's a go."

"Buntah——"

"We'll take the train together at Canterbury," said Bunter brightly. "Don't say any more, Gussy; it's settled."

Arthur Augustus looked at Bunter, and his expression indicated that he was scarcely able to believe his eyes or his ears.

Whether Bunter considered him extremely soft, and hoped to carry the matter off by sheer impudence, or whether the Owl of the Remove was so incredibly fatuous as he appeared, D'Arcy did not know, and could not guess. But he was quite certain on one point—that he was going to say good-bye to Bunter at Canterbury, with all the firmness that might be required.

Bunter rattled on cheerily as the taxi whizzed on to the cathedral city. The ancient spires of Canterbury came in sight, and Bunter, fully occupied with the exercise of his own fat chin, hardly noticed that Arthur Augustus was not speaking at all.

It was all settled in Bunter's fat mind. He was going to put up at Eastwood House for a week—in fact, a fortnight—or, rather, perhaps he could stand it for three weeks! That would give him plenty of time to turn round; and meanwhile, he would be safe from the carping, discontented rotters he had left behind at Combermere. D'Arcy's view of the matter he did not take into consideration; Bunter's view was the only one that mattered to the Owl of the Remove.

The chauffeur stopped in Canterbury, at a signal from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Bunter blinked out of the window, and had a view of an ancient cathedral which did not interest him in the least.

"I say, what are we stopping for?" he asked. "This isn't the railway station."

"We are stoppin' for you to get out, Buntah," said the St. Jim's junior grimly.

Bunter blinked at him, puzzled.

"But I'm coming home with you, old chap."

"Wats!"

"Look here, D'Arcy——"

"Will you have the gweat kindness to step out of the cab, Buntah?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy politely.

"No, you ass! I——" Bunter jumped. "I—I say, you fathead, wha-a-at are you going to do?"

"I am goin' to thwow you out, Buntah."

"Ow! Leggo!"

"I am sowwy, Buntah, that I cannot let go until I have thwown you out of the taxi."

"Yaroooh! Leggo!" roared Bunter. "I'll get out if you like—I'm getting out, ain't I? If you kick me, you beast—— Yooooooop!"

Bunter sat on the pavement.

"Pway dwive on to the station," said Arthur Augustus to the chauffeur.

"Yessir."

"Yaroooh!" Bunter staggered up. "D'Arcy, you rotter—you—you image; I refuse to come home with you. I should certainly decline to travel with a rotter of your sort. Ow!"

The rest of Bunter's remarks were lost in the whir of the taxi as it bore Arthur Augustus D'Arcy onward to the station—minus Bunter.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

After Bunter!

"WHAT next?"

Bob Cherry asked the question.

The Famous Five of Greyfriars were still at Combermere Lodge—no longer Bunter Court.

Bunter had vanished—long since. Where he was, whither he had fled, what had become of him, no one knew.

Everyone knew that he had vanished from Combermere Lodge, and they knew no more. Mr. Pilkins had telephoned to the railway station at Combermere, requesting that the young scoundrel, the young villain, the young bilk, should be detained if he appeared there. But the station-master informed him in return that no one answering to Bunter's description had been seen at the station.

Mr. Pilkins was gone back to Combermere now, with his man Parker; the constable had departed, stolid and unperturbed. Mr. Pilkins was far from sharing the imperturbability of the limb of the law. He went raging—almost raving. In his stuffy office at Combermere, Mr. Pilkins had the pleasure—or otherwise—of calculating how much was due from that unspeakable, unimaginable bilk, William George Bunter, and how much of it he was likely to see the colour of.

He had an additional mental exercise in considering what explanation he was to offer to his client, Lord Combermere, who had left the letting of the house in his hands—with this unlooked-for result. Lord Combermere, living cheaply in a Swiss hotel while his magnificent mansion was "let furnished," was certain to want to know when the money was coming in. It was all very well for Mr. Pilkins to say that he had been swindled, and that Walsingham had been deceived—it was not a house-agent's job to be "done" by a swindler, and not a butler's place to be deceived by any Tom, Dick, or Harry who chose to pull the wool over his eyes.

Unless the cash was forthcoming, this business meant serious trouble for Mr. Pilkins, and probably the "sack" for Walsingham.

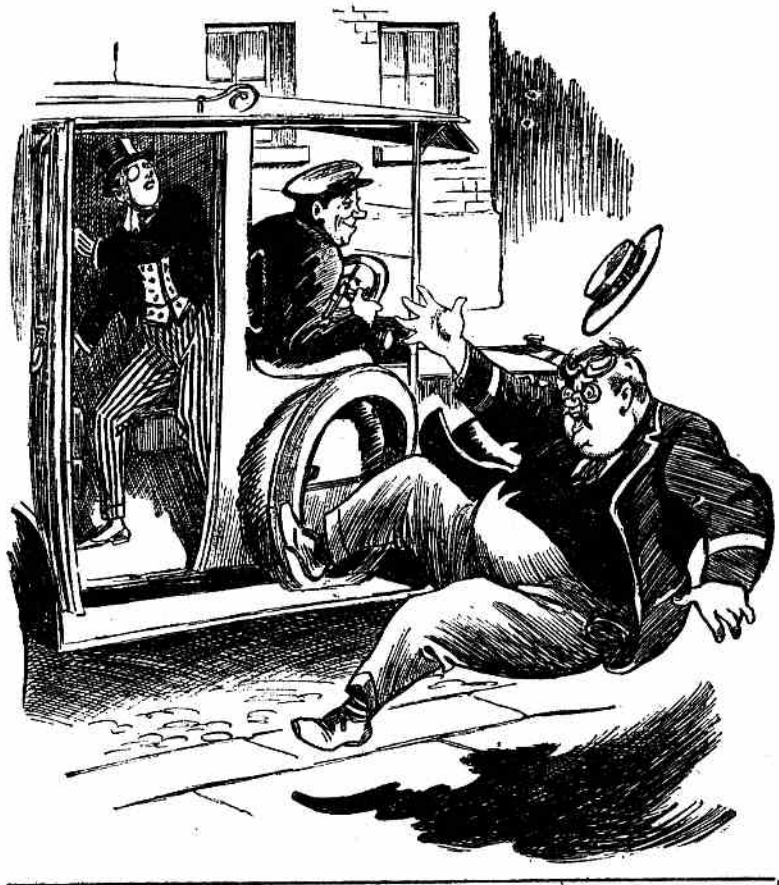
The cash, therefore, had to be forthcoming; Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham agreed on that. At the very least, if the cash was not forthcoming, its value should be taken out of Bunter, with the utmost rigour of the law. And Bunter had bolted!

While Mr. Pilkins raged in his office, and found a slight solace in slanging Parker, Walsingham breathed wrath at Combermere Lodge, and heckled the footmen.

Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co. consulted, scarcely knowing what to do. Bob Cherry asked: "What next?" without being able to answer his own question.

The position of the Famous Five was decidedly unpleasant.

Certainly, they had had no part or lot in Bunter's bilking. They were not responsible for the rent of the house, or the wages of the household, or the bills of the tradespeople. Even had their innocence not been clear otherwise, the fact that they had brought the whole imposture to an end, by rescuing Pilkins and Walsingham from the wine-cellars, would have established it.



"If you won't step out of the cab, Buntah," said Arthur Augustus, gripping the Owl of the Remove by the collar, "I must thwow you out!" "Yaroooh! Leggo!" roared Bunter. "I'll get out if you like—I'm getting out, ain't I? If you kick me, you beast—yooooop!" The fat Removite landed on the pavement with a sickening thud. *(See Chapter 3.)*

But for the intervention of the Greyfriars chums, the estate-agent and the butler would still have been languishing among Lord Combermere's empty wine-bins, in the select company of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Both of them knew it, and even the enraged Mr. Pilkins was grateful for his rescue, and Walsingham, in his deferential and polished butler-manner, respectfully intimated that he was deeply and respectfully obliged to the Greyfriars juniors.

Walsingham had, indeed, served tea for the juniors; a substantial tea, as they had missed their lunch in the excitement of the day. Obviously, he expected the juniors to depart; but he was the excellent butler to the last; and, doubtless he expected something in the way of tips when they went.

"We've got to go," said Harry, "and the sooner the better, what?"

There was a general nodding of heads round the tea-table. The summer day was drawing to a close, and it was obvious that Bunter's guests could not spend another night in the house of which Bunter was no longer master, and from which he had fled as a discovered bilk.

They were, indeed, anxious to go. Walsingham was as polite and deferential as ever; Thomas was quite respectful. But the juniors blushed under the eyes of the Combermere servants; in the general view, they knew that they were lumped with Bunter, the bilk. It was a most unpleasant experience for the chums of Greyfriars, and it made them yearn to get within kicking distance of Bunter.

At the same time, though they longed to kick him, they were concerned about him. He had brought plenty of trouble on them; but the amount of trouble he had brought upon himself was really alarming.

"That fat idiot——" said Nugent.

"Exactly—that fat idiot——" assented Wharton.

"Has he gone home?"

"Goodness knows! I hardly think he would dare to go home and confess to his pater what he's been doing in the vac. It's pretty clear now that his father knew nothing at all about it."

"My hat! What a nerve!"

"What a neck!"

"The neckfulness was terrific."

Harry Wharton laughed rather ruefully.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," he remarked. "Bunter simply didn't understand what he was doing. I don't suppose he realises even now that he's done anything dishonest."

"Phew!"

"We were rather asses to be taken in by him," said Harry. "But there it is; we were taken in. We've been here for weeks, living like giddy fighting-cocks, and nothing's paid for. We're not legally responsible; but——"

"Morally?" said Nugent.

"Well, hardly that, either; we're not responsible at all. But we can't be parties to tradesmen being bilked of their money. We shall have to find some way of settling, at least in part, the accounts at the Combermere shops. Bunter's father will have to shell out something, and we shall have to get our people to stand their whack, somehow. It's a bit thick, but—there you are; we've had some of the stuff, and we can't let it be said that Greyfriars fellows weren't ready to pay their way."

"That's right enough," agreed Johnny Bull; "but I'll slaughter Bunter when I see him again."

"As for the rent of the house, I don't believe they can sue Bunter for it, as he's a minor——"

"Depend on it the fat rotter knew that!"

"Very likely; but I'm doubtful whether they can sue his father either," said Harry. "I think the tradesmen could, for some of the stuff they supplied, at least; but the owner of the house can't—at least I think not. What they can do I'm blessed if I know, unless it's to get Bunter shoved into a reformatory."

"Oh, my hat!"

"We can't ask our people to shell out hundreds of pounds, and it comes to that," said Harry. "Some sort of an arrangement will have to be come to. But first of all Bunter will have to be found; he will have to go straight home and confess to his father what he's done before he gets taken into custody. Mr. Bunter will have to pay up, and we'll get our people to help all they can with the cash. That's all I can think of now. The first thing is for Bunter to be found—and the fat idiot has got frightened and bolted, goodness knows where."

Wharton paused, and looked dubiously at his comrades.

"Bunter's treated us all absolutely rottenly," he said. "But——"

"But——" murmured Bob.

"But he's, after all, a Greyfriars chap, and I dare say the fat dummy meant to give us a good holiday in his own fatheaded way. We—we can't leave him dodging about the country with the police looking for him. If you fellows are willing, my idea is to find Bunter first of all, and make him go straight home and put it to his pater. We can do as we like—we're not expected at home, and we've got some funds. When we leave here, what about leaving our baggage at the railway-station and taking a bag or two and starting after Bunter?"

There was a pause.

Every member of the Famous Five was feeling more inclined to kick Bunter hard than to give him any more friendly attention.

But there was general agreement with Wharton. They knew, if Mr. Pilkins did not, that W. G. Bunter was more fool than rogue—indeed, that he was not in the least conscious of being a rogue at all. There was no doubt that he had taken away with him a fixed belief that he was a generous, well-meaning fellow who had been hardly used!

True, it would have been difficult for anyone who did not know Bunter to account for the Owl looking at the matter in that light. But the Famous Five knew of old the wonderful workings of the Bunter intellect.

"It's a go!" said Bob Cherry, at last. "After all it will be rather a lark hunting Bunter; and we've got to fill up the vac. somehow."

"And we can kick him when we find him!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Hard!" agreed Nugent.

"The hardfulness will be terrific."

"Then it's settled," said Harry. "Something's got to be done to settle matters here on an honourable footing; and Bunter's got to be found first. It's a go?"

"It's a go!" agreed his comrades.

"Master Wharton!" Walsingham glided up, deferential as ever. "Master D'Arcy is holding on to the telephone."

"D'Arcy? Right-ho!"

Harry Wharton hurried away to the telephone. The tones of the swell of St. Jim's came back as he spoke into the transmitter.

"That you, Wharton, deah boy?"

"Yes, old chap. You got home all right?" said the captain of the Remove.

"Yaas, wathah! I thought I would wing you up," said Arthur Augustus. "If you fellows would care to come on to Eastwood House, my patah would be vewy pleased to give you a vewy warm welcome."

"Thanks, old chap! But we've decided to look for Bunter," said Harry. "The fat idiot has taken fright and bolted, and we've got to find him, to get matters settled here."

"Bai Jove! Do you want Buntah?"

"Not the least little bit in the world, only to kick him; but he's a Greyfriars chap, you know, and we don't want the name of Greyfriars School in the papers, with the report of the arrest of a Greyfriars man for bilking," said Wharton.

"I undahstand, deah boy. Then I can tell you where to look," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I gave the fat wottah a lift in my taxi to Cantahbuwy."

"You did?" ejaculated Wharton.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then he's at Canterbury now?" exclaimed Harry.

"Pwobably, deah boy, unless he has bilked the wailway to cawwy him somewhah else."

"Good man—we'll clear off to Canterbury and look for him there, then," said Harry. "Thanks no end!"

"Don't mench, deah boy!"

And after a few more words with the amiable swell of St. Jim's, Harry Wharton hurried back to his comrades.

"It's a clue to the missing porpoise," he explained. "D'Arcy gave Bunter a lift to Canterbury, when he went today; goodness knows how or why. So that's where we've got to look for him."

"Good!"

And having come to a decision, the Famous Five lost no more time. They packed their belongings, and they tipped the numerous staff of Combermere Lodge; and they accepted Walsingham's pressing offer of the car to take them and their baggage to the station.

Queer enough as their holiday at "Bunter Court" had been, the chums of the Remove had enjoyed it, on the whole. Still, they were not sorry to see "Bunter Court" disappear behind them. It was, indeed, a great relief to get clear, for good and all, of Lord Combermere's magnificent domain. And, leaving the bulk of their baggage in the left luggage office at Combermere Station, the chums of the Greyfriars Remove took the Canterbury train, and headed for the cathedral city—after Bunter.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Fool and His Money!

BILLY BUNTER'S eyes glistened behind his big glasses.

The Owl of the Remove was seated in a corner seat, in a third-class carriage, in an express westward bound.

After his painful parting with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy Bunter had quite given up the idea of passing the remainder of the vacation with the swell of St. Jim's. D'Arcy had kicked him only once, but it had been a fairly hefty kick; and Bunter did not want to sample it again. For reasons that Bunter's powerful intellect failed to grasp, his fascinating company had palled on D'Arcy; it was inexplicable, but there it was; after what had occurred it was obvious that he couldn't spend the vacation with Arthur Augustus.

But William George Bunter had many strings to his bow. His list of friends was a long one. Bunter counted as a friend any fellow who could be relied on not to kick him at sight. So—while partaking of a little refreshment in

Canterbury, he had turned over in his mind the list, and debated what fellow should have the honour of his company while he was dodging the results of his masterly strategy at Bunter Court.

He decided on Lord Mauleverer.

Mauly was rich, Mauly was soft, Mauly hated kicking a chap unless fairly driven to it, and Mauly, after all, was responsible, in Bunter's opinion, for the difficulties that now overwhelmed the Owl of the Remove. It was up to Mauly to see him through, he decided; and so Billy Bunter determined that his next stop should be at Mauleverer Towers. Hence his journey in the express westward; Mauleverer Towers being in Hampshire, at a long distance from the spot where D'Arcy had dropped the fat junior like a hot potato.

Bunter liked to travel first class, and always did so if some other fellow could be induced to stand the ticket. When he had to stand it himself, he travelled third. So on the present occasion his fat form was disposed comfortably in the corner of a third-class carriage, while the train ate up the miles across the smiling land of Kent and Surrey. His ticket was taken to Reigate, where he intended to rest for the night; resuming his journey on the following day to the west.

Bunter was feeling fairly satisfied and comfortable now.

All his dangers and difficulties had been left behind; and if they followed him he hoped somehow to land them on the shoulders of Lord Mauleverer, fortunately the best-tempered fellow in the Greyfriars Remove. If he succeeded, well and good; if he failed, it would be time enough to think of new dodges then; it was no use meeting troubles half-way. Anyhow, he would be able to borrow something of Mauly; a few pounds, at the very worst. That would stave off the dreadful necessity of going home and announcing to a horrified Mr. Bunter that he had piled up liabilities running into hundreds of pounds. That announcement Bunter naturally wished to postpone till the very latest possible moment.

There were two other passengers in Bunter's carriage; two men with hard and pimply faces, smoking cigarettes and playing cards. Bunter had chosen a smoking carriage, to put on a cigarette himself, feeling "no end of a dog," and looking—had he only known it—no end of an ass.

He watched the game of the two sporting gentlemen, and his little round eyes glistened behind his glasses.

He was unaware that the two racing men had their eyes on him, and were quite cognisant of his keen interest in their game. He was too short-sighted, as well as too obtuse, to observe the glances they exchanged, or to read the meaning thereof.

Bunter took a second cigarette from his packet, and one of the sporting men leaned across and politely offered him a match.

"Light, sir?"

"Thanks!" said Bunter genially.

Evidently this sporting fellow took Bunter for another sporting fellow—at least, that was Bunter's impression.

He puffed out smoke with an air of great satisfaction. His eyes were on the cards that glistened on the newspaper which the sporting gentlemen were using as a card-table.

"Care to take a hand sir?" said the sporting man, very politely and respectfully.

He treated Bunter as a gentleman, to whom it was an honour for a man like himself to be speaking at all. That was what Bunter liked, especially after his late unpleasant experiences at Bunter Court. The flattering attentions of Mr. Pilkins, the deference of Walsingham, were now things of the past; but they had been pleasant while they lasted. Now they were gone, but the Owl of the Remove was as thirsty as ever for flattery and deference.

The sporting man with the pimply face was prepared to give him all he wanted, so long as he could inveigle Bunter into a game of nap. He was prepared to give it up, too, so long as Bunter's money lasted. After that, he was likely to give Bunter about as much flattering respect as he would have given to a squeezed orange.

But it was one of Bunter's little failings that he never could see farther than the end of his fat nose.

He was pleased now, and looked it. Moreover, Bunter was of opinion that he was a "dab" at nap.

He was, in his own fat opinion, a "dab" at many things. Card games were only a trifle among the things he could do, and do well. With that opinion fixed in his fat mind, he was keen to try his luck, and bag the spare cash of these polite fellows. A few extra pounds in his pocket would come in quite useful, he considered.

The two sporting gentlemen were thinking just the same, only they were thinking of Bunter's pounds in their pockets.

It remained to be seen in which pockets the pounds would ultimately repose.

"I don't mind if I do," said Bunter cheerily.

"Draw up, sir. Give the cards to the young gentleman to shuffle, Herbert."

"More than welcome, sir," said Herbert genially. "It's different, I dare say, with a wealthy young gentleman like you, but my pal Charley and me, we only play for half-crown points."

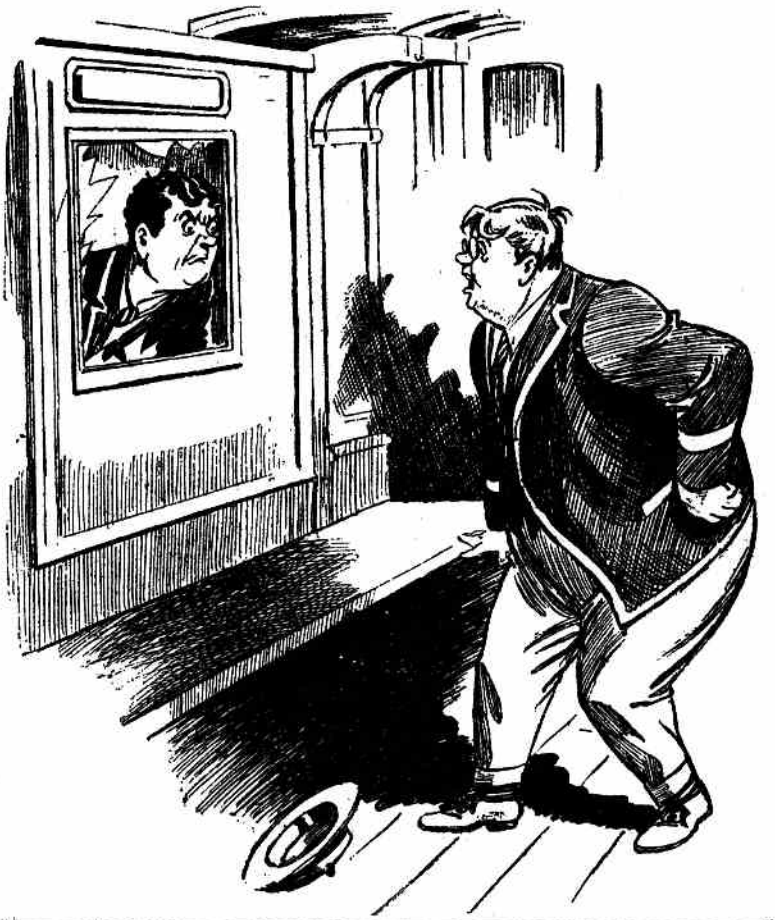
"Never higher than that," said Charley solemnly, with a nod.

Bunter felt a slight inward misgiving.

Sometimes, behind a locked door at Greyfriars, he had played nap with fellows like Skinner or Snoop, but they had played for penny points, and when the stakes ran into shillings they considered themselves reckless plungers.

Charley and Herbert, apparently, regarded half-crowns as mere counters; and Bunter, with an inward qualm, affected to take the same view. He was not going to let himself down in the estimation of these young sporting fellows who treated him so respectfully and genially, and evidently regarding him as a dashing young sportsman.

Bunter shuffled the cards, and Herbert dealt. Bunter was an ass, there was no doubt of that. But he had one eye open for "ways that are dark and tricks that are vain," in playing cards for money with strangers. To the blackguardly



Coker thrust his head through the broken window and glared at Bunter. "You fat villain!" he roared. The Owl of the Remove backed away from Coker's head, and his little round eyes almost started through his spectacles with terror. "Oh dear! I—I say, Coker——" "Unlock that door at once!" raved the Fifth Former. (*See Chapter* 9.)

side of his proceedings he gave no thought at all; he only wanted to win some money, and to keep the other fellows from winning his, and those considerations occupied all his thoughts. He was prepared to be very watchful.

His watchfulness was not of much use.

Charley and Herbert had lived by their wits for years, and thus escaped the painful necessity of earning their daily bread, without acquiring skill in their peculiar profession. Bunter had about as much chance, in their hands, as a fat goose in the jaws of a fox.

He won, and won again, and his eyes glistened behind his spectacles. Then he began to lose.

That he had been allowed to win a dozen half-crowns to encourage him did not even dawn on his fat brain.

Those half-crowns went back to their owners and Bunter's half-crowns began to follow them.

Charley and Herbert obligingly changed a pound note for him, and then another, and another.

Bunter was breathing hard by this time; his podgy heart was beating fast, perspiration bedewed his plump brow.

Three pounds had gone, and he had only one left. His fat fingers trembled on it in his pocket.

The greed of the gambler was on him; the old, old desire to win back his losses, that hopeless bait which keeps the wretched gambler at his dreary game, like the moth at the candle.

He had given up the hope of making a small fortune out of Charley and Herbert. All he wanted now was to get back the pound notes he had parted with; though, probably, had he succeeded, greed would have supervened, and he would have gone on playing to win.

But he was not likely to succeed.

Charley and Herbert had been playing for pleasure before Bunter joined in. Now they were playing for business.

Bunter's last pound note came into view.

It was changed into silver, and Bunter played desperately on, and watched his last coin go.

Then he sat back in his corner, gasping.

Charley winked at Herbert. Herbert laughed.

Both of them understood that Bunter was now "stony," he was in the "squeezed orange" state, and they had no further respect of politeness to waste on him. They were openly amused at his fatuous folly. A few stations later they left the train, leaving Bunter alone.

Charley turned back at the carriage door.

"Afternoon, sir!" he said, with mocking geniality.

Bunter blinked at him dismally.

"Take my tip, young fatty!" said Charley. "Don't you play cards in trains any more! I've seen some silly idiots at cards, but of all the silly idiots I ever struck, you're about the silliest! Take my tip, and chuck it!"

And Charley loafed away after Herbert.

The train rolled on.

"Oh dear!" said Bunter.

His self-esteem had received a shock. Instead of regarding him as a dashing young sportsman, Charley and Herbert apparently looked on him as a silly idiot, and Charley actually had had the unspeakable impudence to address him as "young fatty!"

That was bad enough.

But worse than that was the awful fact that he was now stony, excepting for a few coppers. Like the dog in the fable, he had lost the substance in grasping after the shadow.

He had his ticket to Reigate—merely that and nothing more. It was many, many a long mile from Reigate to Mauleverer Towers; and with his cash in the possession of Charley and Herbert, Bunter had his fat legs to rely upon as a means of locomotion.

"Oh dear!" he repeated.

How was he to continue his journey beyond Reigate? How was he to get a night's lodging in that town? Most important of all, how was he to obtain the extensive refreshment which he would need? To those questions Bunter's fat mind could supply no answer.

"Ow! Oh dear! Beastly swindlers!" he groaned.

It was a dismal and doleful Bunter that rolled out of the train when it stopped at Reigate.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Old Acquaintances!

"YOU talk too much, Potter!"

"Look here——"

"The same with you, Greene!"

"Look here, Coker——"

"You're interrupting me, Greene!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"I've told you before, and I tell you again," said Horace Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars. "You talk too much! You argue with a fellow! When a fellow knows best, he doesn't expect a pair of carping, silly asses to be always arguing with him! You get me?"

Billy Bunter sat up and took notice.

Three familiar voices had come to his ears—the voices of Coker, Potter, and Greene, of the Greyfriars Fifth.

The hour was late.

Bunter was some miles from Reigate now. Having nothing in his pockets, and nowhere to lay his weary head, he had started walking. Certainly, he had not hoped to walk as far as Hampshire that evening. He had a vague idea of obtaining a night's lodging, and necessary refreshment, at some hospitable farmhouse. Fortunately, it was a fine, warm night, with bright moonlight. It was quite a nice night for a walk, if Bunter had cared for walking. He didn't.

The hospitable farmhouse of which he dreamed did not appear to have a local habitation in that part of Surrey.

Bunter walked up quite cheerily to the first comfortable-looking homestead he happened upon; and was told to "be off." Stray travellers looking for a night's lodging on the "nod" did not seem to be in demand.

At his next attempt, he found a sharp-featured female in charge of the farmhouse. She did not trouble to listen to Bunter's request; before he had finished, she set the dog on him.

Bunter put on a record speed in getting back to the road.

After that, he gave up the idea of asking for hospitality. Hospitality seemed to be at a discount; and he disliked dogs at close quarters.

He tramped on dismally.

Instead of a hearty welcome and a hearty supper in a hospitable farmhouse, with a jolly farmer treating him with great respect as an honoured guest, Bunter was now thinking of sneaking into some barn and getting a few hours' sleep in the hay.

But even sneaking into a barn had its difficulties.

Only twelve hours ago he had been lord of Bunter Court, with footmen at his command; now he seemed to be regarded merely as a tramp, and an undesirable tramp at that. Dogs seemed innumerable; every building he approached seemed populated with dogs, especially as the night grew older. And when at last he found a building where there seemed no dogs about, and sneaked in, a man in gaiters came in and found him, and picked up a pitchfork, and Bunter fled again without stopping to inquire what the man was going to do with the pitchfork.

Wearily, under the summer moon, Bunter continued to "hoof" it; looking no longer for even a barn, but for some corner where he could repose his fat and fatigued limbs.

His legs gave way at last; and he sat down under a hedge, with his back to a tree, at a cross-roads, to rest. His head nodded forward, and he was soon fast asleep.

In his slumber he heard voices and other sounds. He awakened quite suddenly with the voices near him, and sat up and took notice. The voices were voices that he knew, but that he had never expected to hear until Greyfriars opened for the new term.

Bunter rubbed his sleepy eyes, and adjusted his big spectacles on his nose, and blinked round him in the moonlight.

A caravan was halted in the lane, where the roads crossed. Three Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars stood less than a couple of yards from Bunter, though in the dimness under the hedge they had not observed him. The three were engaged in argument; or, rather, Coker of the Fifth was engaged in argument, Potter and Greene in tired expostulation. Bunter grinned; he knew the manners and customs of Horace Coker of old.

Having reduced his comrades to silence, if not to satisfaction, Horace Coker turned away from them, and walked ahead of the van. The horse had sunk its head, and was nibbling at the grass beside the lane. Coker strode up to a sign-post in the centre of the patch of grass at the cross-roads, and stared up at it.

It seemed to afford him little satisfaction.

Once upon a time it had indicated the way to travellers; but the paint had long since worn off, and it no longer gave more than a few hints, as it were. Three or four letters were decipherable. These were of no use to Coker, and he snorted angrily, and came back to Potter and Greene.

"The dashed sign's no dashed good!" he grunted. "Can't read a dashed word on the dashed thing."

"I told you so!" remarked Potter mildly.

"I know you did, Potter, and it was exactly the fatheaded thing you would do," agreed Coker.

"Look here——"

"The question is, which road do we take?" said Coker.

"Go hon!" murmured Greene.

"Did you speak, Greene?"

"Oh, no—nothing! Get on with it, Coker."

"The question," said Coker, with a glare at Greene, "is which road do we take? It isn't the road we've come by, so we've got a choice of three. Any one of them might lead to Wheatmayne."

"Any one!" agreed Potter.

"But we can't take more than one," said Coker.

"Did you work that out in your head, Coker?"

"If you're going to be funny, George Potter——" roared Coker.

Potter sighed.

"I don't feel very funny. I'm tired, and I'm hungry. You keep on telling us you're leader of this caravanning party, Coker. Well, lead us somewhere."

"If you think I'm going to plunge into the wrong road, Potter, and get to somewhere we're not aiming at, you're making a mistake."

"Let's have a rest here, then."

"We can't hang about here all night, Potter!"

"Oh, dear! Then we can't keep on, and we can't stand still? What's the third course?" inquired Potter.

Coker breathed hard.

"If a fellow hadn't two silly asses to look after!" he said. "Two helpless duffers, who don't even know the road to take."

"Three, if you come to that," said Greene. "You don't know the road any more than we do, Coker."

"I've told you already that you talk too much, Greene. I hope it won't come to punching between us," said Coker darkly. "I hope it won't; but I'm beginning to think that it will."

"Look here," roared Greene. "What are we going to do?"

"I've got to think that out. I have to do all the thinking for this outfit."

"Think, then, and get it over."

"How's a fellow to think with two silly asses chattering like a pair of magpies?" said Coker. "The only thing we can do now is to ask our way."

"Of whom?" inquired Potter politely. "It's about one in the morning, and there doesn't seem a building in sight."

"I say, you fellows——"

The three Fifth-Formers jumped. That remark was the first hint they had of Bunter's presence.

"What——"

"Who——"

Billy Bunter rolled out from the shadow of the high hedge. He blinked at Coker & Co. He was glad to see them. A bunk in the caravan was not, perhaps, so comfortable as a bed in a farmhouse; but it was a case of any port in a storm with Bunter. And in Coker's caravan it was certain that there would be good supplies. So Bunter blinked and grinned genially at the Fifth-Formers of Greyfriars, very glad to see them.

"I say, you fellows! It's me, you know—Bunter of the Remove! Jolly glad to see you chaps!" said Bunter heartily. "Happy meeting, what?"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
In Luck's Way!

COKER of the Fifth stared at Bunter.

Bunter had declared that it was a happy meeting; but Coker's expression did not indicate that he derived any great happiness from it.

"You!" said Coker, with a grunt.

"Little me," said Bunter amicably "You're Bunter, are you?"

Bunter stared.

"Eh? You know me, I suppose, Coker?"

"Do you think I remember all the fags in the Lower School at Greyfriars?" demanded Coker contemptuously. "Still, I seem to remember you—you're too fat to be forgotten."

"Oh, really, Coker——"

"What do you mean by butting in?"

"Eh?"

"Do you think that, because we're on vacation now, you can put on airs of familiarity with Fifth-form chaps?" nquired Coker.

"I—I say——"

"Like your cheek to speak to us! Get out of it!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The bunk in the caravan, and the supper with Coker & Co., seemed to fade out of the picture now. Bunter had forgotten, momentarily, how very "Fifth-Formy" Coker of the Fifth was. Evidently he was as "Fifth-Formy" in vacation as during the term at Greyfriars, if not a little more so.

Coker waved a large hand disdainfully.

"Clear!" he snapped.

"Hold on!" said Potter. "What's the kid doing here at this time of night?"

"What on earth does that matter?" snapped Coker impatiently. "I'm not interested in Remove fags, Potter."

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"But hold on, Coker, he may know the road to Wheatmayne, as he's hanging about here," said Potter.

"Oh!" said Coker. That very obvious consideration had not yet occurred to Horace Coker's mighty brain. But he condescended to take note of it, and turned to Bunter again. "Bunter, do you know which of these roads leads to a village called Wheatmayne?"

Bunter did not answer.

As a matter of fact, the cross-roads presented to him a mystery as deep as they presented to Coker & Co. But he was not in a hurry to say as much.

"Deaf?" roared Coker angrily.

"Oh, give the kid a chance!" exclaimed Potter impatiently. "What's the good of bullying now?"

"Bullying?" bawled Coker. "Did you say bullying, Potter?"

"Yes, I jolly well did. Leave him alone, and let me ask him—— Here, I say! My hat! Hands off, you ass!"

Coker seemed to have lost his temper. The imputation of bullying had roused his ire. He came at George Potter with his hands up and his eyes gleaming, and Potter beat a hasty retreat round the caravan.

"Coker, old man——" implored Greene.

"Shut up, Greene!"

Coker came back to Bunter, Potter keeping out of reach.

"Now, look here, Bunter," he said, "I want to know the way to Wheatmayne. I've no doubt you know it—a sneaking fag hanging about the place! Which is the road?"

"One good turn deserves another," said Bunter, blinking at him.

"What? What do you mean, you fat idiot?"

"I haven't had any supper."

"That doesn't matter, you ass!"

"It jolly well does matter!" said Bunter warmly.

"Bother your silly supper!" roared Coker. "I'm not bothering about your supper! I want to know the road!"

"I haven't had my supper, and I want a lift," said Bunter. "I'll guide you, if you like. Give me a lift in the van, and supper, and I'll take you straight there. Is it a go?" He blinked inquiringly at Horace Coker, and then uttered a fiendish yell as the Fifth-Former smote: "Yaroooh!"

Bump!

Bunter sat down in the lane. Horace Coker glared at him.

"That's for your cheek!" he said hotly. "If you want any more, get up and have it! I'm waiting!"

Coker waited; but Billy Bunter did not get up. It appeared that he did not want any more. Indeed, one of Horace Coker's hefty swipes was quite enough for any ordinary fellow.

"I say, dash it all!" exclaimed Greene. "If the kid can guide us, it will pay us to give him a lift, Coker, and you needn't be mean about the supper."

"Are you calling me mean, Greeney?"

"Nunno; but——"

Greene backed away. There were times when even his faithful chums found Coker of the Fifth dangerous at close quarters. And undoubtedly losing the way and failing to find it again that night had had a deteriorating effect on Coker's temper.

"I've cuffed that fag," said Coker, "for his cheek! I won't have a Lower Fourth fag making terms with me. Do you hear, Bunter?"

"Ow! Yes! Wow!"

"Now you can get into the van, and I'll give you a lift," said Coker. "You'll find plenty of grub inside, and you can feed. But, mind, no more cheek! I never stand cheek from fags!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter.

He scrambled up and edged away from Coker. Apparently the great man of the Greyfriars Fifth intended to be hospitable. But he was displaying hospitality in his own inimitable manner. Horace Coker's ways were not as the ways of common mortals.

"Hop in!" snapped Coker.

Bunter clambered into the van.

"Now, which road?"

Bunter pointed with a fat finger, and a gleam behind his spectacles. Which road led to Wheatmayne Bunter neither knew nor cared; he had never even heard of the place before. But he knew that he wanted to travel westward; and he was glad of a lift in Coker's caravan on his way. One of the cross-roads led west, as near as Bunter could judge; it was, at all events, a continuation of the road he had been following when he sat down to rest. So it was to that road that Bunter pointed.

"Right on!" he said.

"Any turns?" asked Coker.

"No; right on."

"How far?"

"About ten miles," said Bunter recklessly.

"Ten!" roared Coker.

"I—I mean five!" said Bunter hastily.

"You fat idiot! You mean you don't know how far it is!" growled Coker.

"Oh, really, Coker——"

"Shut up!"

Horace Coker took the horse's head, and led him onward. Potter and Greene trailed behind the van, and they talked in suppressed tones as they trailed. They were caravanning with Coker that vac, and there must have been some idea of enjoying the trip when they started. Coker, perhaps, had a wearing effect on his fellow-caravanners. At all events, to judge by the remarks Potter and Greene made to one another in subdued tones, as they trailed after the van, there was danger of Horace Coker being found lynched by the roadside by some later traveller.

There was one member of the party, however, who was very comfortable. Billy Bunter was at the caravan larder.

Quite a good supply of food was found there—the supper, in fact, that Coker & Co. intended to enjoy when they camped, at long last, on Wheatmayne Common. Coker had given Bunter leave to feed, perhaps having forgotten the fat junior's amazing powers in that line. Bunter fed.

By the time he had finished, there was not much left for Coker & Co.'s supper at Wheatmayne—if ever they reached Wheatmayne.

Then Billy Bunter rolled into a bunk and closed his eyes in balmy slumber, as the van rolled and jogged onward. It had been, after all, a happy meeting—for Bunter. Whether his happiness was likely to last after Coker discovered that he was on the wrong road, was another question. Fortunately, Coker had not discovered that yet.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter in Possession!

"BUNTER, you fat rotter!"

Snore!

Coker's dulcet tones did not awaken Billy Bunter.

Bunter was tired, and Bunter was fully-fed—two reasons why he failed to be brought back easily from the embrace of Morpheus.

His deep, resonant snore echoed through the caravan, and was the only reply that Horace Coker received as he glared in at the door.

The van had halted. Five miles and more had been covered, and the caravanners had no view of the village they sought. Again and again Potter and Greene had implored Coker to halt and camp—somewhere, anywhere. Their weary legs bent under them. Coker was obdurate. Coker had arranged to camp on Wheatmayne Common; he had booked beds for the night, in advance, at the Golden Sheaf at Wheatmayne.

Coker's arrangements were like unto the laws of the Medes and Persians. They were not to be changed for any consideration whatsoever. If anything went wrong—as things often did when Coker made the arrangements—Coker only became all the more determined. Had Potter and Greene been judiciously silent, Coker himself might, perhaps, have thought of camping. But he was above listening to suggestions. They seemed to imply criticism of his arrangements. Coker was not to be criticised with impunity.

So the tired caravanners tramped on, Potter and Greene getting a lift occasionally behind the van. But the horse was tired, too, and the road was hilly. Bunter's additional weight in the van was enough for the horse.

Whenever Coker spotted his followers hanging on he shouted to them to hop off. He called them slackers, and loafers, and loungers, and duds, and helpless duffers; and Potter and Greene were too tired and dispirited to tell Coker what they thought of him.

Now the van had halted, much to the relief of Potter and Greene. Coker was shouting in at Bunter, and the Owl of the Remove answered with a deep, contented snore.

"Bunter, you snoring, snorting fat porpoise!" roared Coker.

Snore!

"Look here, turn the fat brute out!" said Potter. "Why should we walk while that podgy fag takes it easy?"

"I told him I'd give him a lift for showing me the way!" snorted Coker. "I'm a fellow of my word!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Did you say rats to me, George Potter?" demanded Coker, turning round truculently on the step of the van.

"Yes, I did!" howled Potter. "And I've a jolly good mind to mop you off that step, Coker, and pitch you into the ditch!"

"Hear, hear!" said Greene ferociously.

"By Jove! I'll——"

Snore! came from the van. Coker restrained his righteous wrath, and turned into the caravan again.

"Bunter!" he bawled.

He plunged into the shadowy interior of the van, groped in the bunk, and got hold of Bunter's ears.

Bang!

William George Bunter came back to wakefulness with suddenness and a shock as his head smote the side of the caravan.

"Yaroooh!"

"Wake up, you fat rotter!"

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!"

"We've done five miles!" hooted Coker. "We haven't come to Wheatmayne. Have you been pulling my leg, Bunter?"

"Ow! Yes! I mean no!" gasped Bunter.

"Well, if you've brought me on the wrong road," said Coker, "I'm going to make an example of you! I'll give you such a hiding that you won't be able to crawl—see?—and then I'll put you in a ditch! I don't allow fags to pull my leg, Bunter!"

"I—I say——" gasped Bunter.

"Where's that dashed village?" demanded Coker. "I've got rooms booked at the inn, and now we shall have to knock the people up out of their beds. But it's not in sight. Where is it? We've done five miles."

"Do another five!" gasped Bunter.

"What?"

"I—I mean——"

"Get out and walk," said Coker. "I'll jolly well keep touching you up with the whip till you find the way—see?"

"Oh, crikey!"

"That's a good idea for once," said Potter. "My belief is that the fat idiot doesn't know the way, and he's taken us in just to get a lift."

"Looks like it!" agreed Greene.

Horace Coker breathed sulphurously.

"If that's the case, there won't be much left of Bunter when I'm done with him!" he said.

Bunter blinked at the irate Fifth-Former of Greyfriars. Coker's programme did not recommend itself to Bunter at all.

"I—I say, you fellows, we're just on the place!" gasped Bunter. He blinked from the little window of the caravan into the moonlight. "I know this country well—perfectly well; in fact, I was brought up here. I—I used to play round these lanes when I was a little nipper. Five minutes more, and you'll see the—the village spire."

Coker blinked at him with sour suspicion.

"Well, I'll give you a chance," he said. "We'll keep on five minutes longer, and if we ain't at Wheatmayne then, look out, Bunter; you're going to have the time of your life! I'm not carrying a fat porpoise five miles in my van for nothing!"

"Oh, really, Coker——"

"Shut up!"

Coker jumped out of the van again.

"Keep on!" he said. "Five minutes more or less won't make any difference."

"Won't it?" groaned Potter. "My blinking legs are nearly dropping off as it is!"

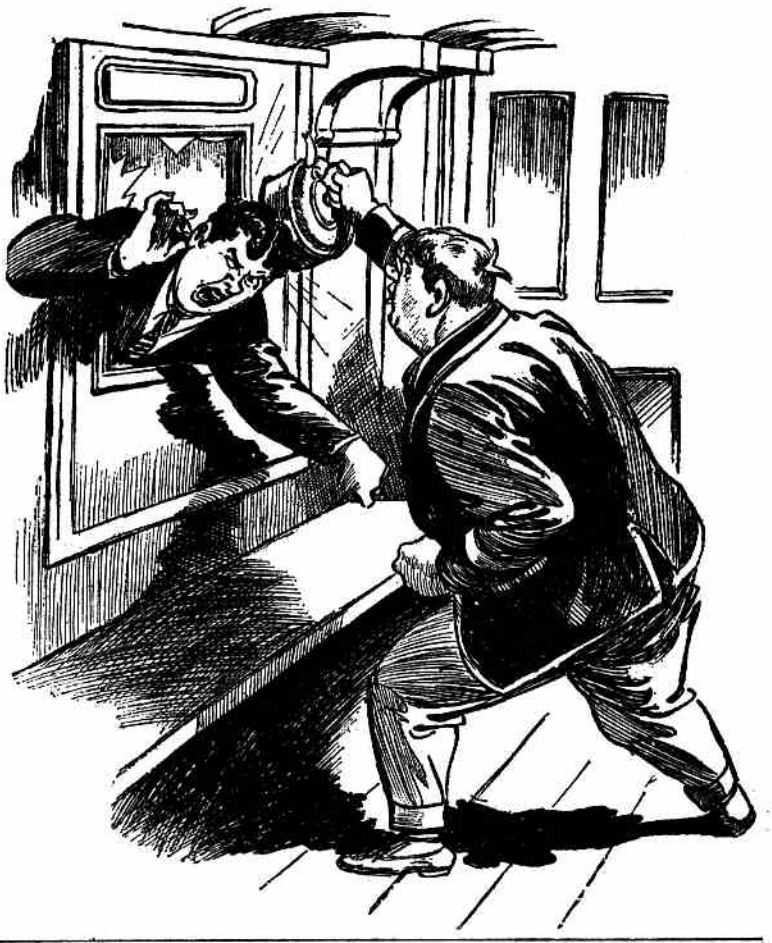
"Bother your legs!"

"I'm fagged out!" groaned Greene.

"Do you expect to go caravanning without getting tired?" asked Coker, with scornful sarcasm. "Why didn't you bring a Kiddy Car or a fairy-bike?"

Coker tramped to the horse's head again and led the quadruped onward, leaving his comrades with feelings too deep for words, even if they had had any breath left for words.

Bunter sat on the bunk



The furious face of Coker was only a couple of feet from Bunter when the Owl of the Remove picked up the caravan kettle. Crash! It was a tin kettle, not meant for such rough usage, and it was very dinted after colliding with Coker's head. Coker's head might have been dinted, too, judging by the terrific yell that echoed through the caravan. "Whoooop!" (*See Chapter* 9.)

He was still sleepy, but he did not think of sleep again. He had only a few minutes at his disposal. In a few minutes Coker would discover that the Owl of the Remove had been pulling his leg; that the fat junior had only been gaining time. True, Wheatmayne might be only five minutes off—but it might be five days off for all Bunter knew to the contrary. Not having the faintest idea where the place was, he really could not form an opinion on that point. Bunter had to act now—and to act quickly.

His idea had been to drop out behind the van and bolt through the hedges once Coker had gone back to the horse's head.

That idea he had to banish as he blinked out at the door and saw the dusty, perspiring, infuriated faces of Potter and Greene behind the van. He did not need telling that they would have collared him promptly had he tried to bolt.

Bunter drew back, his fat heart palpitating.

Something simply had to be done! He would rather have been at the tender mercies of Mr. Pilkins and Walsingham than at Coker's when Coker discovered that he had been made a fool of. Coker had a heavy hand, and Bunter had felt the weight of it already; he had a heavy boot, which Bunter was not in the least anxious to feel the weight of.

And the minutes were passing; slowly enough to the Fifth Form caravanners, but with alarming swiftness to William George Bunter.

The caravan halted.

"Time's up!" he heard Coker say.

"Can't see the place!" growled Potter.

"No sign of it. We seem to be in a giddy wilderness of fields. That idiot Bunter didn't know the way any more than we did!" groaned Greene.

Coker's heavy tramp came round to the back of the van.

Bunter panted.

There was no escape. A few seconds more, and Horace Coker's heavy grasp would have been upon him. In such an emergency Bunter's fat brain worked quickly. He shut the door of the caravan with a slam. There was a key in the lock, and Bunter turned the key.

Click!

The next moment Coker was dragging at the door.

"My hat! He's locked the door!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter.

"Bunter, open that door at once!"

No answer.

"You fat villain!" roared Coker. "Have you got the cheek to lock me

(*Continued on page* 16.)

THE GREYFRIARS HERALD

Supplement No. 237. HARRY WHARTON EDITOR Week Ending August 29th, 1925.

Brighter Lessons!

Revels & Ructions in the Remove Form-room

— IMAGINED BY TOM BROWN —

GOOD-MORNING, my boys!"

Mr. Quelch stepped briskly into the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars, and the juniors cheerfully returned his salutation.

The Form master was not dressed in his robes of office. Instead of the sombre gown and the sober mortar-board, he wore a white sweater, khaki shorts, and a pair of gym shoes. His calves were bare.

Mr. Quelch fairly beamed upon the class.

"Now, my boys," he said gaily, "we will proceed with the first lesson. It is the leap-frog lesson. Have you done your preparation, Bunter?"

"Yessir!" answered Billy Bunter. "I was leap-frogging the whole of last evening—wasn't I, Toddy?"

Peter Todd verified Bunter's statement.

"That is well," said Mr. Quelch. "Hitherto, Bunter, you have been rather backward at leap-frog. Unless you show great improvement, I shall be compelled to give your father an unsatisfactory report at the end of the term!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Mr. Quelch then stooped down, touching his toes.

"Come, boys!" he exclaimed. "Over the top, and the best of luck!"

The juniors sprang out of their seats, and embarked on "first lesson" with great zest. Harry Wharton took a flying leap over the Form master's back, and the others followed in turn.

Billy Bunter came last. He stumbled forward a yard or two; then he hesitated.

"Be quick, Bunter!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I am getting severe backache waiting for you to take your turn."

"Ahem!" stammered Bunter. "W-w-would you mind stooping a bit lower, sir? You seem as high as a blessed mountain!"

Mr. Quelch obligingly stooped lower, and Billy Bunter, running up, made a desperate leap.

But instead of clearing the human obstacle, he landed heavily on the top of it.

Not being a champion weight-lifter, Mr. Quelch was quite unable to support the fourteen stone which had descended upon him. His knees gave way, and he collapsed in a heap on the floor of the Form-room, with Billy Bunter atop of him.

"Yaroooop!"

A fiendish yell rang out from Mr. Quelch. One of Bunter's fat knees was pressing into the nape of his neck, and the Form master's chin, in consequence, was being flattened against the floor-boards.

Harry Wharton & Co. rushed, grinning, to the rescue. They dragged Bunter off, and Mr. Quelch tottered to his feet. He bestowed the glare of a basilisk upon the fat junior.

"Bunter!" he roared. "You blundering, awkward boy! You have not progressed at all with your leap-frog! You have, in fact, retrogressed. I shall award you a severe imposition. You will take a hundred leap-frogs after lessons!"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bunter.

The leap-frog lesson terminated rather suddenly. Apparently Mr. Quelch had had enough!

"Second lesson will now commence," announced the Remove master. "Wharton, kindly fetch the propel-halfpenny board and place it on my desk."

"Do you mean the shove-ha'penny board, sir?" asked Wharton.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Do not indulge in coarse vulgarisms, Wharton! Fetch the propel-halfpenny board at once!"

"Very well, sir!"

The board was produced from the cupboard and placed in position on the desk. There was a number of coins, and the board was divided into sections, or "beds." The game—or lesson—consisted of propelling the coins with the palm of the hand and endeavouring to get them into the beds.

Mr. Quelch, whose skill at "shove-ha'penny" was amazing, gave his pupils an illustration of how it was done. Then he called upon them in turn to give an exhibition. Harry Wharton came last.

"Ah, I am pleased to note a distinct improvement in your work, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch, as the captain of the Remove made a number of excellent "shoves." "There is still room for improvement, however. You have rather too powerful a push. Always fill the beds nearest to you before you proceed to fill the others. That will do. We will now proceed with the cricket lesson."

Lord Mauleverer groaned dismally. Form-room cricket was far too strenuous for his liking. The rest of the pupils, however, fairly revelled in it.

The game was played with baby bats, and tiny wickets were pitched at each end of a long form. The ball was of solid rubber.

"Remove your coats!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "Wharton and Vernon-Smith will pick sides, and I will officiate as umpire."

Wharton and Smithy selected their teams, and Mr. Quelch made a sign for the "lesson" to proceed.

"I shall expect to see a considerable all-round improvement, in batting, bowling, and fielding," said the Remove master. "Any boy who fails to score, through carelessness or stupidity, will be caned! On the other hand, any boy who makes a century will be excused from lessons this afternoon."

The match started in great style, Vernon-Smith bowling to Wharton. The captain of the Remove laid about him with great vigour. There was rather too much vigour, in fact, for Mr. Quelch, standing right in the line of fire, stopped a red-hot drive with his chin. That was the second time his chin had been in the wars that morning.

"Yow-owp!" yelled the unhappy Form master, leaping clear of the floor.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Wharton. "Quite an accident, I assure you!"

Mr. Quelch glared at the batsman, and retreated to a safe corner of the room.

Harry Wharton continued to go great guns. He kept the fieldsmen on the run, and they were continually hopping over desks, or crawling underneath them, in quest of the ball. At length Wharton reached his century, and there was a storm of applause.

"Excellent, my boy!" said Mr. Quelch. "I wish those who sneer at our modern system of education could have seen your innings! You are excused lessons this afternoon."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Bunter will now bat," said Mr. Quelch. And there was a chuckle from the class.

The Owl of the Remove, with his sleeves rolled up, and a grim expression on his face, took his stand at the wicket.

"I should advise you to stand well back, sir," he said to Mr. Quelch, who had emerged from his corner. "I'm in a slogging mood this morning, and I don't want to maim anybody!"

"Silence, you ridiculous boy! I shall be surprised to see you make a dozen!"

Bunter's schoolfellows would have been surprised also, and so would Bunter himself. In previous cricket lessons he had proved a dreadful dunce, and it was highly improbable that he

(*Continued on next page.*)

MY LIVELY ADVENTURES!

BY THE FORM-ROOM MOUSE.

I SCUTTLED along to the Remove Form-room in order to escape the attentions of Felicia, the kitchen cat. Felicia ought to have no use for mice, for she lives on the fat of the land, and enjoys a dainty and extensive diet. But some cats are never satisfied. They will eat a four-course dinner, consisting of cats' meat, sardines, milk, and scraps, and then, not satisfied with this tremendous orgy they must needs go mice-hunting. Truly, a mouse's lot, like a policeman's, is not a happy one!

Well, as I was saying, I scuttled along to the Remove Form-room, with Felicia in hot pursuit. The door was closed, but there was a chink underneath through which I squeezed myself, just in time to escape a vicious paw-thrust.

The Remove were at lessons when I entered. Forty heads were bent over forty books, and nobody noticed my arrival. I crept quietly into the cupboard in the corner and found a comfortable refuge underneath a map of Australia. And there I lay, my heart palpitating a little after that exciting chase.

I was just nodding off to sleep when I heard the deep voice of Mr. Quelch exclaim:

"Wharton! Kindly fetch the map of Australia from the cupboard!"

Heavy human footsteps approached. I cowered in my hiding-place, too panic-stricken to move. Then the door of the cupboard was thrown open without ceremony, and a hand seized the map of Australia and dragged it forth.

"My hat!" muttered Wharton. "There's a mouse under this map!"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. "These small rodent quadrupeds are becoming quite a nuisance! They have infested the Form-room for weeks past. I shall have to ask Mrs. Kebble to lend me the kitchen cat, in order that the pests may be exterminated!"

I fairly shook—not in my shoes, for mice don't wear them. But I trembled from head to tail, as if with the ague.

Wharton stooped down, and made a grab at me; and then I recovered the power of action. I was out of that cupboard in a flash, and I darted across the Form-room floor in terror. Bolsover major lunged at me with his boot, and I only just escaped a fearful fate. Skinner hurled an inkpot at me, but fortunately his aim was erratic, and the inkpot alighted on Mr. Quelch's pet corn. How he danced and yelled! I was compelled to grin, in spite of my terror.

Penfold poked at me with an ebony ruler, and I grew desperate. Billy Bunter's nether extremities were close at hand. I promptly darted up his trouser-leg.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "The beastly mouse has gone up my leg! I shall be stung!"

"Nonsense, you stupid boy!" said Mr. Quelch, who had now concluded his song and dance. "Mice do not sting."

"I shall be nipped!" wailed Bunter. "The beastly pest will take a lump out of my calf!"

"Shake your trouser-leg, fathead!" muttered Peter Todd.

Bunter did so, and out I plopped on to the floor.

"Wharton!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "Pray go and fetch the kitchen cat. We will put an end to these antics!"

But I didn't wait for the arrival of Felicia. I noticed that one of the windows was open, and I was up the wall and on to the sill in a twinkling. Then I fairly leapt through the aperture and scuttled away across the Close.

That fiend of a Felicia ransacked the Remove Form-room in vain!

EDITORIAL!

THERE are lots of fellows who wouldn't mind being educated at Greyfriars—if there was no education on the school programme! That sounds Irish, I know; but you can see what I mean. Lessons are the dullest part of our daily routine, and if only they were abolished life at Greyfriars would be one grand sweet song.

Some fellows imagine—judging by certain letters I have received on the subject—that we have a jolly soft time of it here. They read of us playing exciting cricket matches, having study celebrations and midnight feasts, indulging in jolly japes and ripping rags, and no doubt it makes a very pleasant picture of public school life. But there is another and darker side to that picture. There is a place at Greyfriars called the Remove Form-room. There is a master at Greyfriars called Mr. Horace Henry Samuel Quelch, M.A. Neither the Form-room nor the Form master are here as ornaments. Each fulfils a special function. The former we are taught in, the latter we are taught by. Read for yourselves and see.

HARRY WHARTON.

BRIGHTER LESSONS!

Continued from previous page.

would suddenly reproduce wonderful form.

As a matter of fact, Bunter was beaten by the very first ball sent down. He swiped at it ferociously, and gave Peter Todd, who was fielding at "silly-point," a fearful crack on the jaw. The stumps, which had been affixed to the end of the form, went whizzing into space.

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

"Well bowled, Smithy!"

Mr. Quelch stepped up to his desk and beckoned to Bunter.

"I will not tolerate these repeated ducks' eggs in the Form-room, Bunter!" he exclaimed sternly. "Hold out your hand!"

"Oh, crumbs!" faltered Bunter, "I—I mean to knock up a century to-morrow, sir!"

Mr. Quelch looked grim.

"Never put off till to-morrow what should be done to-day," he said. "You have failed ingloriously, as usual, and I shall cane you severely!"

For the next few moments sounds of wild anguish could be heard.

"The class will now dismiss!" said Mr. Quelch, when the caning was over. "Mind you come punctually into the Form-room at two-thirty for the dancing lesson. I shall expect to see a marked improvement in your waltzing."

Gleefully—with the exception of Billy Bunter—the Remove waltzed out of the Form-room!

THE END.

ON THE WARPATH!

By DICK PENFOLD.

OLD Quelchy came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his optics were gleaming—in frenzy they rolled;
And the frown on his face was most fearsome to see
As he glowered at Bunter and Bulstrode and me!

Then just as a cyclone goes tearing through space,
Old Quelchy indulged in a furious chase;
From pupil to pupil he charged and he cuffed,
And he breathlessly cried, as he panted and puffed:

"This Form is unruly, and stupid, and dense!
The ignorance you have displayed is immense!
Your spelling is faulty, your writing is worse—
To Virgil and Ovid you all seem averse!

"Geography, history, Latin, and Greek,
We have taken in turn, every day of the week;
But Linley alone has made progress with these—
The rest of you think you can do as you please!"

And there stood old Bunter, he cried and he sighed,
For the Form master's pointer had tanned his fat hide;
And the sound of his moaning and groaning was heard
By Prout and the Fifth, and by Twigg and the Third!

And there stood old Bulstrode, distorted and pale,
And he quivered with many a quake and a quail:
While Linley, the scholar, sat silent alone—
From the rest of the class came a dolorous moan.

And the pupils of Quelchy are loud in their wail,
And they're bending and twisting like trees in a gale;
For the stroke of the pointer brings anguish and pain,
And they groan, "The old beast's on the warpath again!"

(*Continued from page* 13.)

out of my own caravan? My hat! I—I'll smash you!"

Bunter sat on the bunk and gasped. He had no doubt that the smashing would happen if Coker got within smashing distance. But Coker had to smash the caravan first. Bunter hoped that that was a task beyond Coker's powers.

"I'll pulverise you!" roared Coker. "I'll squash you into little pieces! I—I—I'll——"

"Oh dear!"

"Come out, Bunter! I'm going to break every bone in your fat carcase!"

The prospect did not seem to tempt Bunter. He did not come out.

"Well, my hat!" said Potter. "You've done it now, Coker!"

"Who's done it?" yelled Coker.

"You have, you ass! I'm stopping here!" And Potter sat down by the roadside, on a grassy bank, and Greene followed his example.

Horace Coker did not sit down. He prowled round the caravan, he banged at the door, he yelled at the window. Bunter, quaking inside, felt like a hapless Hindoo crouching in his hut, with a tiger prowling round outside seeking entrance. Only Coker was really worse than a tiger.

Fortuately, the tiger could not find entrance.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Coker!

"WELL, this is a go!"

"Isn't it?"

"Just like Coker!"

"Oh, just!"

Potter and Greene agreed that it was just like Coker. There was always one thing that Coker of the Fifth could be relied upon to do, and that was the wrong thing at the wrong moment.

There was no further question of seeking Wheatmayne, wherever it was—probably many a long mile away. It was fairly clear that Bunter did not know where the place was, any more than the caravanners did. Coker & Co. had come to a halt; even Coker was tired, and looking for the elusive village seemed like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Without any further argument on the subject, the Greyfriars Fifth-Formers decided to camp; but they were camping under difficulties that would not have existed but for Coker. They were hungry, and their supper was locked up in the caravan with Bunter. Had they only known it, the matter was even worse than that; the supper was not only inside the caravan, it was inside Bunter. Blankets and rugs and pillows were in the caravan. These, of course, were not, like the supper, inside Bunter; but they were as much out of the caravanners' reach as if they had been.

It was just like Coker to bring about this state of affairs; and Potter and Greene told him so, at great length, and with considerable eloquence. Sitting down, they had more breath to expend, and they expended it all on Coker.

Coker hardly heeded them. He had no time then to thrash Potter and Greene; perhaps, too, it dawned upon him that his comrades were in a mood to turn upon him and handle him severely. Their patience was worn out. Fortunately, they were nearly worn out, too; so they contented themselves with slanging Coker; while Coker gave his attention to the locked caravan.

Crash! Smash!

The window went. Billy Bunter gave a convulsive jump as fragments of glass scattered about the interior of the van, accompanied by a huge stone with which Coker, in desperation, had smashed in the window.

"Oh, c-crumbs!" stuttered Bunter.

Coker's head was put in at the window.

The window was much too small to admit the bulky person of Coker, or undoubtedly he would have plunged recklessly in, heedless of broken glass. But he got his head in, to stare at Bunter.

"You fat villain!" he roared.

Bunter backed away from Coker's head, as if it had been head of the fabled Gorgon. His little round eyes almost started through his spectacles with terror.

"Oh dear! I—I say, Coker——"

"Unlock that door at once!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove realised that Coker could not get in at the window. His courage revived.

"Sha'n't!" he retorted.

"What?" roared Coker.

"Go and chop chips!" said Bunter undauntedly.

Out of the reach of an enemy Bunter was as brave as a lion.

Coker almost choked.

"You—you—you—— This is my van! Let me in! You've dared to lock me out of my van! I'd smash in the door if I had anything to smash it in with! Open it at once!"

"Rats!"

"By gum! I—I'll get through this window, somehow!" gasped Coker. "I—I'll spifficate you! I'll—I'll—— Here! Potter! Greene! Come and give me a bunk-up!"

"Go and eat coke!" called back Potter. "I'm not going to move. I'm tired. Besides, you can't get through the window."

"Greene, you're a rather skinny, weedy sort of chap," said Coker. "You get in and I'll bunk you."

"Fathead!"

"Come and bunk me, then."

"Rats!"

"Do you two fellows want me to begin on you?" roared Coker.

"Go and eat coke!"

Coker glared at his mutinous followers. They glared back at him. Once more the great Horace restrained his wrath. After Bunter was dealt with, he could deal with these cheeky mutineers. Bunter came first—Coker was simply yearning to get his hands on Bunter. He dragged the steps round from the back of the caravan, slammed them under the window, and mounted. He was going to make a desperate attempt to force his way through the little window into the van. If he succeeded there was no doubt that Billy Bunter was booked for the time of his life. What Mr. Pilkins would have done to him at Combermere was a jest to what Coker was going to do to him.

Bunter realised that.

He knew what would happen if Coker got in. Head and shoulders came shoving through; the furious face of Coker was only a couple of feet from Bunter when the Owl of the Remove picked up the caravan kettle.

Crash!

It was a tin kettle, not meant for such rough usage. It was very dinted after colliding with Coker's head.

Coker's head might have been dinted, too, judging by the terrific yell that echoed through the caravan.

"Whoooooop!"

Crash!

The kettle landed again.

As a kettle, it was not of much further use. But, as a war-club, it seemed to be serving a useful purpose. Bunter, warming to the work, as it were, smote again and yet again.

Coker was a sticker, and his head was hard. But there was a limit, even to Coker's powers as a sticker, and to the hardness of his head. He shoved back and dropped from the window, stumbled over the steps, and rolled in the road, roaring.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter and Greene.

They had suffered much from Coker, and that burly youth's disaster did not evoke their sympathy. They seemed to think it funny.

Coker sat up and clasped his head with both hands.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow! Wow! Oh! Oh crumbs! Ow!"

Bunter blinked from the window and grinned. He was master of the situation—for the present at least.

"I say, Coker——"

"Yow-ow-ow!" moaned Coker, rubbing his damaged head in deep anguish. "Oh! Ow! Mmmmmooh!"

"I say, old chap, don't play the goat you know," said Bunter. "I'll tell you what! Make it pax——"

Coker staggered up. He made a rush at the window, and Bunter popped his head back just in time. Coker of the Fifth did not seem in a humour for making it "pax."

Coker tramped across to Potter and Greene, who grinned at him. He was still clasping his head, where it had dinted the kettle. The grinning of Potter and Greene passed unheeded; Coker was in no state of battle.

"That young villain won't let us into the van!" he gasped. "I'll make him squirm for it! We're going on."

"Are we?" snapped Potter.

"Yes, you ass! We can't camp here without any supper, or any blankets or things!" snorted Coker. "Have a little sense!"

"I'm not going on," answered Potter, settling back comfortably into the grass. "I feel as if I'd done about a hundred miles to-day. You can go on if you like, and be blowed to you!"

"We may get a lift in a cart at daylight," said Greene hopefully. "It's not jolly far off now."

"And what about the van?" howled Coker.

"Oh, blow the van!"

"Do you think I'm going to get a lift in a cart and leave the van, you howling ass?"

"Carry it away under your arm, if you like," said Potter. "I'm fed-up with it, and you, too, Coker."

"Hear, hear!" concurred Greene.

Coker breathed hard.

"I'm going on," he said. "If I can't find Wheatmayne, I'll find some other dashed place! You fellows can go and eat coke!"

"Rats!"

Coker stamped away to the horse's head, and led the weary beast onward, leaving Potter and Greene at rest by the wayside. Billy Bunter started, as the caravan rumbled on. He blinked from the window as Potter and Greene disappeared behind.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bunter, in dismay.

Coker marched on, leading the horse. The next step, doubtless, was to be in some inn yard, where the door of the caravan could be forced open. That, at least, was Coker's intention, as Bunter guessed, and it was a dismaying prospect to the Owl of the Remove. He thought of unlocking the door suddenly and slipping from the van, but it was borne in only too clearly upon his fat mind that Coker had his eyes open, and that he would be collared before he had taken half a dozen steps.

And then——

Bunter did not like to think of what would happen then.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured.

He almost wished himself back at Combermere, Mr. Pilkins and all. Even the Combermere policeman's hand on his shoulder would have been preferable to Horace Coker's.

The caravan rumbled on slowly.

Again it halted.

Bunter blinked from the window. It was not a village yet; there was no sign of a building, save a red chimney that showed in the distance across the fields in the waning moonlight. Coker's voice was heard in strenuous adjuration to the caravan horse.

"Gee up! Get on, you brute! You shambling beast, get a move on! I'll jolly well whack you! Oh, you rotten apology for a scarecrow! Gee up!"

But the horse declined to "gee."

Before him lay a rising hill, extending as far as the eye could reach in the moonlight; and the caravan horse, who had had a tiring day, very naturally jibbed at it. He did not intend to negotiate that hill, and he made Coker understand that that was so.

For full five minutes Coker's eloquence was unchecked. Then he desisted from sheer want of breath. The horse stood motionless and stolid, unmoved by eloquence. The eloquence of Demosthenes would not have induced him to start up that hill.

Coker gave it up at last. He came savagely to the caravan window.

"Bunter, you fat scoundrel!"

"Yah!"

"I'm stopping here," said Coker. "The horse can't pull your podgy carcase any farther. Will you get out of that van?"

"Will you make it pax?"

"I'll smash you!"

"Yah!"

"Right-ho!" said Coker. "Stick it out! I'm going to camp here, and get on in the morning. Wait till I get my hands on you, Bunter! You won't think life is worth living when I've done with you—if there's any life left in you by that time, which I doubt."

And with that awful threat, Horace Coker drew the van to the roadside, tethered the horse, and sat down.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Bunter Hunters!

"POOR old Pilkins!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned. The train was moving out of Combermere Station with the Famous Five, when they sighted the estate agent and his man, Parker. Mr. Pilkins, in his series of disasters and misfortunes, deserved sympathy, but really there was a comic side to the matter.

Mr. Pilkins, evidently under the impression that the unspeakable "bilk" Bunter might be escaping by that train, was prowling along the platform with watchful eyes. His clerk, Parker, was prowling along also, with equally watchful eyes.

Mr. Pilkins, indeed, looked like a lion seeking what he might devour.

He had a big knobby stick under his arm, which indicated that matters would be very unpleasant for Bunter, if found.

He stared gloomily at the five merry faces looking from a carriage as the train moved out.

Harry Wharton & Co. had kept their own counsel with regard to the information they had received from D'Arcy. They were sorry for Mr. Pilkins, they sympathised with Walsingham, but they did not mean to set the enemy on the trail of Bunter. Now that the crash had come at Bunter Court,

matters had to be adjusted somehow; but not by the method of "running in" the Owl of the Remove. Something had to be done, but not that, if the chums of the Remove could help it.

Mr. Pilkins' portly form and the shiny face of Parker disappeared from view as the train ran out of the station. No doubt Mr. Pilkins continued on the prowl, hunting Bunter, blissfully unconscious of the rather important fact that long, long ago the Owl of the Remove had cleared far out of the neighbourhood.

Harry Wharton & Co. arrived at Canterbury in good spirits.

The chums of the Remove had no objection to spending a few days of the vacation knocking about the country, looking for the elusive Owl. Now that their stay at Bunter Court was over, this was quite an entertaining way of putting in a part of their holiday. So they did not mind very much if Bunter dodged them for a few days, or even a week or two. It was, as Bob Cherry had remarked, rather a lark hunting Bunter.

At Canterbury they had no difficulty in getting on the track of the fleeing Owl. Bunter, once seen, was not easily forgotten. Both his circumference and his diameter naturally impressed themselves on the beholder. Besides, Bunter had made many inquiries at the railway station concerning the ways and means of getting to Hampshire, and had told several persons his opinion of the railway and the manner in which it was conducted. So the inquiring schoolboys soon learned that a fat, spectacled, puffing and blowing, unpleasant, ill-mannered, podgy fellow had taken a ticket for Reigate, in Surrey, and that description, of course, left them no doubt that it was William George Bunter who was travelling to Reigate.

Why Bunter had chosen that destination the juniors did not know; but he had chosen it, and they proceeded to follow on.

It was a late hour when they turned out of the train in the Surrey town.

"The bedfulness seems to my ludicrous mind the proper caper," Hurree Jamset Ram Singh suggested.

And the Co. grinned and agreed that the "bedfulness" came next on the programme.

The chums of the Remove found quarters at the hotel near the station, and turned in for the night.

Bright and early in the morning they were up.

After breakfast they walked into the station, to begin inquiries for a fat, unpleasant, ill-mannered fellow who had possibly taken a ticket for somewhere farther on. They had little doubt that Bunter would be remembered. It was possible, of course, that he was staying in Reigate for some reason of his own; but inquiry at the railway-station was obviously the first move for his pursuers, as it was probable he was still on the run.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly.

Wharton looked round quickly.

"Spotted him?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, no! But there's some Greyfriars chaps, and they look as if they've been through it," said Bob, with a grin.

"Fifth Form chaps!" said Frank Nugent.

The Famous Five glanced at the two dusty, tired youths who were trailing into the station. They were Potter and Greene of the Greyfriars Fifth.

Undoubtedly they looked as if they had been through it. By their dusty and fatigued state, they might have been walking all night, as, indeed, they had.

Potter and Greene sighted the chums of the Remove, and scowled at them. They were feeling inclined to scowl at everything and everybody in the universe just then.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry greeted the two Fifth-Formers cheerily, as if quite oblivious of the great gulf that was fixed between the Lower Fourth and the Fifth Form at Greyfriars. "Enjoying life, what?"

"Don't be cheeky, Cherry!" snapped Potter.

"Where's jolly old Coker?" asked Bob. "I heard at Greyfriars that you were going caravanning with Coker this vac. Have you dropped him somewhere, or lost him, or has he strayed?"

"Find out!" snapped Greene.

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton, as the two Fifth-Formers would have tramped on. "Have you seen anything

of Billy Bunter by any chance? We're looking for him."

The savage expression that came over the faces of Potter and Greene showed at once that they had seen something of Billy Bunter, and that the meeting had not been a happy one for them.

"Hang Bunter!" said Potter.

"Blow Bunter!" said Greene.

"Look here, though, where did you see him?" asked Harry. "We've got to find him, you know."

The Famous Five gathered round Potter and Greene, eager for information. This was a lucky encounter for them; it was clear that Bunter had not gone on by train, if Potter and Greene had seen him somewhere in the vicinity of the Surrey town. And evidently they had.

"Well, when you find him, you probably won't find him all in one piece!" growled Potter. "Coker will smash him, I hope he will, at any rate. I hope he will smash Coker, too."

"Hear, hear!" said Greene.

"You'll find him somewhere between here and Guildford, if you look long enough," said Potter. "Last we saw of him, he had locked himself in Coker's caravan, and Coker was thirsting for his blood."

"Oh, great Scott!"

"That idiot, Coker, got that fat fool, Bunter, to guide us," explained Potter. "The fat dummy didn't know the way any more than that crass idiot, Coker, did. The fat frump locked himself in when the blinking idiot wanted to smash him, and the howling ass went on with the van with the dummy inside it, and left us sitting down, and what's happened to the blinking idiot and the fat-headed chump since then I don't know and don't care!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"All I know is, that the dummy and the blinking idiot have gone on, with one fool inside the van and the other fool outside," said Potter. "Coker was looking for a village called Wheatmayne, so he's probably marching directly away from it. I know we're fed-up, and we're taking the train home, and I know we've been hoofing it all night, after nearly all day, and I know we're fed-up—and I know I'll jolly well knock your cheeky heads together, if you grin at me, you cheeky fags!"

And Potter trailed on, dusty and weary, with Greene, equally dusty and equally weary.

Harry Wharton & Co. smiled.

Caravanning with Coker did not seem to have added to the gaiety of existence for Potter and Greene, of the Greyfriars Fifth.

It was a little difficult to reconstruct the story from Potter's description, which had consisted chiefly of complimentary expressions applied to Coker and Bunter with a rather mixed effect. But the Famous Five had a fairly good idea of what had happened.

At all events, it was clear that Billy Bunter was somewhere in the country west of Reigate, and had last been seen locked in Coker's caravan, which Coker was leading on in the hope of discovering an elusive village called Wheatmayne.

Potter and Greene, apparently, had become fed-up with caravanning with Coker, and after parting with that attractive youth, had tramped wearily to the nearest town to take the train for home. Hence the meeting which had afforded the Bunter-hunters a clue to the missing Owl.

"Well, we're in luck," said Harry Wharton cheerily. "That's enough to go on, and it saves us a lot of trouble. We've got some tin. Let's hire a car to take us to Wheatmayne, wherever that is, and start looking for Bunter with that as a centre. We're bound to hear of Coker and his caravan, and that will put us on Bunter's track."

"Let's!" assented Bob.

And they did.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Getting Clear of Coker!

BILLY BUNTER blinked out of the caravan.

It was a bright and sunny morning.

Any fellow might have felt bucked, looking out of a caravan on that sunny, fresh summer's morning, under a blue sky, amid the green hills of Surrey.

But Bunter had no eye for scenery just then. He had an eye for Coker, and a very watchful eye.

The Owl of the Remove was in rather an unenviable position. He had had a good supper the night before, a sleep in the caravan bunk, and a lift on his way. The final fragments of Coker's food supplies had provided him with a breakfast. So far, so good. All this was to the good; but there remained Horace Coker to deal with, and Horace Coker was a proposition more difficult to negotiate than any problem in Euclid.

The van was drawn on a belt of grass beside a lonely, leafy lane. The horse had lain down to sleep in the grass, traced as he was: Coker had not taken him out. Coker was fast asleep; after a day's tramp, followed by a night's tramp, even the hefty Coker was tired. But he had gone to sleep resting against the back of the caravan, and it was certain that he would wake if the door was opened.

Without opening the door, Bunter could not escape from Coker's caravan. The window, which had been impracticable for Horace Coker, was doubly so for Billy Bunter. Bunter might possibly have squeezed his plump shoulders through, but his waist would never have followed. There was only the door for Bunter, and Coker was outside the door.

He could not see Coker behind the van, but he could hear the deep and steady breathing of the sleeper. Coker might sleep for hours yet; it was still early. Bunter had a respite. But after that?

Sooner or later, even Coker was bound to arrive somewhere with the van. With all his wonderful gifts as a leader, he could not lose his way permanently in a country so closely populated as Surrey. And when he arrived somewhere, wherever it might be, the caravan door would be got open, and Coker's heavy hand would reach Bunter.

The situation was serious.

It seemed to the hapless Owl of the Remove that he had fallen out of the frying-pan into the fire. He had escaped Pilkins, to fall into the hands of Coker; like a mariner who had weathered the rocks of Scylla, to come to grief in the whirlpool of Charybdis.

Really, it was very hard cheese; and Bunter, to his own fat mind, presented that most pathetic of all spectacles, a good man struggling with adversity!

He blinked from the window, without wasting a glance upon the blue, sunny sky or the green fields and rolling hills. Horace Coker occupied his thoughts.

He crept to the door of the van at last.

Through the door he could hear the deep breathing of Horace Coker, who snored occasionally.

The door did not fit precisely in its frame, and there was a crack, through which Bunter had a glimpse of Coker.

The great Horace sat with his back to the van, in the thick grass, and his head leaned on it. Across his knees lay a large, thick stick, which he had apparently cut from the thicket overnight, to be in readiness in the morning. Bunter could guess only too well what Coker intended to do with that stick.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Bunter.

He rolled dismally back to the window.

In a field across the road a man appeared with a horse. The countryside was beginning to awaken.

Soon there would be traffic on the road. Then Coker would wake up; and then——

"Oh, dear!" groaned the Owl of the Remove. He wished from the bottom of his fat heart that he had never met the caravanners, though they had come in useful for a time.

A man came slouching along the lane, and Bunter blinked at him. On his looks, Bunter was glad that he had not met him late the previous night. He was tattered, he was dusty, and he was dirty, and he carried a bundle tied up in a dirty, red-spotted handkerchief on the end of a knobby stick on his shoulder. His face was stubbly with two or three days' beard, and was further adorned with a broken nose. He stared at the caravan as he came up, and approached the window, out of which Billy Bunter was blinking.

"'Ad a accident—what?" he said. "'Elp a cove on his way, sir?"

"I—I'd like to," said Bunter. "But still——"

"A bob would 'elp a cove," said the tramp.

"Sorry, I haven't a bob," said Bunter. Which was the fact, as Bunter's adventure with Charley and Herbert had left him with the sum of elevenpence in his possession.

"P'r'aps you've got an old coat or a pair of boots that you don't want, sir."

The tramp's manner was civil, but with a hint of aggressiveness. Bunter was still more glad that he had not met him late the previous night.

The broken-nosed man had not seen Coker yet, Coker's bulky form being hidden from his sight, so far, behind the caravan. His impression was that Bunter was alone.

Bunter blinked at him, and his fat mind worked. The tramp was a big, hulking fellow, much bigger than even the hefty Coker. The condition of his nose hinted that he was not unaccustomed to fistical encounters. Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. This was the man he wanted, if the man would only play up.

"My dear chap, I'll do anything I can," said Bunter, quite effusively. "I've got some clothes and boots here. I dare say they won't fit you, but you could raise some money on them."

"You're a gentleman, you are, sir!" said the broken-nosed man.

"But look here!" said Bunter. "One good turn deserves another, you know!"

"Eh?"

The tramp eyed him.

Perhaps he suspected that Bunter was going to offer him a job. In that case he was prepared to turn on a flow of language that would have made the fat junior's hair curl.

But it was not so bad as that.

"I'm shut up in this van," said Bunter, sinking his voice. "A brute of a fellow is after me!"

"My eye!"

"He's actually besieging me in this van," said Bunter. "I've been shut up all night, with that—that ruffian watching for a chance to get at me. He's actually sat down at the back of the van and gone to sleep, ready to collar me if I get out of my—my own van!"

"Blow me tight!" said the broken-nosed man. "He's there now, is he?"

"Yes. Look here, you give me a chance to get clear of him and I'll do what I can for you," said Bunter. "Mind, he's a frightfully bad-tempered rotter. He's got a down on me, and I can't handle him. You could handle him all right, especially with that stick. Just look at him. But—but don't wake him up! He's a dangerous ruffian, really!"

"Blow me pink!" said the broken-nosed man.

He blinked round the caravan at Coker.

The great Horace was still sleeping soundly and snoring a little. The tramp stared at him. There was Coker—with his back to the van and the stick across his knees, evidently on guard. Bunter's statements were fully borne out by all that the broken-nosed gentleman could see.

He came back to the window of the van.

"Never 'eard of such a thing, sir!" he said. "Blow me! I never did! You leave 'im to me, sir!"

"Oh, good! Look here, I've got a lot of things that might be useful to you," said Bunter generously. "I'll hand them out!"

"Thank you kindly, sir!"

Money was short with Bunter. But there were plenty of things in the van worth money. True, the things belonged to Coker; but that was a trifling consideration that did not worry the Owl of the Remove. The rights of property never had appealed very much to Billy Bunter. Besides, it was all Coker's fault if Bunter had to give away Coker's things in order to escape from Coker's ferocity.

A handsome pair of boots, for which Coker had given three pounds, were handed out to the tramp. A seven-guinea raincoat followed. The broken-nosed man's eyes glistened. This was the most generous young gent he had ever come across in a long and chequered career spent in dodging work. Half a dozen more articles of Coker's attire were put out of the window and eagerly collared by the tramp.

"That all right—what?" asked Bunter.

"You're a gentleman you are, sir! You leave that bloke to me!" said the broken-nosed man reassuringly. "I'll see that he don't touch you. My eye! Why, I'll smash him, sir, if he tries to lay a finger on you!"

"Get the horse going," said Bunter. "Just start him down the hill, and he'll go all right. Then you handle that—that brute—that—that lawless scoundrel—if he tries to follow!"

"You rely on me, sir!"

The tramp rolled his new possessions up into a big bundle and tied a frowsy string round them. Then he laid the bundle with his own bundle by the further roadside, and Bunter watched him eagerly as he went to the horse. The animal was jerked up and drawn round into the road, facing downhill. The lurch of the caravan as it followed the horse effectually awakened Coker. He was leaning on the van, and as the vehicle moved off his support was withdrawn: and Coker, of course, could not continue leaning back without any visible means of support. He crashed down on his back in the grass and awakened with a yell.

"Quick!" gasped Bunter.

"All O.K., sir!"

Coker leaped up from the grass. He glared round.

"Here, you frowsy lout, what are you doing?" shouted Coker as his eyes fell on the tramp leading the horse round.

Coker could scarcely believe his eyes. It seemed to him that a frowsy tramp was trying to steal his caravan.

"Let that horse alone!" he roared.

"I'll let you alone if you shut up!" said the broken-nosed man. "But don't you call me names, young feller!"

"Quick! Quick!" panted Bunter at the window.

"There you are, sir!"

The tramp released the horse, giving him a slap that started him downhill. He had no time for more; Coker was rushing on him.

The next moment Coker and the broken-nosed man were fighting.

The horse trotted downhill.

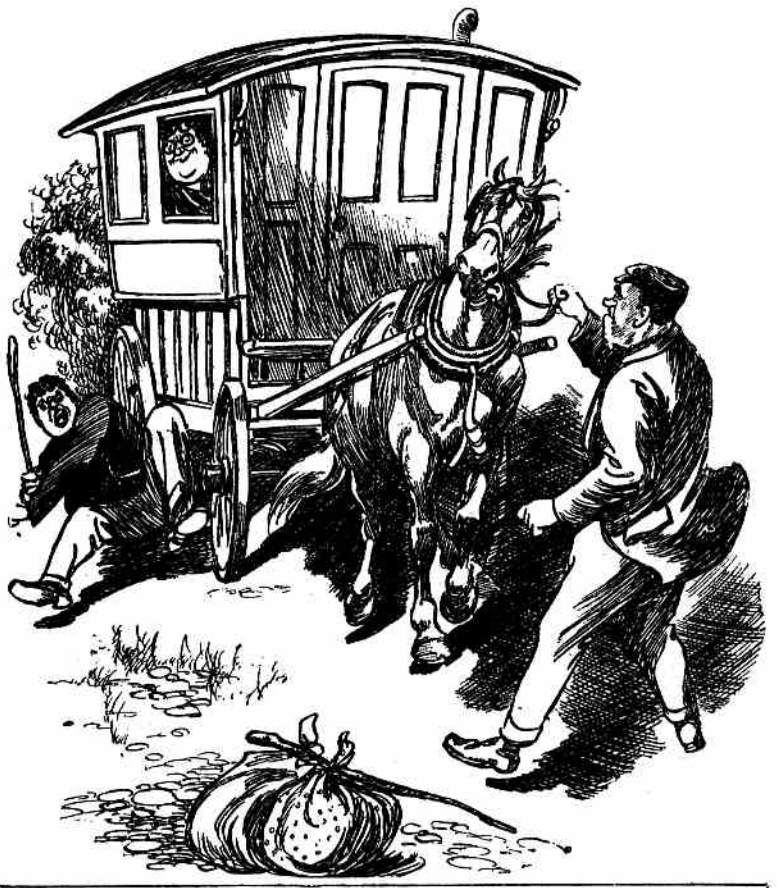
Bunter hurriedly unlocked the door and stared back up the lane. The broken-nosed man was earning his bribe; he was waltzing in a close embrace with Horace Coker, and both of them seemed to be getting plenty of punishment.

Bunter gave a breathless chuckle.

He clambered out of the van and ran round to the horse. Bunter was not generally rapid in his movements; but he was swiftness itself now. He gathered up the reins, clambered into the driver's seat, and cracked the whip. The horse trotted on fast and faster.

Behind Bunter the sounds of energetic conflict died away in the distance.

How the combat proceeded, and how it ended, Bunter did not know; and he did not waste a thought upon such a trifle. All his thoughts were concentrated upon extracting as much speed as possible from the caravan horse and putting the greatest possible distance between himself and Horace Coker. That was the important matter; and to that William George Bunter devoted his whole attention.



As the caravan lurched forward Coker crashed down on his back in the grass and awakened with a yell. "Quick!" gasped Bunter. "All O.K., sir!" Coker leaped up from the grass and glared round him. "Here, you frowsy lout," he shouted as his eyes fell on the tramp leading the horse round, "what are you doing?" (*See Chapter* 11.)

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Still Hunting Bunter!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Looks like a scrap!"

"Why, it's Coker!"

"Coker, by gum!"

"The Cokerfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton signalled to the chauffeur to stop. In the hired car the Famous Five were following a leafy lane in Surrey, en route to the village of Wheatmayne, where they hoped to pick up news of Bunter or of Coker's caravan. As they had plenty of time on their hands, and enjoyed the run among the Surrey hills and vales, they

had told the driver to take a roundabout course, in the hope of sighting the caravan somewhere in the leafy lanes. They did not sight the caravan, as it happened; but they sighted Horace Coker engaged in deadly combat with a frowsy-looking man with a broken nose.

The car halted a short distance from the combatants.

Coker was going strong.

Hefty as he was, he was not quite a match for the burly tramp; but he was putting up a terrific scrap.

The broken-nosed man, in fact, was earning Bunter's bribe, and earning it hard.

Coker was giving him his money's-worth.

Harry Wharton & Co. poured out of the car. They were not at all surprised to find Coker in trouble if they found him at all; Coker of the Fifth was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Neither did they feel called upon to intervene if Coker had asked for trouble and received what he asked for. But Coker, hard as he was fighting, was getting the worse of the combat, and his adversary being a frowsy tramp, it was possible, at least, that Coker was not to blame for once for the trouble. So the heroes of Greyfriars decided to chip in.

They chipped in effectually.

The five of them rushed on the combatants, and Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull grasped the tramp. Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh laid vigorous hands on Horace Coker.

The combatants were dragged apart by main force, and both of them went sprawling along the ground.

Both of them sat up breathlessly, and the Famous Five gathered between the two.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the jolly old trouble?" asked Bob Cherry genially. "Tell your Uncle Robert."

"Ow!" gasped Coker. "Oh!" He mopped a streaming nose. "Wow!"

"I'll out him!" yelled the broken-nosed gentleman.

"Not this morning!" said Bob. "Sit where you are, old pippin, or we shall sit you down again hard!"

"I tell yer——"

"Dry up, you!" said Johnny Bull. "What's the trouble, Coker? If this frowsy bounder has been trying to rob you, we'll deal with him fast enough!"

Coker staggered up.

For once he did not overwhelm fags of the Lower Fourth with scorn and contumely for their impudence in venturing to address so great a man as if he were a mere common mortal. He was, in point of fact, extremely glad to receive reinforcements.

"I've been robbed!" he gasped. "That ruffian—and Bunter——"

"Where's Bunter?"

"Gone off with my caravan!" panted Coker. "Actually walked off with it while this ruffian was scrapping with me! I've been robbed of my caravan. Those idiots, Potter and Greene, have got lost somewhere and couldn't be on hand to help a chap—just like the dummies——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've met Potter and Greene!" chuckled Wharton. "They were going into the railway-station at Reigate to take a train."

"Take a train!" ejaculated Coker. "Why the thump do they want to take a train when they're caravanning with me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Perhaps because they were caravanning with you, old bean!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "You're such a nice chap to caravan with, you know."

"The becausefulness is terrific."

"I was going to lick them both!" gasped Coker. "Perhaps they guessed it. But I don't want any cheek from you cheeky fags. Look here, this man has robbed me, in league with Bunter. He's got a stack of my things here that Bunter must have given him out of the van while I was asleep. I'm going to give him in charge."

In the course of their waltzing and scrambling in that terrific combat Coker and the tramp had trampled over the bundle of plunder and burst it open. Coker's belongings were scattered in the lane.

"Help me take him into custody!" added Coker. "Of course, I can handle him myself all right. Still, you can lend a hand."

The broken-nosed man eyed the Greyfriars fellows surlily. He was rather more than a match for Coker, but he was nothing like a match for the whole party, and he realised that it behoved him to walk delicately, as it were.

"I ain't stole nothing," he said. "Them things was given me by the owner, they was, that young gent in the caravan!"

"They're my things!" roared Coker.

"Oh, stow it!" said the broken-nosed man. "You'll be saying as it was your caravan next."

"So it was my caravan!" hooted Coker.

"Stow it, mate!"

"You cheeky villain——"

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "Let's hear what the man has to say, Coker."

"I don't want to hear what he has to say!" roared Coker. "I'm going to give him into custody, and then find Bunter and smash him—see?"

"But we want to hear what he has to say," said Wharton coolly. "And we happen to be top dogs at the present moment. So shut up, Coker!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Shut up a bit!"

"Why, you—you—you——" gasped Coker. When Coker of the Fifth was told to shut up by a Remove fag it was time for the skies to fall.

But the skies did not fall. The solar system rolled on its accustomed way, although Coker of the Fifth had been told to shut up by a fag of the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars.

And Coker of the Fifth did not take instant vengeance. Really, he was in no state for taking vengeance. Amazing as the circumstances would have seemed to anyone who knew Coker, he shut up!

"I tell you straight," said the broken-nosed man, Coker having shut up, "I comes along and sees a fat young gent looking out of the caravan, and he says to me, says he, that brute was arter him, he says, and he gives me them things to 'old the blinkin' 'ooligan back while he gets away, he does. Gives 'em to me fair and square, he does, and I 'olds the blooming 'ooligan according. And he ups and punches a bloke. Look at my nose!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Bunter——"

"Bunter gave him Coker's things to tip him to hold Coker while he got off with Coker's van!" said Johnny Bull. "My only hat! This beats Bunter Court and diddling Pilkins!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker, and the tramp rubbed their bruises and dabbed their streaming noses and glared at one another. But neither of them made any attempt to close in combat again. Much damage had been done, and both of them seemed to realise that they had had enough.

"You've been diddled, my man," said Harry Wharton. "You can't keep those things. The van belonged to this chap, Coker, and all the things in it were his."

"That's all very well," grunted the broken-nosed man. "That fat young gent was in the van, he was, and this bloke was houtside the van. That don't look as if he was the howner."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"But he was," he said. "You see, we happen to know him. It was his caravan right enough, and the other fellow was pulling your leg."

"My eye!" said the broken-nosed man. "If I get my 'ands on that bloke some time I'll make him sorry for himself! Sc I've 'ad all this blinking trouble for nothing!"

"Looks like it," agreed Wharton.

The tramp eyed them and eyed the expensive articles Bunter had so generously presented to him. But there was nothing doing for the broken-nosed gentleman—force was on the other side. He spat and grunted.

"Tip him something," said Bob Cherry. "He's been done by a Greyfriars man, and it's up to us."

Harry Wharton nodded. A collection of half-crowns was made for the hapless gentleman with the broken nose, and his damaged face brightened.

"Thank you kindly, gentlemen," he said. "You're gents, you are! If that blinking idiot there had explained to a bloke, instead of butting at him like a mad bull, this might not 'ave 'appened. 'Morning, gents!"

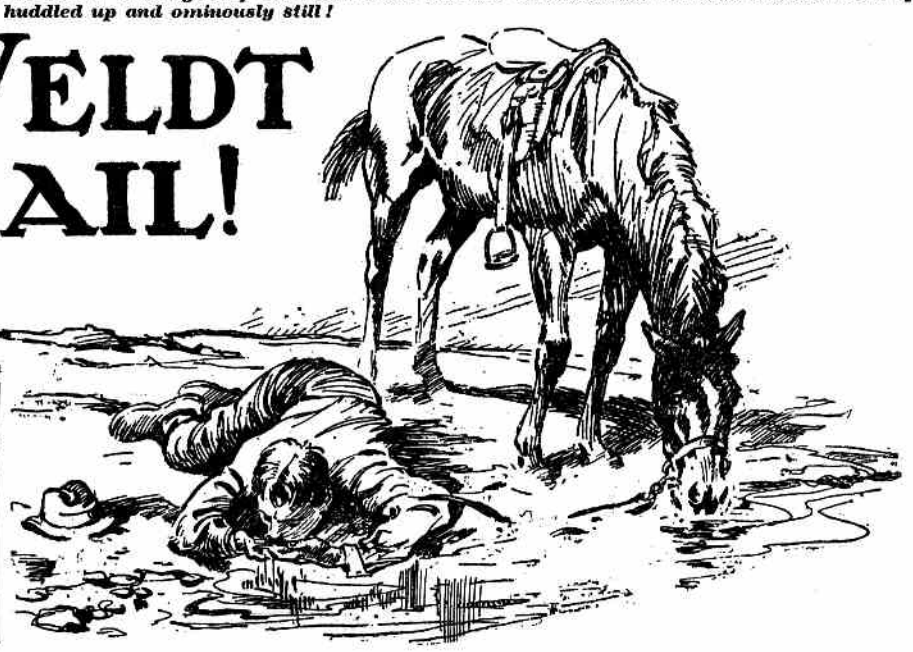
And the broken-nosed gentleman put his stick and his red-spotted bundle over his shoulder and slouched on his way. Coker's powerful intellect had by this time assimilated the fact that the tramp had been acting under a misapprehension; and he said no more about giving the man into custody. But he glanced after him darkly as he went. Right or wrong, misapprehension or not, it was a cheek for a common mortal to lay hands on Horace Coker. Still, it had happened.

"We may as well be getting on," said Harry. "The caravan can't be very far away now."

(*Continued on page 27.*)

A SHOCK FOR FERRERS LOCKE! Jutting out from beneath the table the detective saw the head and shoulders of a human form, lying huddled up and ominously still!

The VELDT TRAIL!



A powerful mystery story staged in Africa, featuring the wizard detective, Ferrers Locke and his boy assistant, Jack Drake.

An Errand of Mercy.

LOCKE stared at the apparently meaningless word in complete silence for a moment or so.

Then Inspector Pyecroft gave a low grunt of disgust.

"Is that all?" he asked, in a disappointed tone.

"What more do you want?" countered Locke dryly.

"But, hang it all, man!" protested Vane. "There's nothing in it—meantersay, I don't understand the meaning of the word——"

"Don't you?" murmured the detective, in an aggravatingly calm, detached tone. "Perhaps I can explain. Asbestos, as you know, is a variety of amphibole, occurring in long and delicate fibres or seams. It is a valuable non-combustible material, usually found——"

"Aw, cut it out, Locke!" cried Pyecroft disgustedly. "What we want to know is, what earthly bearing can that absurd word have on the case in hand?"

"A very earthly bearing, I should say," murmured Locke thoughtfully, "though at present I'm afraid I can't enlighten you further. Still, it's a most valuable clue—quite the most important I've yet struck!"

"Clue?" echoed Jack Drake blankly. "B-but how the dickens——"

But Locke rose from his seat, and held up a restraining hand.

"Time, gentlemen, please!" he exclaimed. "I'll explain everything later on. But, meanwhile, I'm dog tired, and I'm going to bed, from which wild horses won't drag me until I've had at least five hours' solid sleep. After that, Jack and I are going to motor out to the Jo'burg-Pretoria Road, to have a look at that Devil's Elbow which poor old Daft Dave was talking about!"

And forthwith the famous detective turned and left the room, while Pyecroft, Vane, and Jack Drake—the latter deciding, rather unwisely, that he couldn't rest if he tried—proceeded to discuss the amazing sequence of facts which Locke had just placed before them.

. . . . . .

That Locke had been sorely in need of sleep was proved as the day wore on.

Luncheon-time came, and Jack Drake dined alone. Vane and Pyecroft had taken themselves off an hour or so previously—Van to pay a visit to the scene of the fire and Pyecroft to make a further attempt to compel the native, Umlili, who had been captured on the roof of the house at Vrededorp, to tell what he knew.

WHO'S WHO.

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous detective, who is engaged in solving the mystery surrounding the tragic end of

SIR MERTON CARR, a South African mining magnate, who has been murdered, uncle of

GERALD BRISTOW—alias Arthur the Dude—an escaped convict, who has made his way over to Johannesburg to seek the treasure of the Golden Pyramid.

GRIGGS, the valet at Sir Merton's house at Parktown, a suburb of Johannesburg.

STEPHEN JARRAD, the late baronet's private secretary, who has mysteriously disappeared, thereby leading the Jo'burg police to assume that he is guilty of the murder.

DAFT DAVE, a local half-wit, who apparently knew the true facts of the murder, but dies before he can make a full confession. He helps in the quest, however, by directing Locke to see the "black box under the kloof at Devil's Elbow."

JACK DRAKE, Locke's capable boy assistant.

INSPECTOR PYECROFT, a Scotland Yard detective.

INSPECTOR VANE, a member of the South African Police Force.

. . . . . .

So far the treasure of the Golden Pyramid, which, incidentally, supplies the motive for the murder of Sir Merton, has yielded nothing better than an old biscuit-tin containing a worthless cheque and a nonsensical letter. Locke, however, pays especial attention to the cheque, and ultimately discovers a number of pinholes pricked out in the watermark, the watermark in this case being a repetition of the bank's name. The letters of the watermark through which the perforations have been made spell out a word, and that word is "Asbestos."

(Now read on.)

And, meantime, Ferrers Locke remained in his room, plunged deep in slumber, from which Jack did not care to rouse him, even when the time came and went for the midday meal.

By way of filling in the time, Drake tried to solve the mystery of Piet de Jough's letters. He read it through again and again, until its blotchy, ink-splashed phrases became imprinted on his memory, and he could, if necessary, reel the whole thing off by heart.

But, despite his most painstaking efforts, he had to confess to no progress whatever inside of an hour. And at the end of another hour he was still more or less where he was when he had begun.

But now he had settled down to make a diligent copy of the screed, writing each separate letter out in black capitals on a sheet of paper, and studying every word and phrase with the utmost intentness. He was thus absorbed when the sound of a low voice, addressing him in deferential tones, caused him to jerk back with a stifled cry of surprise.

"Good heavens, I'd no idea you were here, Griggs!" he exclaimed. "You must walk about the place like a blessed cat!"

The face of Griggs, the valet, and now acting temporarily as a sort of butler, was absolutely wooden. He held a salver in one hand, on which reposed a letter.

"It's for Mr. Locke, sir," he said, in his usual expressionless voice. "It's marked urgent, but seeing as 'ow Mr. Locke was asleep I didn't like to disturb him."

Jack picked up the letter.

It was addressed in a crabbed and obviously feminine hand to "Ferrers Locke, Esq.," and across the top left-hand corner were the words: "Urgent and Personal," heavily underscored. There was no postage stamp, and the letter had evidently been delivered by hand.

Jack gazed at it thoughtfully for a moment, and then pressed a bell. Griggs reappeared as softly and noiselessly as before.

"This letter was delivered by hand," said Jack. "Who brought it?"

Griggs hesitated and coughed tentatively behind his cupped hand.

"A—a person, sir," he said at last.

"Yes, I gathered as much as that," retorted Jack dryly. "But what sort of a person?"

"Well—er—I didn't actually receive the letter myself, sir," responded the valet, "but Binks, the potboy, says it was a--a youngster of about his own age, sir. A 'ragged little ruffian' was Binks' description of the person, if I remember rightly."

Jack nodded dismissal, and after Griggs had gone he suddenly rose to his feet and hastened upstairs.

He was relieved to find that Locke was already awake—indeed, he had just had a bath, and was now busy putting the finishing touches to his toilet.

Locke took the letter interestedly, examined it, and finally ripped it open.

"It's from Mrs. Jarrad, Jack," he said quietly. "Stephen Jarrad's mother, you know. She's a bed-ridden invalid, and she writes to ask if I can possibly come and see her."

"About—about her son?" asked Jack, with sudden interest.

Locke nodded.

"It's a pitiful letter," he said. "The poor lady is terribly distracted. It appears she had read of the murder, and of her son's subsequent disappearance in the newspapers, and she begs me—— However, read it for yourself."

Jack took the letter and glanced through it, and a wave of very real pity went through him as he did so. Written in a crabbed, shaky hand, it formed a pitiful, heartbroken appeal to Locke, begging him to come at once and see the writer.

"If you have a mother still living," Jack read, "I beg and implore you, in her name, Mr. Locke, to come and see me at once. I have not much longer to live, and the shock of this terrible tragedy and the shadow which it has cast over my son will make that time for me even shorter. Every hour I breathe now is charged with dread and terror, and——"

Jack looked at the detective, who was staring out of the window.

"It's a terribly sad letter, guv'nor," he said. "What are you going to do about it? What can you do, anyway? Besides, our time is so taken up——"

He had not meant that last remark in an unsympathetic way, but, just the same, it seemed somehow to spur Locke to instant action.

"My time is not so taken up, Jack," he said reprovingly, "that I can afford to ignore an appeal like that. It goes straight to the heart, and I'm going straight to the poor woman who wrote it. It's little enough I can do, but at least I may be able to comfort her a little, and——"

"Guv'nor"—Jack laid a hand on the detective's arm as Locke thrust on his hat and turned to go—"do you believe that—that Stephen Jarrad——"

"I wish to heaven I could believe something good of him!" cut in Locke, with extraordinary feeling, "if only to give some peace of mind to his poor, bed-ridden mother!"

And next instant Locke had turned abruptly and left the room.

Jack made his way thoughtfully downstairs and back to the library, where he resumed the study of the mysterious letter.

It was about an hour or so after Locke's departure that Jack, deeply immersed in his self-imposed task, gave a choking gasp as the point of a revolver, appearing as if from nowhere, was suddenly thrust against his ribs. Next moment Drake was fighting for his life.

. . . . . .

Meantime, Ferrers Locke had found his way to the address given by Mrs. Jarrad, and was shown—by a nervous, grubby little fellow, of some ten years of age—into the room in which a silver-haired old lady reclined on an old-fashioned bedstead.

There were deep shadows under her eyes, from which the light of life had strangely faded, leaving them dim and veiled. But as Locke entered Mrs. Jarad smiled wanly, and something of the old sparkle crept back into her eyes as she lifted a thin, grey hand to take his.

Locke murmured a few comforting words to her as he sat down on a chair beside the bed. The detective was manifestly moved by the sight of that pale, weak figure stretched out on her bed of sickness.

"I asked you to come, Mr. Locke," she said, in a thin, trailing wisp of a voice, "because I wanted to know if you believe my—my boy to be guilty of that terrible crime. Even here, in far-away South Africa, your name is well known, Mr. Locke, and I realise that what you believe the police themselves must also believe in the end."

"I believe nothing, either for or against your son as yet, Mrs. Jarrad," answered Locke frankly. "There are many things to sort out in this baffling mystery, and your son's connection with it is not the least of them. But you may rest assured that if he is indeed innocent—as, of course, you believe him to be—I shall ultimately prove him so to the authorities. More than that I cannot say."

The old lady's face became shadowed with disappointment for a moment.

"My son has—has run away, so they say," she whispered at last, and Locke nodded.

"It was very foolish of him, Mrs. Jarrad," he answered. "It would have been far wiser for him to have remained and faced things out, especially if he is really innocent."

Mrs. Jarrad nodded, and continued to look into Locke's eyes, as if searching for something. Then, as if apparently satisfied, she began to fumble at something under her pillow, and finally brought forth an envelope.

"I thought I could trust you, Mr. Locke," she said at last, "but I wanted first to see you, just—just to make sure. A—a mother's anxiety, you understand. It is but natural that I should wish to protect my boy, even—even if——"

She broke off, her eyes suddenly streaming with tears.

"He was always such a good son to me, too," she rambled on, after a moment or so. "So self-sacrificing. He couldn't possibly have done this terrible thing!"

Locke turned his head away. He was profoundly moved.

"He—he has written to me, Mr. Locke," said Mrs. Jarrad at last, and Ferrers Locke restrained his surprise only with an effort. "I've kept it a—a close secret, but now that I've seen you and know I can trust you I've decided to let you see his letter."

And as she spoke she handed Locke the envelope, which he took wonderingly from her trembling hands.

He glanced quickly through the letter. It was hastily written, bore no address, and was merely a message of comfort to his mother, without, however, making any direct reference to the crime.

Locke glanced over it, and then at the envelope, which bore a postage stamp obliterated so smudgily that it was impossible, with the naked eye, to make out the name of the office of its origin.

"May I keep this?" he asked.

And the old lady, after a momentary hesitation, nodded.

And a few minutes later, after having again comforted the old lady by promising to do his utmost to clear her son's name—if, indeed, it could be cleared—Locke took his departure.

It was night when he stepped out into the street and hurried away, and so immersed was he in the thoughts which chased each other through his brain that he did not see the vague, shadowy figure which crept, as noiselessly as a panther, from a hedge which surrounded Mrs. Jarrad's house, and, after watching him till he had passed from sight, turned and hastened away in the opposite direction.

It was a tall, spare figure, slightly stooping at the shoulders. Had Ferrers Locke seen it he would almost certainly have given it a name.

And that name would have been Stephen Jarrad.

. . . . . .

In paying his visit of mercy to Mrs. Jarrad, Locke had not made use of Sir Merton's car, prefering to travel by the ordinary electric tram, as he particularly wished to avoid drawing any undue attention towards the old lady's house, which was situated in Troyeville, some miles distant from Parktown.

He returned to Parktown now by the same means, and as the electric tram brought him only within a mile and half of Sir Merton's house, he had a longish walk in front of him.

But Locke was feeling fresh and vigorous after his long sleep, and the cool night air was wonderfully refreshing after the dazzling heat of the day.

As he was making his way up the drive towards the front door of Sir Merton's house something attracted his attention, and he halted suddenly.

Immediately before him just ahead of the lawn, the french windows of the library stood wide open, their curtains ballooning in the slight breeze. And Locke's eyes narrowed slightly as he thought he detected a gaping hole in one of the windows, with a series of jagged cracks over the remaining fragments of glass.

Next instant he had raced across the lawn and passed within the library, to come to a dead stop almost on the threshold.

The room presented a scene of utmost disorder, and as Locke gazed round in dismay he gave vent to a sudden cry of horror.

Jutting out from beneath the table were the head and shoulders of a human form, lying huddled up, and ominously still.

Locke hastened towards it and dropped to one knee. The electric lights were all fully on, and the face that looked sightlessly into his was only too tragically familiar.

"Jack Drake!" he whispered, horror-stricken. "Good heavens, he—he is dead!"

The Mystery Letter!

THE colour drained from Ferrers Locke's face as he gazed down upon the still and apparently quite lifeless figure of his young assistant.

Only Jack Drake's head and shoulders were visible, the rest of his body was

hidden beneath the table, and he had evidently been rudely thrust there after having been attacked.

Locke dropped to one knee and made a swift, anxious examination. Then he gave a deep sigh of profound relief.

"Thank Heaven he lives!" he muttered.

He picked up the inert form of his young assistant, and hastened with it to a couch near by. Even as he did so the door of the room opened and Inspector Pyecroft entered.

"Hallo, Locke!" he said breezily, not noticing for the moment what had happened. "Saw the light on here, and thought I'd find—— Why, what on earth's happened?"

But Locke did not trouble to answer. He was too taken up in trying to bring Jack to his senses by forcing some liquid from a pocket-flask between the boy's clenched teeth.

Pyecroft stood staring at them both in speechless amazement.

Then his eyes roved round the room, noting the disorder, the signs on every hand of a struggle, and he nodded his head slowly.

"Call everyone in the house, please, Pyecroft," said Locke almost curtly, as he paused for a moment in his frantic efforts to bring Jack back to consciousness. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this."

Pyecroft nodded and hastened away.

Jack was showing some faint signs of recovery now, but Locke did not cease his efforts at resuscitation.

There was a nasty wound on the back of Jack's head which Locke sagely judged to have been the cause of all the trouble. One of the boy's hands was clenched tightly, and as Locke looked curiously at it he saw a fragment of paper sticking out from between the fingers.

It was only with difficulty that he contrived at last to loosen the fingers and remove the scrap of paper. Then he examined this closely for a moment.

"Old Piet de Jongh's letter!" he muttered at last with a frown. "I remember now. Jack asked me to let him have a shot at studying it, to see if there was really anything in it. The fellow who attacked him must have been after it, and must have got it, too, or most of it, by the look of things."

Pyecroft returned, followed by Griggs and two or three others, representing the small staff which had been kept on at the house since the murder of Sir Merton Carr.

"Put them through it, old chap!" jerked Locke, busy again with Jack. "I must get Jack round before I can think of anything else."

But there was nothing to be got out of any of the household staff. Every one of them, from Griggs to the lowliest native kitchen boy, came under Pyecroft's eagle eye, and had to run the gauntlet of a rapid fire of shrewd, searching questions, but the result was invariably the same.

Griggs had been engaged in the basement of the house and had heard nothing at all. The cook had only just returned from an evening out with her young man, and therefore could hardly be expected to know anything about what had occurred. And three native "boys" had been scattered about in various parts of the house and grounds and stolidly denied having heard so much as a whisper of sound.

Pyecroft dismissed them all with a grunt of disgust, and turned again towards Locke.

By this time Jack had regained his senses to some extent, and was smiling somewhat shamefacedly up at Locke as the detective continued his efforts to bring some of the colour back to the boy's cheeks.

"S-sorry, guv'nor," muttered Jack at last. "'Fraid they bested me that time, but I put up a good fight——"

"I can see that, my boy," said Locke with a grim smile, as his eyes wandered round the room. "And I rather fancy I know who it was that attacked you."

As he spoke he darted across the room and pounced on something hanging from the upturned leg of a chair.

Pyecroft, watching him, saw that Locke now held between his fingers what looked like a length of black silk tape, with a tiny gold ring at one end, while attached to the ring was a fragment of jagged, broken glass.

"Gerald Arthur Bristow, otherwise Arthur the Dude," muttered Pyecroft.

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"The ruins of his famous eyeglass," he smiled. "It's friend Arthur's inevitable trade mark."

"There were two of 'em, guv'nor," said Jack, sitting up now on the couch and gazing dolorously around at the scene of wild disorder. "Otherwise I might have won out. I'm fairly handy with my fists, as you know, but that gigantic native he brought with him was one too many for me. Half-naked the brute was, and his skin all smothered with grease. I just couldn't get a grip on him, he was as slippery as an eel, and his fists were like legs of mutton."

"It was no fist that knocked you out, my boy," said Locke gravely. "That smack on the back of your head——"

"It was Bristow," nodded Jack, feeling his head gingerly. "I was wrestling with the nigger when Bristow came up from behind. I'd already landed him one that sent him flat, but he must have jumped up again. Anyway, while I was trying things out with the nigger I felt a dickens of a wallop on the back of the head, and saw more stars than were ever dreamed of by the Astronomer Royal, I give you my word. And then—well, I guess I was counted out."

"The dirty backslider!" growled Pyecroft angrily. "I already owe that window-paned tailor's dummy a reckoning, but it's nothing to what he's going to get when I can lay my hands on him."

"You'd better get to bed, Jack," said Locke. "In the morning, when you're feeling a bit more like yourself you can give us an idea of all that happened."

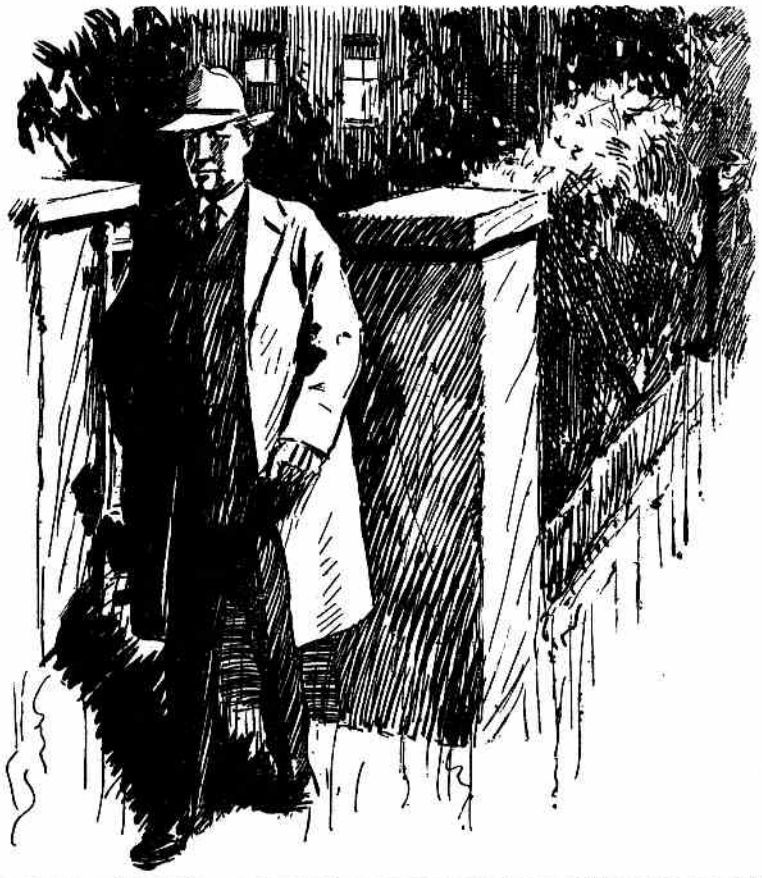
"I'd rather get on with the job now, if you don't mind, guv'nor?" pleaded Jack. "I'm really quite O.K. Only got a rotten headache. Besides, there's the letter——"

His face fell as he mentioned this latter fact, and he dropped his eyes.

Locke nodded.

"I found a torn fragment of it in your hand, Jack," he said quietly. "I suppose Bristow——"

"I've let you down, guv'nor," cut in Jack shamefacedly. "I reckon I'm no darned good, after all. Bristow took me by surprise. No really capable detective would let himself be surprised



So immersed was Ferrers Locke in the thoughts that chased through his brain that he did not see the vague, shadowy figure which crept as noiselessly as a panther from behind the hedge. (*See Page* 22.)

and duped as I have been. I guess I'm waiting for you to slang me, guv'nor. I'm a rotten dud, anyway——"

Locke stared at him, and then burst into a roar of uncontrollable laughter.

Jack was deadly serious, but his expression was so woebegone, so self-contemptuous, as to be positively comic.

"Glad you think it's funny," muttered Jack. "But that doesn't take the sting out of what I've let you in for. After all the training I've had at your hands, too. Better let me hop it, guv'nor. I'm only a stumbling block, anyway——"

He staggered to his feet and stood swaying dizzily till Locke placed a steadying hand on his shoulder. The detective had stopped laughing now, though his lips twitched slightly, and there was a kindly light in his eyes.

"Back pedal, old chap," he said quietly. "Don't get so downhearted. Even the cleverest detective gets caught napping now and then. Look at old Pyecroft, for instance. He could tell you a yarn or two——"

The Yard man grew red and glared ferociously at Locke. Then, catching the detective's ponderous wink, turned away to hide the smile that had curled his lips.

"I'm sure you did your best, my boy," went on Locke more seriously. "And I'm equally positive you couldn't have done more, for that matter. I don't suppose I could have made a better job of it myself. It's just the fortunes of war. All in the game, you know. Keep your tail up, old thing, and tell us all about it."

"It's jolly decent of you, guv'nor, to put it that way," returned Jack gratefully. "But, just the same, I let you down. And that letter——"

"Bristow's got away with it, of course," nodded Locke. But there was not the slightest trace of bitterness or even of regret in the detective's voice.

Jack Drake looked at him curiously, unable to fathom Locke's apparent indifference. The famous detective did not seem in the least perturbed about what had happened. Yet to Jack it spelt irreparable disaster.

"I've just managed to solve the mystery of that letter," he exclaimed. "You've no idea, guv'nor, what a sell it's been—what an almighty scoop Bristow's brought off against us!"

"So you solved it, eh?" Locke's eyes were flashing now. "That's good news, anyway. I always had an idea that there was more in that apparently absurd collection of platitudes than met the eye!"

"A jolly good deal more, you can bet your sweet life, guv'nor!" returned Jack excitedly. "Why, that letter contained the whole secret of—— But what's the use? What's the blessed use of anything now? Bristow's got away with it——"

"Never mind about Bristow!" said Locke, almost impatiently. "Tell us how it all happened."

"There's nothing to tell," answered Jack gloomily. "I had just worked out the code of the letter and was on the point of writing out a fair copy from my shorthand notes, when suddenly Bristow appeared as if from nowhere, and jabbed an automatic into my ribs.

"I jumped up and closed with him got the gun away, and gave him a useful one on the point. He went down like a log, and then that nigger appeared, and I was up against it with a vengeance. That's how the room came to be knocked about so much.

"We fought like twin hurricanes, and

though the native was a regular Hercules, I rather reckon I was gradually getting the upper hand when, as I say, Bristow got me down from behind. And that's all I remember till now."

Locke nodded, and then took a wallet from his pocket, extracting therefrom a sealed envelope.

He sat down and ripped open the envelope, taking from it a slip of paper covered with lines in his own neat handwriting.

"This is an exact copy of old Piet de Jongh's famous letter," he said at last, and Jack gasped. "In this detective game, Jack, as I've mentioned before, it's always as well to look ahead. From the outset I had an idea that there might be something—well, valuable—about that letter, and I took this copy because I rather expected some such thing as this to happen. Bristow's welcome to his torn fragment. I hope he'll enjoy trying to make sense out of it, but I very much doubt if he'll succeed."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" gasped Jack, with a profound sigh of relief.

"Not at all!" murmured Locke, with a dry smile. "Only a detective!"

He lighted a cigarette and puffed thoughtfully away at it for a few moments.

Then he turned again to Jack.

"And now, if you're feeling equal to it," he said, "perhaps you'll let us see the result of your efforts to de-code this document."

Jack, who was now feeling considerably fresher, drew up a chair to the table, round which Locke and Pyecroft had already gathered.

The Dead Man's Secret!

"IN the first place," began Jack, "on reading through that letter I noticed that there were several suspicious irregularities.

"For instance, there were certain simple words wrongly spelt, while others, not nearly so simple, were written correctly. The writing, too, appeared at first sight to be that of an illiterate man.

"But as I studied the whole thing more closely, I came to the conclusion that it was a deliberate hoax. If old Piet de Jongh had really been illiterate, he would not have known of the existence of those long words, let alone have been able to spell them. Also, his attempts to appear illiterate have been absurdly overdone.

"Take, for example, the number of words he has crossed out. Some of them were correctly spelled in the first place, and he has scratched them out and written them again—this time taking elaborate pains to spell them wrongly.

"Then there's all those blots—the uneducated man may make a bit of a mess of letter-writing, but not such a well-contrived mess as this. Most of those blots were deliberate—note how the ink is far deeper in the dead centre of the blots than anywhere else.

"The purely accidental blot is more scattered, more smudgy in appearance. But these blots have been intentionally shaken from the pen, and such great care has been taken to place them in different parts of the letter that it's obvious that they were deliberately made.

"All that, as I say, struck me as child's play. But, at least, it first started the suspicion in my mind that this letter held some sort of secret.

"And, on studying the contents of the letter more closely, I found I was not far wrong. The letter itself is full of a lot of silly platitudes—it's a sort of childish sermon which no man in his sane senses would write just for the mere sake of writing it.

"One of the first things I noticed was the curious repetition of capital letters in the wrong places. That's pretty usual where illiterate letters are concerned, but here again it has been overdone.

"I decided to pick out these capital letters and set them out in a row. And the result was—well, have a look at this, guv'nor."

Jack picked up a piece of blank paper, studied the copy of Piet de Jongh's letter thoughtfully for a few moments, and then began to set down in block capitals a series of isolated letters, which, at first, seemed to convey nothing at all.

But as he went on the letters began to form themselves into words, and both Locke and Pyecroft followed the boy detective's actions with breathless interest.

"The first two capital letters—'M' and 'D'—signify nothing," said Jack. "The same applies to the last eight capitals. They were doubtless included to make the solving of the code the more difficult. But if you make a start with the third capital—the letter 'C' used in the word 'cometh,' and move along from there to 'A' in 'after,' and thence to 'C' in 'secret,' and 'T' in 'treasure,' you have more than half of the first word of the code, the remaining two letters being 'U' in 'treasure' and 'S' in 'discovery'——"

"Cactus!" exclaimed Locke and Pyecroft together.

Jack nodded.

"And if you just continue on through the letter, picking out every capital you come to, whether it occurs initially or in the body of the word, you build up, in the end, a sentence like this."

His pencil now began to move swiftly over the paper, pausing only now and then to tick off each letter as he picked it out from Locke's fair copy.

And when at last he completed his task, the following amazing sentence stood out on the sheet of paper before him:

"CACTUS BUSH 500 YARDS FROM CONICAL TOWER GREAT ZIMBABWE."

"You will note" explained Jack, "that I have included the figures representing '500,' as these, too, have been written in unusually large characters—besides, they seem to fit very well into the body of the message."

"Ye gods!" gasped Pyecroft at last. "It's a definite, intelligible message right enough! Good for you, Jack, old lad! But what on earth does it mean, anyway?"

Locke laid aside his cigarette and turned towards the others. There was a queer glint in his eyes now, and a shadowy smile, almost suggestive of a quiet triumph, about the corners of his lips.

"You've done mighty well, Jack," he said quietly. "Probably far better than you imagine!"

Jack flushed with pleasure. The great detective's appreciation made up a great deal for the soreness he had

been feeling over the way in which Bristow had "bested" him.

"Meantersay you understand what that extraordinary message means?" jerked Pyecroft, who was all agog with excitement.

Locke nodded.

"You remember the secret of that cheque form, signed by Piet de Jongh?" he said, addressing them both. "Those pinpricks through certain letters in the watermark of the cheque——"

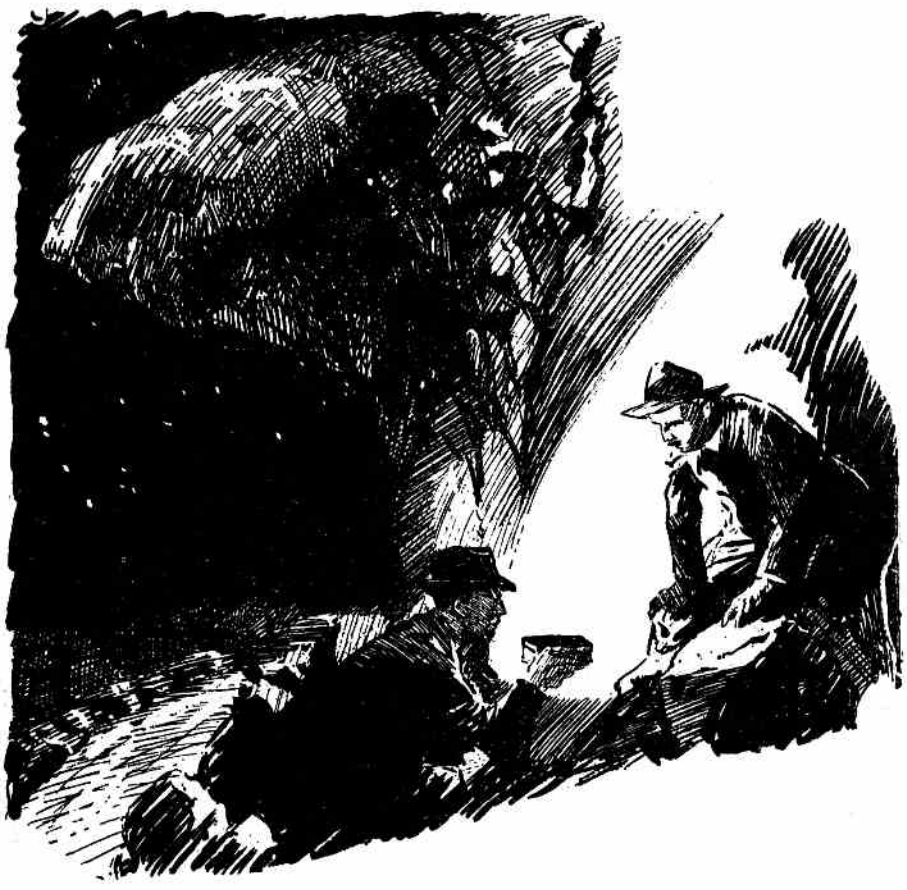
"They formed the word 'Asbestos,' didn't they?" Jack nodded. "And you very kindly went on to explain to us that asbestos was a valuable, non-combustible mineral——"

Ferrers Locke burst into a laugh.

"I was sorry to have to keep you dangling on a bit of string just then," he said apologetically; "but, as a matter of fact, I felt that the time was not then ripe for a more detailed explanation.

"But now that you, Jack, have so cleverly solved the mystery of this letter, I think we can fit the pieces of the puzzle together once and for all. Incidentally, I am no end glad to be able to announce that we have now solved practically everything connected with this amazing case——"

"Solved practically everything!" gasped Pyecroft, staring in blank amazement at the detective. "I'm afraid you're going just a stride too fast for me, old man! Sorry, but I'm blessed if I can see——"



Pyecroft gave a grunt of satisfaction as he saw that Locke was holding up a small but exquisitely fashioned box. "The ebony box!" whispered the C.I.D. man exultantly. "Daft Dave told the truth then, after all!" (*See Page* 26.)

"You'll see it all in a minute or two," put in Locke cheerfully. "I tell you we've solved the motive behind the murder of Sir Merton, and we've solved the mystery of the dead man's voice, as per Daft Dave's super-dictaphone. And now we've solved the dead Boer farmer's secret!"

He drew his chair closer to the table and lighted another cigarette.

"That Golden Pyramid," he said, after a pause, "was the clue to hidden treasure——"

"It was supposed to be," grunted Pyecroft.

"Supposed nothing!" rapped out Locke. "It was the clue! Sir Merton, following the instructions given on the base of the pyramid, went to Devil's Spruit, and unearthed the old biscuit-tin which contained that cheque and the apparently childish letter. The cheque form, as we have since proved, gave us the word 'Asbestos.' The letter, thanks to Jack's clever work upon it, has told us of the whereabouts of the treasure—otherwise, the asbestos!"

"Great pip!" gasped Jack. "Then the asbestos——"

"The asbestos is the treasure," nodded Locke, with a smile. "Don't you realise what it means? Old De Jongh, in the course of his wanderings, must have paid a visit to South Rhodesia and to the Great Zimbabwe ruins, where he struck a rich asbestos reef. Asbestos is one of the most valuable minerals in the world, and it's rare enough to be very much in demand. That cheque for five hundred thousand pounds was no joke—it was a reality! The finder of that asbestos reef will be able to present a cheque for that amount or probably a jolly sight more, and have it honoured, too!"

A sudden tense silence fell, broken eventually by Jack Drake.

"Then this means, guv'nor," he said, in little more than a whisper, "that we've got to make tracks for Rhodesia?"

"For Rhodesia—for Great Zimbabwe!" completed Locke. "The fabled land of Ophir, and King Solomon's Mines. And unless we're pretty sharp about it, we may find that others have got there before us!"

He rose abruptly from his seat, but hesitated as Pyecroft laid a hand on his arm. The Yard man's face was puckered in thought. He seemed strangely perplexed about something.

"Half a mo', Locke!" he said. "You told us just now that everything about this confounded case had been solved bar——"

"Bar only one mystery," corrected Locke, with a smile. "Once we've cleared that up, we can pack up our kit and trek back to dear old London!"

"And that one thing is——"

Locke laid a hand on Pyecroft's shoulder, and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Just this," he said slowly. "Who killed Sir Merton Carr?"

An Amazing Discovery!

INSPECTOR PYECROFT gave a snort of disgust.

"That's easy!" he growled.

"Think so?" murmured Locke. "Then perhaps you'll tell us?"

"Stephen Jarrad, of course!" replied the Yard man promptly.

A slow smile creased Locke's lips, and he turned towards Jack Drake.

"What say you, Jack?" he asked.

"I think Pyecroft's right off the mark," replied Jack Drake. "It's Gerald Arthur Bristow."

"Sure?" persisted Locke, that enigmatic smile still playing round his lips.

Jack shifted his position uncomfortably, his brows drawn suddenly together in a perplexed frown.

"Well—er—if it isn't Bristow," he said, "it was Daft Dave—one or the other! Who on earth else could it be, anyway?"

"That's what I want to know!" murmured Locke. "What we all want to know!"

"Then you don't think——" began Pyecroft, but stopped short as Locke held up his hand.

"I think a whole lot of things," said the detective, with a smile. "But until I'm sure——"

His lips snapped close, and Pyecroft and Jack turned away. They both knew that it was useless to commence any sort of an argument with the famous detective at this juncture.

An oyster wasn't in it where he was concerned when he chose to keep a thing to himself.

And he chose now.

In the amazing series of adventures through which they had all been passing during the past few days—adventures which had left them breathless in more senses than one—they had been in danger of getting into a state of tangled confusion regarding the prime essentials of this altogether extraordinary case.

Jack himself was compelled to own that he had become completely befogged on more than one occasion. Things had happened so swiftly, fresh mysteries had sprung up apparently from nowhere and without any warning, amazing and seemingly meaningless incidents had occurred one on top of another, so that it was perhaps inevitable that the net results should be a fog of uncertainty for everyone concerned.

But, as Locke had so far explained, things had gradually sorted themselves out until now they knew many facts which had so successfully eluded them during the past few days.

The motive for the murder of Sir Merton was one of them.

The meaning of that weird voice, that voice which was so undeniably Sir Merton's, yet which had been heard hours after Sir Merton's tragic death, was another.

The mystery surrounding Dark Dave's connection with the whole affair formed a third.

All these had been sifted out, tracked to their origin, explained away, thanks mainly to the indefatigable efforts of that prince of detectives, Ferrers Locke.

But still there remained the one chief riddle—the outstanding mystery of all, the solution to which, as Jack very well knew, must be found before Locke could think of bringing this amazing case to an end and returning home to England.

Who killed Sir Merton Carr?

The whole reason for the murder had been discovered, beyond all doubt. The murderer had been after the secret of the Golden Pyramid—the weird contents of the old biscuit-tin found at Devil's Spruit—those apparently meaningless objects, whose real secret had at last been unravelled.

The "possibles" among the cast of characters in this strange, bewildering drama had been sorted out, sifted down to a mere handful. Jack had to confess himself uncertain as to which of these was truly responsible for Sir Merton's death—whose hand had struck the fatal blow. Yet he felt positive, in his own mind, that one of them was guilty.

Bristow—Daft Dave—Stephen Jarrad!

The three names kept repeating themselves almost mockingly in his brain, but strive as he might he could find no answer to the riddle. He looked again towards Locke.

But the detective's face was like a mask.

Did Ferrers Locke know the secret? Had he already, in that amazing brain of his, ferreted out the truth?

"Look here, Jack!" Locke's voice broke the silence now, and Jack gave a smothered sigh of relief.

He was glad, anyway, to have a chance to break away from these tormenting thoughts. Besides, his head was still thumping badly as the result of that smashing blow he had received from Bristow.

"I think you'd better toddle off to bye-bye till the morning, my boy," went on Locke. "Pyecroft and I are fresher and can carry on."

"What are you going to do, guv nor?" asked Jack.

"I'm going to drag Pyecroft along with me to the Pretoria Road," answered Locke quietly, and Jack jumped.

"To—to the Devil's Elbow?" he exclaimed. "The place mentioned by Daft Dave when he was dying?"

Locke nodded.

"The poor fellow may have been only rambling," he said; "but, on the other hand, there may have been something in what he said. Anyway, I'm not going to leave a stone unturned——"

"I'd like to come with you, guv'nor," pleaded Jack. "I'm really quite fit again now——"

"You're an insatiable, bloodthirsty young ruffian!" laughed Locke, shaking his head. "I should have thought that wallop on the head would have kept you quiet for a week! No, Jack, you're not fit, and you're going to have a dose of shut-eye, whether you like it or not—and that is most beautifully that! So toddle off, and let's hear no more about it!"

Jack grunted discontentedly, but did not venture to argue. He knew it would be a waste of time, anyway.

He turned on his heel and left the room, and Locke grabbed at Pyecroft's arm.

"Come along, old thing," he said. "It's close on midnight now. We can make use of Sir Merton's car, and get out on to the Pretoria Road in next to no time. Got your automatic?"

Pyecroft nodded, staring at the detective.

"More trouble, I suppose!" he growled.

But Locke did not answer.

A minute or so later they had started out in Sir Merton's high-powered car, which soon began to eat up the miles of road en route to the Devil's Elbow.

A pale moon beamed down upon them as they sped along. Somewhere ahead of them an owl hooted weirdly——

* * * * *

"Here we are, then!" said Locke, at last, as the great car purred to a standstill, and the detective leapt down from the wheel, followed by Pyecroft.

The moon still rode clear in the violet skies, but a breeze had sprung up, and the inspector shivered slightly.

Locke had swerved the car round a bend in the road and down into a dip, where he parked it under the shadow of a cliff.

They made their way up the hill again on to the main road. Just ahead of them the gigantic shelf of rock known as the Devil's Elbow jutted out over the edge of the road itself. It was uncommonly like a human elbow in shape—grotesquely large though it seemed.

All around was absolute silence, save for the hum of insects in the long, brown grass. The road stretched ahead like an ever-narrowing, tortuous ribbon, dropping at last like a loose string over the misty horizon, and merging into the violet shadows of the night.

"This way," muttered Locke.

Daft Dave, in his dying statement, had given no particulars as to the exact spot where the "ebony box" to which he had referred was to be found. He had spoken only of the Devil's Elbow.

But Locke shrewdly guessed that the box—if, indeed, it actually existed—would be hidden in one of the score or so of cave-like crannies which abounded around the base of the gigantic cliff.

And now he darted about, turning the bright rays of an electric-torch into every hole and corner, till at last he came to an abrupt stop.

Pyecroft, who had kept rather closely behind the detective, almost sprawled headlong as Locke, without any warning, suddenly dropped to one knee, propped his torch against an angle of rock, and began poking about with his finger at a tiny pile of loose pebbles and stubbly grass.

"Funny place to hide anything!" muttered Pyecroft.

"A jolly good place!" said Locke. "It's on the loneliest part of the main Pretoria road, and is both secret and obvious, if you follow my meaning. And after all, the obvious hiding place is nearly always the last one to be searched!"

He ferreted about again for a moment or so, Pyecroft watching him interestedly, but unable to see much on account of the prevalence of deep, purple shadows cast by the overhanging rocks, shadows which the rays of the torch, bright though they were, could not altogether disperse.

"I don't know," muttered Locke, at last. "But I rather fancy these pebbles and this grass have already been disturbed—and quite recently, too! The rearrangement of them is so darned careful as to be unnatural, and—— Ah, what's this?"

He broke off as his hand, without any warning, dropped into a sort of hidden cavity. A moment later he withdrew it, and Pyecroft gave a grunt of satisfaction as he saw that Locke was holding up a small but exquisitely-fashioned box, wrought, apparently, out of solid ebony.

"The ebony box!" whispered Pyecroft exultantly. "Daft Dave told the truth, then, after all!"

But Locke did not answer. He was too engrossed in his examination of the tiny box, the lid of which he eventually contrived to fling back.

Then he turned the rays of the torch into the interior, and immediately gave a gasp of chagrin and dismay.

"Empty!" he muttered.

"He's tricked us!" exclaimed Pyecroft.

"It's not Daft Dave who's tricked us!" came the startling rejoinder a moment later. "Someone else must have been here before us, and—— Why, there you are, man! See, just where you're standing! Those footmarks—they're fresh, and——"

Pyecroft glanced quickly down as Locke turned the rays of the electric-torch upon the ground close by.

Outlined before them were unmistakable prints in the soft, clay-like soil—prints of a man's hobnailed boot.

"He's got here before us, whoever it was," exclaimed Pyecroft, "and only recently, too!"

"But what on earth did he leave the empty box behind for?" mused Locke, half to himself.

Pyecroft grunted.

"Maybe he found it as we've found it!" he retorted. "Empty!"

Locke did not answer, and Pyecroft's eyes roved over the footprints again thoughtfully.

"I'll swear those prints are freshly made," he said, at last. "Matter of hours——"

"Probably only of minutes," was Locke's startling rejoinder, and Pyecroft jerked up his head in astonishment.

"What makes you think——" he began, and then broke off, catching up his breath.

Printed and published every Monday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and Abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole agents for South Africa: The Central News Agency, Ltd. Sole agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for Canada, The Imperial News Co., Ltd. (Canada).—Saturday, August 29th, 1925.

Somewhere ahead of them a sound had broken the stillness—a sound so faint that it might easily have passed unnoticed had not their ears been attuned to catch the slightest noise.

They both listened now, with bated breath, and presently it was repeated—a short, snapping sound, like the breaking of a twig.

"There's a clump of bushes just round the bend of this rock," breathed Pyecroft suddenly. "I noticed it as we came up off the road. Somebody's in hiding there, watching us——"

Again the sound came, and with it another—a steady "thud-thud" that could have only one meaning.

Locke clutched at Pyecroft's arm.

"Come on!" he jerked.

They crept as quickly as they could away from the shadow of the overhanging rock, but were prevented from moving at any great rate for fear of catching their heads against the jagged, black edges overhead.

Getting clear of this at last, they sped round and up the bank into the open field, which was dotted plentifully with clumps of bush, giant ant-heaps, and grotesque, piled-up boulders of stone, standing out like gaunt, silent sentinels of the night.

Here they remained for a moment, and then Pyecroft gave a gasp.

"There he is—see?" he exclaimed, gripping Locke's arm, and at the same time pointing excitedly away to his right.

Locke turned swiftly.

Out of the darkness a figure had suddenly appeared, half-crouching.

Locke raced forward, Pyecroft following suit. But even as they did so, a cloud drifted across the face of the moon, and, in that peculiar, abrupt way characteristic of the African night, the light was completely blotted out, leaving pursuer and pursued enfolded in a mystifying, purple fog.

"Confound!" moaned Pyecroft. "That's about dished us!"

They raced on, however, in the direction in which they had last glimpsed the mysterious fugitive.

Locke was some yards ahead of Pyecroft, who pounded heavily in his wake, till he was tripped up by a loose slab of rock, half-hidden in the stubble. He crashed headlong with a roar of impotent rage.

But he was up again in a moment and racing onward once more. Locke had momentarily disappeared, but flashed again from the shadow of a gigantic boulder, and, with a call to Pyecroft, sped onward, veering sharply to the left.

Obscured as it was by the drifting, heavy clouds, the moon's light was completely shut off; but now the clouds began to break up, and, a minute or so later, the great white disc was again beaming down upon the lonely veldt.

Pyecroft drew level with Ferrers Locke, who had come momentarily to a standstill. The whole scene seemed utterly deserted save for themselves, and the inspector groaned in chagrin.

"That's done it!" he growled. "Got clean away, of course!"

"Looks like it," nodded Locke, disappointedly. "I caught a glimpse of him just a second before the cloud passed over the moon, and dived after him; but he eluded me again, and—Jove, look there!"

He broke off with a gasp, pointing away to his left.

(Who is this mysterious fugitive? Will he succeed in giving Ferrers Locke the slip? Next Monday's powerful instalment will tel you. Mind you read it.

BILLY BUNTER'S BOLT!

(Continued from page 20.)

"Hold on!" said Coker.

"Anything more we can do for you, old man?" asked the captain of the Remove politely.

"Yes. I've got to get back my van, and I've got to carry these things. You fags can make them up into a bundle for me."

The fags grinned, but did not stir.

"I suppose you've hired that car?" said Coker.

"Just that."

"I'll take it over until I find my van."

"And what are we going to do without it?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Walk back to Reigate—or anything you like." said Coker. "Don't bother me about it."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Dear old Coker," said Wharton, laughing. "We're not handing over our car. We'll give you a lift if you like."

"I don't want a crowd of cheeky fags with me."

"Right ho! Good-bye, Coker!"

Harry Wharton & Co. walked back to the car. Horace Coker stared after them. Once more it was time for the skies to fall, for, only too clearly, these cheeky fags weren't going to hand over their hired car at Horace Coker's lofty command. Once more the skies, however, appeared quite unmoved.

"I—I'll have a lift in the car!" gasped Coker at last.

"You don't want a crowd of cheeky fags with you, you know!" chuckled Nugent.

"I'll put up with you!" growled Coker.

"Good! But we can't put up with you! Good-bye!"

The Famous Five packed themselves into the car again. Far away in the distance, across intervening meadows sloping down the hillside, they had a glimpse of the painted roof of a caravan. There was little, or, rather, no doubt that that was Coker's caravan, annexed by Bunter, and Wharton pointed it out to the chauffeur. Horace Coker struggled with his feelings, and came up to the car.

"Look here," he said, "I want a lift."

"Keep on wanting, old bean!" said Bob Cherry politely.

"I must get that caravan back!" gasped Coker. "I—I can't leave these things here, or carry them under my arms. Look here, give me a lift, will you?"

"Say please!"

"I—I—I——" stuttered Coker.

"Good-bye!"

"Please!" gasped Coker.

"That's better! Shove in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace Coker shoved in, and the car started, rather closely packed. By lane and road and byway the Reigate chauffeur tracked down the caravan that had been seen across the fields in the far distance.

Sometimes the party lost sight of it behind trees and hedges and grassy knolls, but always they sighted it again, and it was soon clear that the caravan was at a halt.

The car turned at last into the lane where Coker's van stood. The horse, tethered to a fence, was nibbling at the grass by the roadside. The door stood wide open.

"Bunter!" shouted Bob Cherry.

The juniors expected to see the Owl of the Remove appear. But he did not appear.

The car halted and they turned out. Horace Coker made a rush for his van, and fairly bolted into it headlong. He wanted to get at Billy Bunter, and he wanted to get at him quick.

"After him!" exclaimed Wharton. "He mustn't quite kill Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors rushed after Coker.

As they reached the van Coker's disappointed face glared out of the door.

"He's not here!"

"My hat! Then where is he?"

"I—I—I'll smash him! I'll break every bone in his body when I find him!" roared Coker.

No doubt it was fortunate for William George Bunter that Coker did not find him.

Where was Bunter?

The caravan was empty—and there was no sign of the Owl of the Remove. It was clear at last that Bunter was gone. He had borrowed Coker's caravan to escape from Coker. At a safe distance he had tied up the horse and deserted the van—it was of no further use to him. Had it been provisioned for a journey, perhaps Bunter would have retained possession and gone caravanning on his own. But the caravan larder was empty—and no doubt that was the reason why the caravan was empty, too.

"Well, he's gone!" said Harry Wharton at last. "We've got to look farther for the fat bounder!"

"Can't be far away," said Bob Cherry. "He must be making for somewhere, and we'll follow on his trail till we find him."

"That's the programme!" agreed Wharton. "There's your van, Coker! Jolly time to you, old chap! Don't trouble to thank us!"

"I wasn't thinking of thanking you, you cheeky young sweep! I've a jolly good mind to lick you all round."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if you cackle at me I'll do it!" roared Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker rushed at the hilarious Removites. Any fellow but Coker might have been supposed to have had enough that morning in the scrapping line. But Coker seemed to want more.

He got more. There were a few wild and whirling moments, and then Horace Coker found himself in his van, hurled there in a heap. He sat up and blinked dizzily after a disappearing motor-car, from which five merry Greyfriars juniors waved their hands in farewell.

Harry Wharton and Co. had finished with Coker of the Fifth. But they were still hunting Bunter.

THE END.

(How long will this hunt for Billy Bunter continue? How long will it be before the great William George has to answer for his fatuous folly? These questions are answered in the next grand complete story of Harry Wharton and Co., the title of which is "BUNTER CAUGHT!" Don't miss it, chums.)

TO AND FROM YOUR EDITOR!

WORTH WAITING FOR!

MAGNETITES will agree that these topping cut-out, stand-up photos were well worth waiting for. Aren't they just splendid? With this week's four—Strudwick, Douglas, Tate, and Quaife—my readers now have as fine a collection of famous cricketers as it is possible to get anywhere. I'd just like to have a peep into your private dens. Gee! I bet those cut-outs look fine. Aren't you proud of them? Rather! I can hear your enthusiastic reply beforehand. Now that I've kept my word by you in connection with this colossal Free Gift scheme I want to ask you a small favour. It's this. Do your utmost to enrol a new reader every week. If you do that you will, indirectly, be doing yourself a good turn, too. The more new readers I get, the more Free Gifts you get. Savvy?

WHAT TO DO!

Some of you, perhaps, have missed previous instructions on what to do with these ripping free gifts. It's quite a simple matter. First separate the two figures by cutting along the white line dividing the green bases, then bend the cardboard where it says "Fold here." It will at once be seen that natural supports are given to the photos, enabling them to stand up anywhere in a realistic manner. Easy, isn't it?

THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!

Magnetites need little encouragement from me to buy a copy of the world-famous "Holiday Annual" when September the First comes round. Most of you know what excellent value it offers. Long, complete stories of Harry Wharton & Co., Tom Merry & Co., Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, thrilling adventure stories, sensational motor yarns, plays, poems, gorgeous coloured plates, and splendid photogravures, are but a few of its brilliant attractions. See that you secure this monster volume of fun and fiction before it is sold out. There's bound to be a great rush to secure it. Remember the date:

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1st.

Next Monday's Programme.

"BUNTER CAUGHT!"

By Frank Richards.

Another ripping story of Harry Wharton & Co., telling of their further adventures at "Bunter Court"—or, to be more truthful, Combermere Lodge, during the summer vacation.

"THE VELDT TRAIL!"

A powerful long instalment of this amazing mystery yarn, featuring Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake.

"NEW BOYS!"

A special "Herald" Supplement, devoted to he subject of "New Boys," by Harry Wharton & Co.

MAGNET PORTRAIT GALLERY NO. 1.

The first portrait in this new feature is of Harry Wharton—the captain of the Remove.

Isn't that a bumper programme? You can't find a paper to beat it, I'll wager. Trot along to your newsagents now and make certain of a copy of the MAGNET—the old boys' paper which is always new. Cheerio, chums, till next week.

YOUR EDITOR.