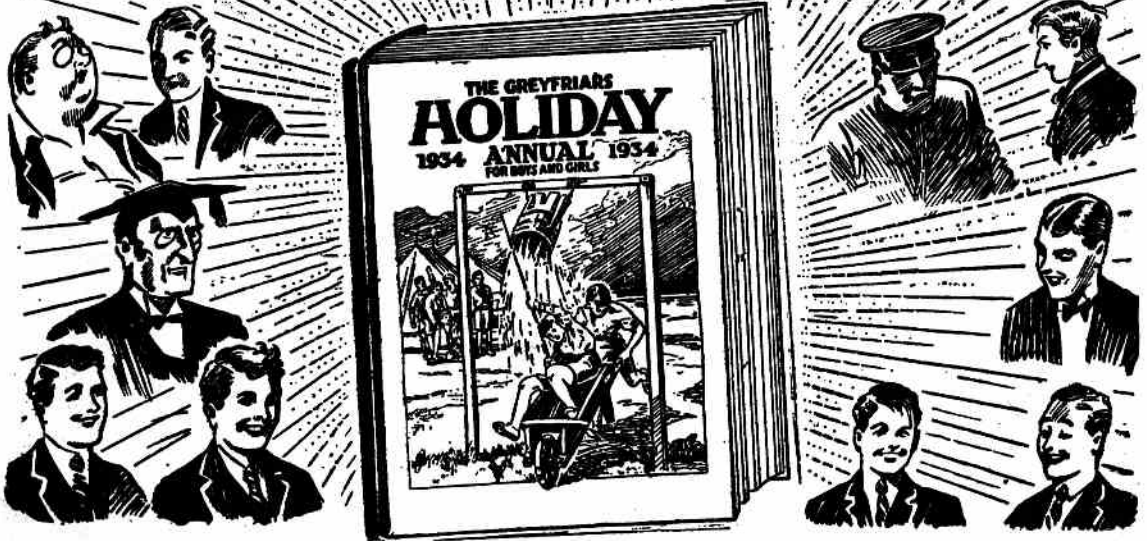


"The SECRET of the HOLIDAY ANNUAL!" By Frank Richards.
Thrilling Yarn of School Adventure.

The MAGNET 2^D



The SECRET of the HOLIDAY ANNUAL!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Back to School!

"My treat!" said Billy Bunter. Five fellows grinned.

There was rather a crowd on the platform at Lantham Junction. It was the first day of the new term, and there were a good many Greyfriars fellows, and a good many fellows going back to Highcliffe School. The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove—still brown from their summer hike—had arrived from various quarters, and gathered in a cheery group, waiting for the train for Courtfield, and the school. And Billy Bunter, also brown from hiking, and looking as fat as ever—or fatter—rolled up and joined them, and, of course, drew their attention to the station buffet.

With ten minutes to wait for the Courtfield train, Bunter's idea was to fill those minutes to the very best advantage—which could be done by filling William George Bunter himself. "You can get jolly good cakes here," Bunter explained. "I've tried them. My treat. Come on you fellows!" Instead of accepting that generous offer and coming on, Harry Wharton & Co. remained where they were, and merely grinned.

They knew their Bunter! Just as clearly as if the fat Owl of the Remove had told them so, they knew that W. G. B. was going to fill up with expensive cakes till the bell rang to announce the train, and then was going to rush off, leaving the trifling detail of the bill to be dealt with by someone else!

That was the way Bunter stood treat! Being treated on those lines came too expensive. The chums of the Remove had had some, so to speak!

"I say, you fellows, ain't you coming?" demanded Bunter. "I tell you I've sampled the cakes, and they're ripping! Do come!"

"Money's tight!" grinned Bob Cherry.

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"That's all right. It's my treat! I've got lots of money. I haven't bought my ticket to Courtfield yet. I mean, I've got lots of tin, besides my fare—"

"If you haven't got your ticket, fat-head," said Harry Wharton, "you'd better go and get it!"

"Lots of time! Do come and have some cakes!" urged Bunter. "Dash it all, you fellows stood a lot of the expenses while we were hiking. Why shouldn't I stand treat?"

"Look for Mauleverer," suggested Frank Nugent. "Mauly's a millionaire, and can afford to let you treat him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter.

"Or Smithy," said Johnny Bull. "Smithy's somewhere about, and he's got lots of oof. He can afford it."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"The treatfulness of the esteemed Bunter is a boot on the other leg," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, shaking his head.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll jolly well ask some other chaps!" hooted Bunter. "I jolly well won't treat you fellows now, so yah!"

And, giving up the Famous Five as a bad job, the fat Owl rolled away to look for easier victims. Skinner and Snoop and Stott of the Remove were at hand, and Billy Bunter blinked at them dubiously through his big spectacles. Skinner was an uncommonly sharp fellow, and not easily caught. But Bunter had a hopeful nature. He tapped Skinner on the arm.

"Late in the season for bluebottles to be about," remarked Skinner. "And that's a jolly fat one!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Buzz off!"

"If you fellows like to step into the buffet," said Bunter, with dignity, "I'm standing treat."

"Gammon!" said Stott.

"Rats!" said Snoop.

And they walked on. But Skinner stopped. He knew his Bunter as well as the other fellows did, and was about

the last fellow in the Greyfriars Remove to be imposed upon. Nevertheless, he stopped and gave the Owl of the Remove an agreeable grin.

"Good man!" he said. "Let's!" And Skinner strolled into the buffet with Bunter, whose fat face now wore a cheery smile of satisfaction.

The cakes at Lantham were good. That was a fact. Bunter had room for a good many of them. So had Harold Skinner! Skinner, in point of fact, had come back for the new term in a very stony state. Away from school, and the sharp eyes of masters and prefects, Skinner had been "backing his fancy," and some "gee-gees" that had been absolutely certain to win had unaccountably turned out losers. Skinner had his railway ticket in his pocket—and not a single coin of any description with it. In these circumstances it would have been extremely difficult for Bunter to spoof him into paying for those cakes! But Bunter was not aware of the circumstances, and he had great faith in his own astuteness. Bunter devoured cakes, and Skinner, not slow to follow his example, devoured cakes also. There was quite a run on the cakes.

"Coming!" called out Skinner suddenly, exactly one minute before the bell was due to ring for the train, answering an imaginary call.

"I say—" began Bunter, with his mouth full of cake.

But answer there came none. Skinner had vanished!

"I say, Skinner!" yelled Bunter, in alarm.

Skinner was gone!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

The bell rang.

Billy Bunter cast an alarmed blink round through his big spectacles. A waiter was at his fat elbow. "Seven-and-six, please!" said the waiter.

It is much to be feared that, had it been possible, Billy Bunter might have scooted out of the buffet without paying. But it was not possible! He

had intended to scoot at the ring of the bell, and leave it up to Skinner! Skinner had scooted a minute before the bell, and left it up to Bunter! And Bunter had three half-crowns and three pennies for all his worldly wealth. Slowly—though it was time for the train—Bunter drew out those three half-crowns. Still more slowly he handed them over where they belonged. Then, in a state of dismay, he rolled out of the buffet.

Fellows were crowding for the train. There was hardly time now for Billy Bunter to cut off and get a ticket. That mattered little, as he had now no cash to offer in exchange, and it was very improbable that the man in the booking-office would have given him one for nothing. Most fellows in Bunter's position would have felt quite stranded. But William George Bunter had his resources. He was one of the many unthinking people who seem to think that railway companies are made to be "bilked." Three pennies, it was certain, would not pay his fare to Courtfield—and Bunter had to get to Courtfield. So he joined the crowd going for the train, and hoped for the best.

"I say, you fellows, make room for a chap!" squeaked Billy Bunter, as he spotted the Famous Five taking possession of a carriage.

"Roll in!" said Bob Cherry. Bunter rolled in.

"Look here, there's no room!" It was Skinner's voice. He was already in, with Snoop and Stott.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter. "No room!" repeated Bob. "Right-ho! I'll drop you out, if you like, Skinner! Step this way!"

"Oh, rats!" "I say, you fellows, chuck him out!" gasped Bunter. "The beast was pulling my leg in the buffet, and he left me to pay for the cakes—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner. "Didn't you want to pay for your own treat?"

"Beast!" "You fat frump!" said Johnny Bull. "Did you try that game on Skinner? You hadn't much chance of getting by with it."

"Spent your railway fare?" grinned Bob. "If you have you'd better hop out. They collect the tickets here before we start."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner, greatly tickled at the idea of Bunter having "blued" his railway fare in the buffet.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" groaned Bunter. "You rotter, you jolly well pulled my leg—"

"Weren't you trying to pull mine?" chuckled Skinner. "Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Billy Bunter sat down beside Skinner. It was rather a squeeze in the crowded carriage. Not that Bunter was likely to remain there. As he had no ticket and no means of paying for one, the ticket-collector was certain to hook him out before the train started—quite an amusing prospect to Skinner, but not at all amusing to Billy Bunter.

"Tickets, please!" It was a voice coming along the platform.

And at that moment Bunter's fat hand, as he squeezed beside Skinner, came into contact with a small oblong of cardboard sticking out of the ticket pocket of Skinner's coat.

Billy Bunter's fat brain did not often work quickly. Now it worked like lightning. In a split second that oblong of cardboard was gone from Skinner's

ticket pocket and was crumpled in Billy Bunter's fat hand. And Billy Bunter, greatly relieved and reassured, sat with a cheerful countenance to wait for the ticket-collector to look in.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Whose Ticket?

TICKETS!" A peaked cap was put into the carriage doorway. Harry Wharton & Co. showed up their tickets, and Billy Bunter, with great equanimity, produced one also and passed it over. Snoop and Stott followed his example. Skinner felt in his pocket.

"Tickets, please!" "Wait a minute!" grunted Skinner. "I've got it here."

Finger and thumb groped in vain in the ticket pocket of Skinner's coat. That pocket was empty.

Skinner was certain—or almost certain—that he had placed his ticket there. But it was not there; and he felt in his other pockets. It was not there, either.

The collector was growing impatient. Doors were already slamming on the train. He had to get through.

"Ticket—ticket!" he barked. "I must have dropped it!" exclaimed Skinner. "I know I had it here. Can you fellows see it on the floor?"

Hidden somewhere among the pages of the Holiday Annual lie clues to the whereabouts of hidden plunder. No wonder all Greyfriars are afire to read this famous volume!

"I can't," said Snoop, without looking.

"Blessed if I can!" said Stott, taking the trouble to look, but without result.

"Dropped it in the buffet, perhaps," suggested Billy Bunter, blinking at Skinner through his big spectacles. "You ran out in rather a hurry."

"Oh, my hat!" said Skinner. It was possible enough, for he remembered that he had stuck the ticket rather carelessly in the little pocket of his coat. "I say, my man, I had my ticket—these fellows saw it—"

"Look here, my lad, show up your ticket; you're wasting time!" said the man at the door. "This train's got to start."

"I've dropped it somewhere—"
Grunt!—from the collector. He had had experience of railway travellers who had "dropped" their tickets. He did not believe all he heard from passengers in such circumstances.

"Well, dropped or not, if you've not got a ticket, I can find you one," he said. "Half-a-crown, please!"

Skinner, standing up with a worried face, went desperately through all his pockets; then he scanned and scrutinised the floor. Snoop winked at Stott. Snoop's private opinion was that Skinner had never had a ticket, and was going through a sort of comedy—really the only resource of a passenger detected in the act of "bilking" the railway.

"I can't wait any longer! Will you pay, or get out!" rapped the voice at the doorway.

"I tell you I had my ticket!" howled Skinner. "I'm jolly well not going to pay twice, I know that!"

"Then step out, please! You can't start without a ticket."

"I've got to get to school—"
"You've got to pay for a ticket if you travel on this line. Are you paying, or getting out?"

"I must have dropped it in the buffet—"

"The company will refund the money if you find the ticket. I can't waste any more time. Step out, please!"

"Look here—"

"Get out of the carriage at once!" Skinner, crimson with rage and mortification, stood undecided. He had been entertained at the prospect of Bunter being turned out for trying to travel without a ticket. Now it dawned upon him that such an experience was really not entertaining at all. It was, in fact, horrid.

"Look here, you fellows," he gasped, "lend me—"

But there was no time for the other fellows to come to the rescue, if they felt disposed so to do. Possibly they didn't; for a half-crown was a half-crown to a schoolboy. And Skinner was the fellow to forget to settle such a little debt, and to make a point of forgetting again if he was reminded of it. Anyhow, there was no time, for the railway official, quite convinced by this time that he had to deal with a particularly impudent "bilk," grasped Skinner by the arm and jerked him out of the carriage.

Slam! went the door. The man spoke to a porter, who edged Skinner away from the train. He had no chance of getting on again without a ticket. He lacked the necessary cash to buy one. He stood dismayed on the platform, stranded. Doors slammed, the engine shrieked, the train moved. There was a fat chuckle from William George Bunter as it glided out of Lantham Station.

"He, he, he!" "Poor old Skinner!" sighed Snoop. "Bit thick, if you ask me, travelling without a ticket! I've known him to pull it off; still, a fellow can't expect to get by with it every time."

"He, he, he!" "He said he'd lost his ticket," said Harry Wharton.

"Yes, Skinner says lots of things," smiled Snoop. "What the dickens else is a fellow to say when he's nabbed?"

"He, he, he!" "Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you going off like an alarm clock for, Bunter?" demanded Bob Cherry, with a suspicious look at the Owl of the Remove.

"He, he, he! Serve him jolly well right!" grinned Bunter. "Shocking thing bilking a railway company! Not the sort of thing I'd do!"

"You've done it pretty often, and landed into trouble for it!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"
"And where did you jolly well get a ticket from?" demanded Johnny Bull. "I don't believe you had one when you got in!"

"You saw me hand over my ticket!" "Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Nugent. "Did Skinner drop his ticket, and Bunter pick it up?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"
"You fat villain—" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Was that Skinner's ticket you gave up, Bunter?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, staring at the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Certainly not!" said Bunter warmly. "I hope I'm not the fellow to bag

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Pon Loses No Time!

SMACK!
Skinner yelled and dropped.
Skinner was "pinching" a ride.

Left stranded at Lantham, without a railway ticket or the means of purchasing one, Skinner was rather in a fix.

He had to get to Greyfriars. His box was going on without its owner. It was nine or ten miles to walk—which was a good walk even for a fellow who liked walking—and Skinner hated it. So when he started to walk the distance, naturally Skinner looked for a chance of a lift. That chance came in the form of a lorry rolling down the Lantham road. Skinner hung on behind, unseen by the driver, and did a mile at quite good speed. Then he discovered that there was a man in the lorry as well as the driver, and that man discovered Skinner and smacked his head.

Skinner sat in the dusty road while the lorry continued its journey. The lorry disappeared, and Skinner picked himself up and dusted himself.

Skinner was in a fearful temper by this time. He had "tumbled" to what had become of his railway ticket. In the confusion of the moment in the railway carriage it had not occurred to him; but since then he had had time to put two and two together. He had lost a ticket, and Billy Bunter had been unexpectedly in possession of one. Skinner owed this weary walk to the Owl of the Remove, and he was simply yearning to behold Bunter again and thump him right and left. But Bunter was far out of reach at present, and Skinner could only tramp on, nursing thoughts of vengeance.

Tramping on, Skinner had the pleasure—or otherwise—of seeing the crowded train pass on the embankment above the road. The lorry, by a shorter cut, had been ahead of the train. Skinner stared after the train as it vanished towards Courtfield, and gritted his teeth. Billy Bunter was on that train, travelling at Skinner's expense, while Skinner was walking. That was an exasperating thought to Harold Skinner.

Honk, honk, honk! sounded behind him, and Skinner looked round, in the faint hope of getting a lift from a motorist.

Then his face brightened.

He knew the three fellows in the car. As a black sheep, rather given to smoking surreptitious cigarettes and backing gee-goes, Skinner had a good deal in common with Pon & Co. He was one of the few Greyfriars fellows with whom they were on more or less friendly terms. Whether they felt friendly enough to give him a lift in their car Skinner felt by no means certain, but he was going to try it on, anyhow.

He waved his hand as the car came up.

"Hold on!" he shouted.

Gadsby and Monson stared at him. They knew Skinner, but had no desire for his company, and certainly would not have stopped on his account. But Cecil Ponsonby called to the chauffeur to halt.

"Look here, what are you stoppin' for, Pon?" asked Monson. "We're not pickin' up Greyfriars cads, I suppose?"

"Skinner's a pal, more or less," answered Ponsonby.

"Oh, rot!" said Gadsby. "Let's get on. We don't want him."

"I do!" answered Ponsonby.

The car stopped and Skinner came up to it. He adopted his most ingratiating

another fellow's ticket! Besides, Skinner diddle me over those cakes! I had to pay seven-and-six! I don't believe Skinner ever had a ticket! Careless ass, too! What can a fellow expect if he leaves his ticket sticking half out of his pocket? Of course, he dropped it!"

"You don't believe he had a ticket, and you saw it sticking half out of his pocket!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You bagged Skinner's ticket!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Nothing of the kind! It wasn't sticking out of his pocket when I sat down beside him, and I never hooked it out! Besides, I shall pay for it, of course! I hope I'm honest!" said Bunter with dignity.

"He—he—he—he hopes he's honest!" babbled Bob Cherry.

"Hopeful nature," remarked Nugent. "If you fellows were as honourable and straightforward as I am you'd do!" said Bunter. "I shall pay Skinner for that ticket as soon as I receive a postal order I've been expecting for some time. Not that I had it, you know! I know nothing whatever about it; and my own belief is that Skinner never had a ticket at all. He's that sort."

"What is that chap doing outside a home for idiots?" asked Stott.

"Beast!"

"Poor old Skinner!" grinned Snoop. "And poor old Bunter when Skinner hears about this! Skinner will skin him!"

"The skinfulness will probably be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a chuckle.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's that Highcliffe lot!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, glancing from the window of the train.

The line was in sight of the Lantham road. On that road a motor-car was gliding within a stone's throw of the passing train. In the car sat three fellows well known to the chums of the Remove—Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School. Pon & Co. were going back to school in style; not in a common or garden railway train, but in Pon's pater's handsome car.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked from the windows at the three Highcliffians, with whom they had had so much trouble during the summer hike. Ponsonby had hunted the hikers all through the holidays to get hold of Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual, and the mysterious secret it was supposed to contain. But he had had no luck. That valuable volume was in Bob's box, going back to Greyfriars with him. Bob leaned from the carriage window and waved his hat.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he bawled.

Pon & Co. started, and stared from the car. The Highcliffians stared up at the faces in the train, and Pon's eyes gleamed at the sight of Bob Cherry's ruddy and cheery countenance.

"That crew!" said Monson.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Do you still want that jolly old Holiday Annual, Pon?" roared Bob. "I'm taking it back to Greyfriars with me. Call there for it if you want it, old bean."

The train rushed on, leaving the Highcliffians in their car behind.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I don't want a rotten row with Skinner over a paltry half-crown. I say, which of you is going to lend me half-a-crown till my postal order comes?"

There was no answer.

Apparently nobody was going to lend Billy Bunter half-a-crown till his postal order came.

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manner as he greeted the Highcliffians. Skinner was very keen to get a lift for the eight or nine miles to Courtfield, especially in such a comfortable car. Gadsby and Monson gave him the briefest of nods. They had plenty of affairs of their own to think of on the first day of the term, and did not want to be bothered by Skinner. But Pon's manner was unexpectedly polite, indeed cordial. Which was surprising, for Pon was anything but good-natured, and likely to leave either friend or foe in the lurch.

"Walkin' it?" asked Ponsonby pleasantly. "Hop in if you'd like a lift, Skinner. Plenty of room."

"You're awfully good!" said Skinner, feeling almost grateful—not quite, perhaps, for the kinder emotions were not strangely developed in him. But certainly Pon's cordial welcome relieved him very much. "That fat blighter Bunter bagged my ticket at Lantham, and I had to hoof it."

Gadsby and Monson exchanged a glance, but Pon was careful not to express the supreme contempt he felt for a fellow who had no money in his pockets.

"Jolly glad we spotted you, then!" he said. "Here you are! Get on with it, Jervis. We can take you as far as Courtfield, Skinner. You can walk from there, or pick up the motor-bus."

"Thanks no end!" said Skinner, settling down comfortably as the car started. "Had good hols?" he went on, by way of conversation.

"Oh, more or less," said Pon. "We had a motorin' tour most of the time, the three of us, and wound up at Gaddy's place in Bucks. We dropped on a Greyfriars crowd, hikin', several times."

"Wharton's lot?" asked Skinner. "I heard they were hiking it. Cheap," he added, with the sneer that came as naturally to his face as a cheery grin to Bob Cherry's.

"That's the crew!" said Monson. "Row with them?" asked Skinner. "I hope you mopped them up, if you did. I never could stand that crowd."

"The fact is, I was rather huntin' them," said Ponsonby. "I was after somethin' that that ruffian Cherry kept in his rucksack."

Skinner opened his eyes wide.

"What on earth?" he asked.

"A Holiday Annual," said Pon.

"Pulling my leg?" asked the mystified Skinner. "You can buy a Holiday Annual if you want one, I suppose. I believe they're only five bob now."

"I'd have given Cherry five quids for that one—in fact, I offered it," said Ponsonby. "There's something in it—a sort of secret. Of course, I wasn't going to pinch a fellow's book, but I wanted to borrow it to look at. I still want to. To tell you the truth," went on Pon, with an air of great frankness, "somebody I know happened to scribble somethin' in that book when it wasn't in Cherry's hands, and I want to see it."

"He'd let you see it if you asked him. He's a hooligan, but he's good-natured," said Skinner, more and more puzzled.

"He'd do a good turn to a friend or an enemy. That's the sort of ass he is."

"Well, I rather got on his wrong side. It's no good askin' him. But look here, Skinner, I know that he's taken that book back to school with him. Ten to one he'll leave it about his study. A Greyfriars man could borrow it."

"Easily!"

"And lend it to another chap for a day or two," said Pon.

Skinner laughed.

"I'd do more than that for this jolly lift you're giving me," he said. "Cherry will lend me the book to read if I ask

him, and I'll let you have it for a couple of days, anyhow."

"Good man!" said Pon, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction. "Only don't mention it to Cherry. He would refuse if he knew I wanted it."

"Not a word!" said Skinner. "That will be all right. I'll wangle it to-morrow somehow."

"Why not to-day?" asked Pon. "Look here, I can get an exeat from my Form master Mobby. The little snob will do anythin' for me. You needn't take the trouble to come over to Highcliffe."

"I couldn't!" said Skinner. "Quelch isn't quite so easy-going as your beak."

"That's all right; I'll bike over," said

Bob Cherry, whom Skinner honoured with his dislike.

"I can manage it," said Skinner, at last. "Rely on me, old bean. There's no prep first night of term, and a fellow can dodge out of the House after lock-up. Say about eight."

"Right as rain!" said Ponsoby. "Come over to Highcliffe next half-holiday, Skinner, old chap. Tea in the study and a little game afterwards—what?"

"What-ho!" agreed Skinner.

The car ran on to Courtfield, the talk running on the entrancing subject of gee-gees, and the odds on or against the same. The Highcliffians, as well as Skinner, had had hard luck in backing

"I shall spot it next time!"

Gadsby and Monson looked doubtful. But Ponsoby had no doubts, and he arrived at Highcliffe School in a very cheery mood.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Hunting Bunter!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, frowned.

On the first day of term every beak had plenty of matters on his hands, and was liable to be a little rushed, a little worried, and perhaps a little tartaric.

Mr. Quelch also had a special cause



"Tickets, please!" As the ticket-collector was about to put his head into the carriage doorway, Bunter's fat hand came into contact with a small oblong of cardboard, sticking out of the pocket of Skinner's coat. In a split second that ticket was gone from Skinner's pocket and was crumpled in Bunter's fat hand!

Ponsoby. "You can cut out of school after dark for a few minutes. I'll be waiting in that little lane beside the Cloisters, and you can drop the book over to me."

Harold Skinner looked at the dandy of Highcliffe long and hard. Skinner was a keen, not to say suspicious, fellow. He realised that there must be something more in this than Ponsoby had explained. He knew now that Pon had stopped for him, and offered him that lift in the car, in order to ask him to do that very thing. Pon was going to cycle over from Highcliffe, and wait secretly in the dark for Skinner to hand him the volume. It was to be kept carefully from the owner of the book.

Obviously, Pon had some very powerful motive, though what it was, was a deep mystery to Skinner. Certainly his story of something scribbled in the book by somebody he knew did not account for all this.

Skinner was feeling extremely curious. At the same time he was quite willing to oblige Ponsoby—all the more because it was up against

their fancies, and Skinner gathered that they were all in a rather hard-up state.

It was a congenial topic, and passed the time quickly, till Courtfield was reached. There Skinner was dropped, to walk to Greyfriars, and the car ran on to Highcliffe School with Pon & Co.

Pon smiled at his friends.

"Got it at last!" he remarked. "I've hunted that dashed Holiday Annual all through the hols, and never managed to snaffle it! Now it's just goin' to drop into my hands without any trouble. Cherry can have it back, and welcome, when I've done with it," he chuckled, "and that will be when I've snooped the fifty pounds reward!"

"If there's anythin' in it—" said Gadsby.

"I know there is!"

"Queer that those Greyfriars fellows never spotted it, then!" said Monson.

"They're a set of duffers! More brains in my little finger than in all their silly skulls lumped together!" said Ponsoby contemptuously.

"Well, you had hold of the book once, and never spotted anythin' in it."

of annoyance, in the fact that one member of his Form had not yet arrived, that member being Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Some fellows arrived later than others, and so long as a fellow arrived before the gates were locked, with a reasonable explanation of his late arrival, all was well. But Mr. Quelch had very little faith in that particular member of his Form, and a strong suspicion that the Bounder was prolonging his holiday a little on his own account. Neither was he prepared to believe a single word that the Bounder might offer in excuse or explanation. At the same time he was aware that Smithy was too astute to give him any good reason for refusing to credit it.

It looked as if the scapegrace of Greyfriars was beginning the term with the cheeky impudence his Form master was accustomed to—a very annoying thought to Henry Samuel Quelch.

And so quite a trivial incident was liable to make Mr. Quelch frown—and he frowned at the sight of one Remove

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fellow chasing another along a passage, evidently with deadly intent.

Hunter and hunted sped along the passage, without observing the master of the Remove for the moment.

The hunter was Harold Skinner! The hunted was Billy Bunter!

It was some hours since the two of them had arrived, Skinner not very late after Bunter, owing to his lift in Pon's car.

Skinner was not the fellow to forget an injury—though he had a remarkably short memory for benefits. After that feed at Bunter's expense at the refreshment-rooms at Lantham Junction, Skinner might have forgiven the episode of the lost ticket, but his was not a forgiving nature. During the hours they had been back at school Bunter had led the life of a hunted hare. Skinner had told all the Remove that he was going to give Bunter the kicking of his life, and was going to keep on kicking him till he refunded the sum of half-a-crown for the ticket.

As Bunter was not going to refund it till he received his celebrated postal order, it looked as if Skinner would have to keep on kicking the fat Owl for the term of his natural life!

Again and again Bunter had dodged the vengeful Skinner. Now he was dodging him again—unsuccessfully! Skinner, in hot chase, was running him down, and Billy Bunter bolted along the passage like a fat rabbit, gasping for breath, and looking over a fat shoulder to see whether Skinner was near enough to kick him. And Mr. Quelch, stepping into that passage, beheld the chase—and frowned!

"What is this—" began Mr. Quelch.

He got no further.

It was quite natural for Bunter to

blink back over his fat shoulder as he ran, with Skinner so close behind. But it was unfortunate, for it prevented him from seeing Mr. Quelch in time. The consequence was that Bunter charged on blindly, and butted into his Form master with a truly terrific concussion.

"Ooooooh!" gasped Mr. Quelch. He staggered against the wall, gasping. Bunter reeled. Skinner, spotting the Remove master, stopped dead.

Mr. Quelch grasped Bunter by the collar.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Leggo, you beast! Wow! I'll kick your shins! You beastly rotter, leggo!"

"What?" gasped Mr. Quelch. Then the Owl of the Remove discerned that it was his Form master that he had charged into.

"Oh lor!" he gasped.

"Bunter!" almost roared Mr. Quelch.

"I—I didn't!" gasped Bunter. "I—I wasn't! I mean, I didn't know it was you, sir! I thought it was some other rotter—"

"Boy!"

"I—I—I—"

"Skinner!" Holding the dismayed Owl by the collar, Mr. Quelch fixed his gimlet eyes on Skinner. "Why were you chasing this absurd and foolish boy in such a manner?"

"Only a—a—a lark, sir—" stammered Skinner.

"A certain amount of exuberance of spirits," said Mr. Quelch, "is excusable on the first day of term. But there is a limit, Skinner—a strict limit! I have received a very painful shock! Both of you will follow me to my study!"

"Oh crikey!"

A dismayed Bunter and an equally

dismayed Skinner followed the Remove master to his study. Mr. Quelch gasped as he led the way. A charge with Bunter's weight behind it was far from being a light matter. Mr. Quelch in his younger days had played football, and had received many a charge. But his footballing days were over—long over! Mr. Quelch was breathless, and very much disturbed, and his temper, already a little tart, was not improved in the very least!

In his study he selected a cane. Bunter blinked apprehensively at that cane through his big spectacles.

"On the first day of term," said Mr. Quelch, "I am extremely reluctant to inflict punishment on any boy of my Form."

The two juniors were even more reluctant than Mr. Quelch! But, reluctant as he was, Mr. Quelch proceeded to do that very thing!

"But something like order," added Mr. Quelch, "must be maintained, even on the first day of term! Bunter!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"You will bend over that chair!"

Whack!

"Yaroooooooop!"

"Skinner, you will bend over that chair!"

Whack, whack!

Skinner, as the apparent aggressor, had two swipes! Both of them were tough.

Mr. Quelch pointed to the door with his cane.

"Leave my study," he said, "and let there be no disorder!"

Two wriggling juniors left Mr. Quelch's study. They wriggled down the passage. Skinner, as he wriggled his way, gave Billy Bunter looks that were positively tigerish.

He was waiting till they reached the end of the passage—out of hearing of Quelch's study. Then Skinner was going to avenge the affair of the lost ticket, and those two swipes, at the same time. His foot fairly itched to land on Bunter's tight trousers.

But the Owl of the Remove was wary. It was not difficult to guess Skinner's thoughts. Near the end of the passage Billy Bunter ceased to wriggle his way along like a fat worm, and made a sudden bolt. He went round the corner like an escaping rhinoceros—with no time, of course, to ascertain first whether there was anybody round that corner. And there was! Coker of the Fifth Form was coming along—and Bunter met him in full career. Coker of the Fifth gave a howl as Bunter barged him to the wall, dashed past, and disappeared.

"My hat!" gasped Coker. "The cheek of these fags—barging into a Fifth Form man! My hat! Here's another of them!"

Coker had been too taken by surprise to grab Bunter before he flew. But he was ready for the next fellow who came flying round the corner. He grabbed Skinner by the neck.

"Ow!" gasped Skinner. "Leggo! Oh!"

"Barging over Fifth Form men—what?" said Coker genially. "Sort of game—what? Well, that sort of game won't do! When a fag barges into me, I pull his ears like that—"

Skinner gave a fiendish yell.

"And smack his head, like that—"

"Yaroooooh!"

"And tap his head on the wall, like that—"

"Whooooop!"

"And then kick him, like that!"

Skinner yelled as he flew from Coker's boot.

Coker of the Fifth walked away, with



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a chuckle, feeling that he had well upheld the dignity and importance of the Fifth Form. And Skinner, clothed with aches and pains as with a garment, did not take up the trail of vengeance again, and Billy Bunter had a respite. The wicked ceased from troubling, and the weary Bunter was at rest—for a time!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
A Doughnut for Skinner!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Buzz off, Bunter!"
"But, I say—"
"How did Bunter know we had doughnuts?" asked Bob Cherry. "It's really like magic."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Take one, and take your hook at the same time!" said Bob.
Billy Bunter rolled into Study No. 13 in the Remove, and took a doughnut—but he did not take his "hook." The Famous Five of the Remove had gathered in Bob's study to "jaw" till it was time to go down to Hall supper. They discussed the holidays, the new term, Remove football, and doughnuts, at the same time.

Bob Cherry had unpacked, among other things, a huge bag of really delicious doughnuts—and his friends rallied round him for the disposal of the same. Lord Mauleverer dropped in, and Squiff and Tom Brown and Peter Todd and Hazeldene and Ogilvy, so the study was fairly full.

Fortunately the bag of doughnuts was a very large one indeed. Tom Redwing looked in, to ask if any fellow had seen anything of Smithy, who had not yet arrived. But Tom was dragged in, and joined in the feast. And then Bunter happened. There was not much room for Bunter—but he got in, and got at the doughnuts. He took one, as asked to do—he took another without bothering to be asked—and then he took another, and another. They went down almost like oysters.

"I didn't know you had doughnuts, old chap," said the Owl of the Remove, with his mouth full. "But I'll have some, as you're so pressing. I was going to say—"

"I've heard that Loder of the Sixth thinks he's going to play football for the school!" remarked Peter Todd.

"That dud!" said Squiff. "If Wingate puts him in, it'll show that Greyfriars wants a new captain."

"I say, you fellows—"
"Have another doughnut, Bunter!" said Bob. "Have two! Have three! Put 'em all in together."

"Eh? Why?"
"Then you won't be able to talk for a minute or two."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I came here to say—"

"I wonder why Smithy's not back?" said Tom Redwing. He seemed to be a little worried about his chum.

Bunter blinked at him.
"What rot!" he said. "Smithy never was a back! He's a forward! Smithy isn't going to play back this season, is he, Wharton?"

"Fathead!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"
"We're going to win matches this term," said Harry. "We shall have a jolly strong team—"

"Hear, hear!"
"I shouldn't mind keeping goal for the Remove," said Billy Bunter. "I shouldn't have time to play in all the matches, of course—but I'd do the best I could for you, Wharton! I fancy the ball wouldn't get past me in goal!"

"It couldn't!" said Bob. "There wouldn't be room!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Beast! I mean, I say, old chap, I came here to tell you about Skinner! He's after you!"

"Skinner after me!" ejaculated Bob. And even the topic of Soccer was dropped, in the general surprise.

"Yes," said Bunter. "After your scalp, old chap! I heard him tell Snoop he was coming up to your study. He's going to whop you. He says he's going to begin this term by putting you in your place."

"Gammon!"
"He says you can't really scrap, and you haven't as much pluck as a bunny rabbit!" said Bunter. "He told Snoop he was going to mop up the study with you, and make you jolly well cringe."

Bob Cherry stared at Bunter. He was quite aware that Skinner did not waste any affection on him, and he had no doubt that Skinner would have loved to "whop" him, had he been able to do so. But it was very surprising if Skinner fancied that he could.

"You blithering Owl!" said Bob. "I don't believe Skinner said anything of the kind, and I'll jolly well bump you for telling crammers."

"The bumpfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Let us all bump the esteemed and idiotic Bunter togetherfully!"

"Hear, hear!"
"I say you fellows, you wait a minute!" said Bunter. "Skinner won't be long—I saw him on the stairs when I came up. I got out of his way. He's making a rotten fuss about that rotten half-crown ticket. After I stood him a magnificent spread at Lantham, you know! I can tell you he's coming here after you, Bob."

"Well, if he is, let him come!" said Bob, with a rather warlike look. "I'll give him a doughnut if he comes—taken externally."

"He won't come here," said Mark Linley. "Skinner never comes to our study. It's only Bunter's gas."

"Oh, really, Linley—"
"My hat!" Squiff, who was near the door, glanced out into the Remove passage. "Here he comes!"

"Skinner?" exclaimed Bob.
"Yes. He's passed his own study. Looks as if he's coming here," said the Australian junior. "Fancy Skinner hunting for trouble!"

Bob Cherry rose from his seat on the coal-box, and picked up a fat, juicy, jammy doughnut. If Skinner was coming to that study, it looked as if Bunter's tale was true—for Skinner certainly was not on visiting terms with any fellow in the study. And if Skinner was hunting trouble, Bob was prepared to give him all he wanted, and a little over.

Footsteps came up the passage, and stopped at the open doorway of Study No. 13. Bob Cherry stepped towards the door—all eyes on him and on the juicy doughnut in his hand. Skinner stepped in.

"You here, Cherry?" he said, as he came.

"Here!" answered Bob cheerily.
"Right on the spot, and ready for you, old bean! Have a doughnut?"

Squash!
"Urrrrgggh!" gurgled the startled Skinner, as the jammy doughnut squashed and squelched over his features. "Gurrrrrgh! Oooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Have another?" asked Bob, as Skinner clawed wildly at his jammy, sticky face.

"I'll bung the next one down your neck."
"Urrrrgggh!"

"He, he, he!" from Billy Bunter. "I

say, old chap, pitch into him! Kick him! Barge him out, old fellow! Give him beans! He, he, he!"

"G r o o o o o h!" gasped Skinner. "Wharrer you up to, you mad idiot?" Skinner clawed jam and gurgled: "Are you potty, you silly ass?"

"My dear man, if you come to a fellow's study hunting for trouble, what's the good of grousing at the trouble?"

"He, he, he!"
"You howling idiot!" spluttered Skinner. "I came here to borrow a book!"

"Wha-a-at?"
"You—you—you—" articulated Skinner, clawing jam.

"Didn't you come for a row?" gasped Bob.

"No, you bithering dummy!" howled Skinner. "I came to ask you to lend me your Holiday Annual, you shrieking maniac!"

"Oh, my hat! Bunter, you fat villain—"

"I—I say, you fellows, don't you believe him!" exclaimed Bunter. "I heard him tell Snoop he was coming up here—"

"You fat, spoofing octopus—"
"Kick him out, old chap! I say, you fellows, that beast has been after me ever since we got in—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"And I distinctly heard him say—"

Yaroooooooooh!" yelled Bunter, as Bob Cherry grasped him with one hand and a doughnut with the other, and plastered the latter over a fat face. "Urrrrgggh!"

Bump!
Billy Bunter landed in the passage. Skinner, jammy and furious, stepped out after him. But Bunter did not wait for Skinner. He bounced up almost like an indiarubber ball and fled for his fat life.

"Sorry, old bean!" gasped Bob. "That fat villain pulled my leg! He said you were coming here for a row, and you never come here, so I thought—"

"Can you think with a brain like yours?" howled Skinner. "Look at my face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. Skinner's face was rather entertaining to look at in its present state.

"Sorry," said Bob. "I say, did you say you wanted my Holiday Annual? I'll lend it to you with pleasure."

Bob was quite sorry for that unfortunate mistake, and anxious to make any amends he could.

Skinner calmed down. He did not want a scrap with the heftiest fighting-man in the Greyfriars Remove, and he did want that Holiday Annual.

"You silly ass!" he said. "That fat scoundrel put you up to this because I'm after him for pinching my railway ticket. Never mind; I can get a wash, I suppose. I'd like to borrow your Holiday Annual. A fellow in the hols told me about a story in it that I want to read."

"Right as rain!" said Bob.
Bob had already unpacked that celebrated volume, which had accompanied the Greyfriars hikers all through the summer hike, and showed a good many signs of the same. It was on the study bookshelf, and Bob reached it down and handed it to Skinner.

"Mind if I keep it a day or two?" asked Skinner.

"Not at all; only mind you don't lose it. That's a rather special Holiday Annual," said Bob.

"Right—and thanks!"
Skinner, jammy, but successful, left the study. The fellows in Study No. 13

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soon forgot Skinner, and certainly not one of them had the remotest suspicion of what he wanted that Holiday Annual for. Staying only to get a wash—which he badly needed—Harold Skinner slipped quietly out of the House and made his way in the deep dusk to the Cloisters. In Bob Cherry's study, Harry Wharton & Co. continued their cheery talk, never dreaming for a moment that their old enemy, Ponsonby of Highcliffe, was "at it" again, and that this time his success seemed absolutely assured.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Smithy in a Scrape I

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, set his lips hard with annoyance.

The autumn dusk was thickening on the banks of the Sark, a mile up the river from Greyfriars, and Smithy was rather glad of the dusk, which enabled him to dodge out of sight unrecognised. The Head of Greyfriars and Mr. Quelch would have been surprised had they known where Smithy was at the present moment, long hours after he ought to have reported himself to his Form master.

Dropping over the fence of the Three Fishers Inn, Smithy was about to walk down the towpath to the school, when a portly figure loomed up on the shadowy bank, and Smithy promptly backed out of sight in a mass of bushes along the fence. The portly figure was that of Inspector Grimes of Courtfield, and Smithy did not want that official gentleman to spot him. A word from him to a Greyfriars beak, and the result would have been rather serious for Smithy.

Hidden in the bushes, the Bounder waited impatiently for Mr. Grimes to pass. But Mr. Grimes did not pass. He came on slowly, and more slowly, and finally stopped only a few yards from the hawthorn-bush that hid Herbert Vernon-Smith. Smithy wondered for a moment whether Mr. Grimes had spotted him as he dodged. But the portly back was turned to him; Mr. Grimes was staring up the river in the direction of Popper's Island, and for some minutes he did not stir.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth. He was anxious to get going, but he could not venture to show up while Mr. Grimes was there. It was altogether too risky.

With his usual recklessness, Smithy, instead of going on to the school with other fellows, had walked off to the Three Fishers, up the river, to renew old disreputable acquaintances there.

After the long, careless freedom of the holidays, the coming restraints of school irked him. Smithy was always up against authority, and at the beginning of the term more so than ever. And he found it amusing to pull Quelch's leg. So long as he dodged in at the school before the gates were locked for the night, some story of a lost connection on the railway would see him through; and the Bounder was quite unscrupulous in his customary warfare with the beaks.

Even the fact that Quelch would not believe him amused the Bounder. Quelch, believing or unbelieving, would have to take his word, and the less he believed, the greater the score over him. So Smithy had left himself just time to scud down the towpath, cut across the fields, and reach Greyfriars School before lock-up; and then Mr. Grimes happened, and Smithy skulked in cover, savagely impatient, while precious minutes flew.

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What the dickens Grimes was up to was a mystery. There he stood, portly, slow-breathing, and staring into the dusk of the river.

A low mutter of a voice came to the Bounder in the silence; Mr. Grimes, in the belief that he had the shadowy towpath to himself, was speaking to himself.

"Where? Somewhere—but where? Weeks and weeks of it, and nothing found! Can the rogue have thrown it into the river, after all, as he said? It begins to look like it!"

Then Smithy saw Mr. Grimes shake his head.

Irritated as he was, the Bounder grinned. Those murmured words told him why the inspector was there.

Smithy remembered the smash-and-grab raid at Courtfield at the end of the last term. A man who rejoiced in the name of Micky the Sprat had smashed the window of Mr. Lazarus' shop in the High Street and bolted with a bag crammed with jewellery. He had been caught, but the plunder was not on him, and he had stated that he had lost it in the river, which he had attempted to swim. Nobody believed that statement; and there was a long search for the bag of jewellery—watches, rings, brooches, tiepins, all sorts of things, said to be a thousand pounds in value.

Smithy understood now that the search must have been going on all through the summer holidays, and it was the quest of Micky the Sprat's plunder that had brought Mr. Grimes up the bank of the Sark again. The insurance company had offered a reward of fifty pounds for the recovery of the plunder; but no doubt Mr. Grimes was thinking rather of his duty and of the credit to be acquired, than of the reward. Anyhow, it was clear that the portly inspector was after that lost bag of jewellery rather like a dog after a bone.

It was equally clear that Mr. Grimes was quite beaten. If he had not found Micky the Sprat's plunder yet, it looked as if he never would find it.

Whether he found it or not, Smithy cared little. But he wished from the bottom of his heart that Mr. Grimes would get on and look for it—anywhere he liked, so long as he left the coast clear for the breaker of bounds.

"But where?" he heard Mr. Grimes mumble again. "All over the common; along the river; in Sir Hilton's woods; on the island; miles and miles and miles, and at any spot—"

Mr. Grimes gave a shrug of his portly shoulders. The great stretch of ground covered by the smash-and-grab man in his flight made it almost hopeless to think of recovering the plunder from its hiding-place so long as the man now in prison refused to speak.

"Might be pitched anywhere—in any bush. May be found when the leaves fall!" Mr. Grimes mumbled again.

And to Smithy's horror he turned round and stared directly at the hawthorn-bush that hid the Bounder, as

if wondering whether that very bush was the one into which Micky the Sprat might have pitched the bag of plunder, The Bounder crouched motionless.

Whether Mr. Grimes, if he saw him, would report the circumstance at the school, he could not be sure. If Mr. Grimes considered that his duty, it was certain that he would do it. The close proximity of the Three Fishers Inn showed why Smithy was on that spot. Unpleasant thoughts of the sack on the first day of term came into the Bounder's mind.

His eyes gleamed in the dusk. The darkness was falling fast, but it was not too dark for Mr. Grimes to recognise him if he saw him.

The inspector stirred again. He came slowly and ponderously towards the bushes, parted some of the branches and peered amongst them.

Certainly, Mr. Grimes could have had little hope of seeing a bag of plunder there. His action was rather in the way of leaving no stone unturned.

But though he did not see anything like a bag of plunder, he had a glimpse of a crouching figure, and he gave a sharp start and uttered an exclamation.

"Who—what—"

The startled officer plunged into the hawthorns. Naturally, as a police-officer, he was going to ascertain why some unknown person was crouching there out of sight.

Smithy shut his teeth hard. He was quite desperate now. He had only himself to blame; but he was not going to be reported at Greyfriars, and flogged or sacked on the first day of term, if he could help it. Without pausing to think—had he paused, even the head-strong and reckless Bounder might not have acted as he did—he drove a clenched fist at the plump inspector as he plunged into the hawthorns.

Crash!

Taken quite by surprise by the sudden jar in his plump ribs, Mr. Grimes staggered, caught his foot in trailing roots, and sat down, with a heavy bump.

"Oooh!" gasped Mr. Grimes.

He spluttered breathlessly. Vernon-Smith did not lose a split second. As Mr. Grimes sat down, Smithy bolted from the hawthorns and raced away down the towpath. His back was to Mr. Grimes, and the dusk shrouded him.

The inspector, staggering to his feet, had a momentary glimpse of a shadowy, running figure, and that was all. It vanished in the dusk—and heavy, tramping footsteps sounded in pursuit. Forgetful of Micky the Sprat and his hidden plunder, Mr. Grimes ran in hot chase of the unknown who had knocked him over in the hawthorns.

Vernon-Smith was good at running; but he had never put up such speed on the cinder-path as he put up now! It was not merely a flogging, not merely even the "sack," that he had to think of now—he had struck an officer of the law, and was liable to legal penalties.

The bare thought of the consequences of capture spurred the Bounder into amazing speed, and he ran like a deer. Mr. Grimes had no chance in such a foot-race.

His heavy footsteps died away behind the Bounder. In a few minutes Smithy was safe—and he turned from the towpath and sprinted across fields and meadows, hardly slackening speed till he was in the road that ran past the gates of Greyfriars. There he stopped, at last, panting for breath. Mr. Grimes, in a winded state, was still gasping on the bank of the Sark.

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Skinner hung on behind the lorry, unseen by the driver. After doing a mile at quite good speed, the Greyfriars junior discovered that there was a man in the lorry, as well as the driver. The next moment a hand shot out and Skinner crashed back into the road, while the lorry continued its journey.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Quite a Surprise!

BY gum!" murmured the Bouncer.

It was a great relief to have escaped Mr. Grimes. Compared with that, nothing else mattered so much. He had not been recognised—he could not have been—and Grimey would never know who had knocked him over. The awful vision of a bench of magistrates, with stern faces, faded from the Bouncer's mind.

In place of that came the thought of his headmaster and his Form master. He was out of the worst of it; but he had still to face the trouble his recklessness had brought on him.

The school gates were closed and locked. If he went in at the gates he had to ring up Gosling to open them.

He dismissed that thought from his mind as soon as it entered. Mr. Grimes did not know who had punched him, but he must know that it was a boy—that it was a schoolboy. He must know that that schoolboy had fled in the direction of Greyfriars. It was possible, at least, that he might look for him in that direction. If a schoolboy rang for admittance, so soon after that assault on Mr. Grimes, it was quite probable that two and two might be correctly put together.

Vernon-Smith did not go near the gates. He turned from the road, into the little lane that ran by the old Cloisters. In term-time he had broken bounds often enough, by way of the old Cloister wall—and it was easy enough to get in there.

Once in, it would be difficult for anyone to prove that he had not come in earlier, along with crowds of fellows, at the gates. The fact that he had not reported his arrival would be set down to his usual careless impudence—at least, he hoped so. "Six" from Quelch

for such impudence, did not matter very much to the hardy Bouncer, in comparison with what he was likely to get if it was discovered that he had punched an officer of the law.

In a very few minutes the astute Bouncer had his plans out and dried. At that hour the gates were locked and the House closed—all juniors were supposed to be in House bounds. But he could get into the House easily enough, by some door or window, unseen—and who was to prove that he had not been there longer? He would walk into Hall to supper with the rest—to be called over the coals by Quelch for not reporting his arrival! That was all! Smithy was not feeling alarmed. He had great faith in his own astuteness and cool sagacity.

Stepping quietly along in the thickening darkness, he stopped at the wall of the Cloisters. And then, suddenly, he gave a start, and his heart thumped as he realised that he was not alone in that solitary, shadowy spot.

A glimmer of metal showed him a bicycle leaning against the old stones, and the next moment he spotted a figure standing by it. A moment more, and there was a whispering voice:

"I'm here, Skinner!"
Smithy stared blankly.
He knew the voice of Cecil Ponsonby, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, well enough.

He had spent some days in the holidays at Gadsby's place in Bucks, with Pon & Co.—a visit that had ended in a shindy, and in Pon being knocked spinning by the Bouncer. After that, he had wound up the holidays hiking with Harry Wharton & Co., and forgotten all about Pon. Now he was reminded of him—in the most surprising way. If he had thought of Pon at all he would have supposed that Pon was at Highcliffe School; but here he was, with his bicycle leaning against the wall,

and apparently in wait for Skinner of the Remove—naturally, in the circumstances, taking the Bouncer's shadowy, half-seen form for Skinner's!

"You needn't have got out—you were going to drop it over the wall!" went on Ponsonby's whisper. "Anyhow, have you got it?"

The Bouncer, after the first stare of utter astonishment, grinned. He found this rather amusing.

"Hand it over, old bean," went on Ponsonby. "I'll give you a bunk up the wall again, if you like! I didn't hear you gettin' out! Hand it over—I suppose you've got it?"

He peered rather anxiously at the supposed Skinner. Then he gave a gasp of surprise.

"That's not Skinner—"
"Not a little bit!" grinned the Bouncer. "Better apologise, old bean—it's rather insultin' to take a fellow for Skinner."

"S-Smithy!" stuttered Pon.
"Exactly."
"You meddlin' rotter! What are you doin' here?"

"Just what I was going to ask you!" said the Bouncer coolly. "Have you sneaked out of bounds, or has dear old snobby Mobby given you leave?"
"Mind your own bizney!"

"Oh, quite! But I want to know what you're hanging about my school for, you Highcliffe cur!"
"Find out!"

"I'm goin' to," said the Bouncer. "You're up to some dirty trick, as usual—I don't need tellin' that! What's the game?"

Ponsonby breathed hard. He was utterly disconcerted by the sudden and unexpected appearance of the Bouncer. He had selected that spot as a very solitary one—and, unfortunately for him, the Bouncer had done the very same thing!

"I'm here to speak to Skinner," he said at last sullenly. "I suppose I can speak to Skinner if I like."

"Why not?" grinned the Bounder. "Speak to him as long as you enjoy his conversation. I've never found it interestin' myself. But what was he goin' to hand over?"

Ponsonby trembled with rage. At every moment he expected Skinner to appear on the spot, to hand over that borrowed Holiday Annual.

"Will you mind your own business?" he snarled.

"I'm makin' this my business, dear man!" said the Bounder mockingly. "Whatever you're up to here, Pon, you're not gettin' by with it. And I'm goin' to see that you don't!"

There was a sound of rustling ivy on the inner side of the old wall. Someone was clambering up there.

Ponsonby started. He knew that Skinner was coming! His eyes gleamed with rage and hate at the Bounder! If he could have handled him, Pon would have knocked him headlong at that moment. But he had a painful remembrance of his attempt to handle the Bounder in the holidays.

A head and shoulders loomed against the shadowy sky over the Cloister wall. An arm appeared, and a hand holding some object. There was a low whistle.

"You there, Pon?" came a cautious whisper. It was Skinner's voice.

Skinner peered down into the shadows. "Here!" breathed Pon.

And with a sudden movement he shoved past the Bounder and held up his hand to Skinner's. The next moment, Vernon-Smith grasped him by the back of his collar and flung him over sprawling on the ground. Smithy's hand shot up, grasping the object in Skinner's.

To his amazement, it was a book—a heavy book!

"Thanks!" said the Bounder coolly.

Skinner jumped so suddenly that he almost fell from the wall.

"Pon—who—is that, Smithy?"

"Quite."

"I didn't know you were with Pon—what—"

"Oh, we're frightful pals!" said the Bounder, laughing.

"What's up?" Skinner peered into the darkness below. "Are you ragging, or what? Look here, give Pon that Holiday Annual, Smithy—I'm lending it to him."

"The Holiday Annual!"

"Yes—I'm lending it to Pon!"

"Great gum!"

Why Ponsonby should have come, secretly, after dark, to take a borrowed book over a wall, would have puzzled Smithy; but he would certainly not have felt called on to interfere, had that been all.

But that was not all! Smithy had hiked with the Greyfriars

hikers, and he had heard all about Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual, and the secret that Ponsonby believed it to contain. Camping with the hikers, Smithy had looked through the book more than once to see whether he could spot the secret—if any!

So now he understood!

It was hardly likely that, if Skinner had been lending his own Holiday Annual to Pon, the transaction would have been carried out in this secret and surreptitious way. Smithy would have been much less keen than he was if he had not guessed how matters stood.

He gripped the volume very tight, and burst into a laugh.

"So you're lending Pon a Holiday Annual, Skinner?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Your own?"

"Eh? Yes!"

"Not one you've borrowed?" asked the Bounder mockingly.

Skinner started.

"Eh! No! Why?"

"Not borrowed or pinched from Bob Cherry?" grinned Smithy.

Skinner stared down at him blankly.

"Blessed if I see how it matters to you," he said. "Suppose I did borrow it from Bob Cherry, you needn't worry about it, Smithy, that I can see."

"Pon hasn't told you why he wants it, then!" chuckled Smithy. "Well, he's not getting it! Oh! Would you, you rotter?" Ponsonby, scrambling up, hurled himself suddenly at the Bounder, snatching at the volume. Holding it behind him with his right hand, Smithy hit out with his left, catching the dandy of Highcliffe under the chin.

Ponsonby went down with a thud and a howl.

"Have some more?" grinned Smithy. "Lots more where that came from, Pon! You rotten cur, you've been after this book through the hols, and now you've tricked a Greyfriars man into getting hold of it for you. Get out! You're not wanted here."

Ponsonby yelled as the Bounder's foot caught him. He scrambled up, crimson with fury, grabbed his bicycle from the wall, and ran it down to the road. Pon had failed once more, and all he could do was to get back to Highcliffe—and he started in a hurry. He had had enough of the Bounder's boot!

Vernon-Smith laughed, and, still holding the Holiday Annual, he climbed the wall and dropped into the Cloisters.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Pulling Quelch's Leg!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Smithy!"

"You're jolly late!"

"Seen Quelch?"

Hall supper was nearly due, but, fortunately, not

quite, when the Bounder of Greyfriars looked in at Study No. 13 in the Remove.

All the fellows there gave him welcoming looks. Tom Redwing was greatly relieved to see that his chum had arrived before last call-over. Harry Wharton & Co. were on unusually amicable terms with the Bounder since they had hiked together at the end of the holidays; and they were glad to see him again. To

their surprise, Vernon-Smith, as he stepped into the doorway of the study, had a thick volume in one hand, and in the other held the arm of Harold Skinner—the latter wriggling very uncomfortably, but making no resistance in Smithy's sinewy grip.

Smithy gave the crowded study a cheery nod.

"Glad to see you men lookin' so merry an' bright!" he drawled. "Yes—I'm a bit late—lost a connection on the line and had to wait donkeys' ages for another train."

"That's for Quelch, I suppose?" said Harry Wharton rather dryly. Redwing coloured a little; he hated to hear his chum lie.

"Exactly!" agreed the Bounder coolly. "I'm not asking you men to believe it."

"Think Quelch will?" asked Squiff.

"I hope so! You never know your luck."

"But what the thump are you draggin' Skinner around for?" asked Lord Mauleverer, changing the topic.

"I thought Cherry might like to speak to him. He's returning your Holiday Annual, Cherry."

Smithy tossed the thick, heavy volume on to the study table. Bob looked at it, at Smithy, and at Skinner, puzzled.

"What the dickens—" he exclaimed. "Have you done with it already, Skinner? It's not half an hour since you borrowed it."

"Skinner hasn't done with it," said Smithy. "Have you, Skinner?"

"Let go my arm!" snarled Skinner.

All the fellows were giving the new arrivals surprised attention now. They could see that something had happened. Obviously, Skinner had come to Study No. 13 very unwillingly.

"Blessed if I make this out," said Bob. "If Skinner hasn't done with the book, he's welcome to keep it. What the dickens have you butted in for, Smithy?"

"I've taken that jolly old Holiday Annual away from Skinner," explained the Bounder. "You see, he borrowed it to lend to another chap, not to revel in high-class literature himself—didn't you, Skinner?"

"You rotter!" hissed Skinner.

"Well, no harm in lending it to another chap," said the amazed Bob. "Any man at Greyfriars is welcome to have it to read."

"Any man at Highcliffe, too?" grinned Smithy.

Bob Cherry started.

"Highcliffe! What do you mean? Skinner can't have been over at Highcliffe after lock-up."

"If the mountain can't go to Mahomet, old bean, the jolly old prophet can go to the mountain! Skinner hasn't been to Highcliffe—but a Highcliffe man has been over here—hasn't he, Skinner?"

"Let go my arm, you cad!"

Bob Cherry could only stare.

"To cut an interestin' story short," yawned the Bounder, "I got in by way of the Cloisters—and barged into Pon waitin' there—"

"Pon!" exclaimed all the Famous Five together.

"Just Pon! Dear old Pon! Jolly old Pon! And Skinner heaved into the offing with that jolly old volume for Pon! So I took the liberty of buttin' in, as you express it, and that's that!"

Bob Cherry's brow darkened.

"Skinner—" he began.

"Well, what about it?" snarled Skinner. "You lent me the book, didn't you? Why shouldn't I lend it to



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a pal outside the school? Think Ponsonby was going to pinch your five-bob annual?"

Bob looked at him.

"You never said you wanted it for Ponsonby! That Highcliffe cad put you up to this, to get hold of it. And you must have jolly well known that it wasn't merely a Holiday Annual that he wanted—he's got plenty of money to buy one if it was that! You must have known he specially wanted mine. You sneaking rotter, you said you wanted to read a story in it, that a fellow had told you about in the hols—and you wanted it to hand over to that Highcliffe cad."

"Where's the harm?" muttered Skinner.

"You knew that Pon was up to something, as he must have told you to keep it dark that you were getting it for him," said Harry Wharton.

"I don't see the harm, all the same."

"The esteemed Skinner does not know the history of the mystery of the absurd Holiday Annual!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "He does not know the terrific and improbable value of that entrancing and ridiculous volume. Nevertheless, he has acted snake-in-the-grassfully."

Bob picked up the Annual.

"Thanks, Smithy," he said quietly. "I'm no end obliged to you for keeping it out of Pon's paws. He'd have had it this time, and no mistake! Skinner,

you rotter, I know you don't know why Pon wanted it, but it's no excuse for pulling my leg, and handing over my property to that Highcliffe cad! Push him over here, Smithy!"

"Pleased!" said Smithy.

He gave Skinner a shove, and Pon's pal lurched into the room, stumbled, and landed on his hands and knees.

Immediately Bob Cherry grasped him by the collar with his left hand. With his right he lifted the Holiday Annual.

Bang!

"Leggo!" shrieked Skinner. "You rotter—yaroooh!"

Bang!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on next page.)



Come on, you footer fans, fire in your queries! "Linesman" is never happier than when he's dealing with problems of interest to the Soccer enthusiast. Address your letters to: "LINESMAN," c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

WHEN can a footballer be said to have put through his own goal? This is a question on which I have received several letters recently, and I am not surprised that the query should be put to me. The newspapers which give details of big football matches so often differ in their names of goal scorers. Already this season several full-backs have been debited with goals against their own side, while the same goal has been credited, in other newspapers, to the man who sent in the original shot.

This difference of opinion about goal scorers arises, of course, because there is no law on the subject. The rule-makers of football don't concern themselves with such points as who scored the goal. In this connection the rule-makers are wise.

After all, the point is surely that it doesn't matter who gets the goals so long as they are got.

A FOOTBALL TRAGEDY I

I DO feel, however, that injustice is often done in debiting a footballer with scoring against his own side.

Let us take the case of a full-back who shoots out a leg in a desperate effort to stop a ball which is going straight for the net. He only succeeds, by that desperate effort, in turning the ball off its original course, but it still goes into the net. I can't for the life of me understand why in such a case the full-back should be associated with the football tragedy of scoring against his own side. If the goalkeeper, making a flying leap at the ball, manages to get his finger tips to it, turns it a little, but does not prevent it from going into the net, we do not say that he scored against his own side, do we? Then why should a full-back doing the same thing with his feet, be debited with the goal instead of the player who sent the ball in being credited with it?

My standard of judgment is, roughly, on these lines. If the ball would have gone into goal if a defender had not touched it, and still goes in after he has touched it, then the credit should go to the player making the shot. If a ball is turned into the net by a defender which

would not have gone into the net thus turned, then it is justifiable to say that the player scored against his own side.

Even in such circumstances, however, I don't agree that these incidents ought to be remembered against the player. Let me tell you a story of a famous occasion on which a player scored against his own side. Tom Clay, a great full-back of Tottenham Hotspur, playing in a big Cup-tie against Aston Villa, turned a centre past his own goalkeeper. By that goal the match was lost. At the end of the game Clay was terribly upset. He took his things off in the dressing-room, and flung them far from him one by one, declaring that he would never kick a football again.

This action was noticed by Bert Bliss, a forward of the Spurs, so he proceeded to do the same thing, throwing his boots and his shirt far from him. When asked why he was doing this Bliss replied:

"Well, Tommy thinks he lost the match by putting the ball through his own goal. He no more lost it than I did when I fired over the bar with the goalkeeper lying helpless."

And that, if you think it over, was quite true.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT I

I HAVE a reader at Sheffield who goes to watch the Wednesday every other week. He wants to be a real full-back, and his object in watching the First Division players of the Wednesday—such as Blenkinsop—is to improve his game. "But I can't go to watch and play at the same time," he says. And then he asks the question: "What would you do?"

Well, I think there is much which a young player can learn by watching the experts at the game, but if my young friend is going to be absent from his team on the Saturday afternoon every time the Wednesday are playing at home, then he can't expect to be a regular member of his team. And it is only by playing regularly that he can hope to progress, and eventually catch the eye of club officials in a higher circle.

Having watched the players of Sheffield Wednesday a few times, my young friend should stick to playing; that is, not miss matches with his club, and try to put into practice the points he has picked up. If, without interfering with his regular play, he can still go and watch the experts occasionally, well and good.

Although my friend is a right full-back, I would say to him and to all my young friends, don't develop into a one-footed footballer.

A goodly proportion of the top-class footballers of to-day would be ever so much better if they could kick with equal efficiency with both feet. Get into the habit of using both feet. If you are naturally right-footed take a spell where you will be compelled to use the left foot.

Jimmy McMullan, who is now manager of Oldham Athletic, but who played for Manchester City in last season's Cup Final, spent the whole of his first-class career in a position in which he had to use the left foot, either inside-left or left-half. Yet McMullan, by nature, was a right-footed player. He first got into the Partick Thistle team at left-half because there was no other vacancy. And he spent nearly twenty years in first-class football as a left-footer. But when the necessity came for using his right foot he could do it, because that was his natural foot. So I say to all my readers:

"make the opportunity for using the 'wrong' foot; that is the foot other than the one with which you kick naturally. Thereby you will become a two-footed player."

OFFSIDE TACTICS I

DO you recommend offside tactics? This is a question which comes to me from a reader in Hanley. Those of my readers who are getting on in years will remember the time when offside tactics were commonly exploited. But with the alteration of the offside rule, such tactics were dropped. They are now coming back into the game; there is no doubt about that. And from time to time I think full-backs can throw opponents offside with safety.

It is a dangerous move, however, and one which should not be used other than sparingly, because, of course, it means both backs moving up at the same time.

But if the opposing centre-forward is poaching, trying to keep within shooting distance, then it is good tactics to put him offside. And there is nothing unsporting about such tactics, either. I repeat, however, be careful, less you overdo this offside business and cost your side goals.

"LINESMAN."

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Bang!
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bang!
"Yarooop! Oh, my hat! Oh crikey!
You silly brute—yaroooh!"

Bang!
"Will you let go?" raved Skinner,
struggling frantically.

Bang!
"Whoooooo!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That will do, I fancy!" said Bob,
tossing the Holiday Annual on the
shelf. "You lay a finger on that book
again, Skinner, and I'll give you some
more of the same. Out you go!"

Yelling, Harold Skinner rolled head-
long into the passage. He scrambled
away in a breathless and painful state,
feeling that he had paid rather dearly,
after all, for that lift in Pon's car.

"Trot in, Smithy!" said Bob, when
Skinner was gone. "There's a couple of
doughnuts left, and you must be hungry
after your long journey, and missing
the connections, and waiting for trains,
and so on."

The Bounder grinned and came in.
He sat on the table—there were no
chairs available—and took a dough-
nut. Tom Redwing gave him a rather
anxious look.

"Haven't you seen Quelch yet,
Smithy?" he asked.

"Haven't had that pleasure," said
the Bounder. "The fact is, I'm not
keen to see Quelch's jolly old bulldog
muzzle. The later it's put off, the more
agreeable it is. A fellow can't see too
little of Quelch."

"But surely you've reported to him?"
said Harry Wharton.

"Haven't had time, really! I was
so keen to see you fellows, and enjoy
your improvin' society."

"You'll get six!" said Hazeldene.

"I hope so!" assented the Bounder.

"You hope so?" exclaimed six or
seven fellows at once.

"Yes, rather! You see, if Quelch
gives me six for bein' so cheeky as not
to report my arrival when I blew in,
he may not suspect that I blew in over
the wall after the gates were locked."

"Oh!"

"I really hope that Quelch will fancy
that I've been runnin' round and
barkin' for a couple of hours or so,"
yawned the Bounder. "I'd rather he
gave me six for cheek than handed me
over to the Head for a floggin'."

"What the thump did you stay out
so late for?" asked Bob.

"Lookin' on the wine when it was
red and the billiards-table when it was
green!" explained the Bounder gravely.
"Playin' the silly ox, and askin' for
trouble—a weakness of mine. But I
don't want to start the term with too
big a shindy—"

The Bounder paused. There was a
footstep—a well-known footstep—in the
Remove passage. It was the step of
Henry Samuel Quelch, master of the
Remove. The Bounder's quick ear
caught it at once, and he guessed, easily
enough, that Mr. Quelch had stepped
up to the Remove quarters to inquire
whether anything was known there of
the missing member of his Form!

His pause was only momentary!
Knowing that Mr. Quelch was coming
into the hearing of voices from the open
doorway of the study, Vernon-Smith
went on, in very distinct tones:

"Rather a jest to have been in the
school two or three hours without
reporting to a beak—what? I wonder
whether Quelch thinks that I haven't
arrived yet?"

The juniors, in silence, looked at
one another. The next moment the

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angular figure and stern face of Mr.
Quelch appeared in the doorway.
Smithy, looking in the other direction,
could not see him, and affected to be
quite unaware that he was there.
Quelch's gimlet eyes fixed on the back
of the scapegrace's head.

"Vernon-Smith!" he rapped.

The Bounder gave a start, and turned.
All the fellows in the study had jumped
to their feet.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" said Vernon-Smith.

"I was under the impression, Vernon-
Smith, that you had not yet arrived at
the school!" said Mr. Quelch sternly.

"Indeed, sir?"

"I came to inquire whether any-
thing had been seen of you. I find"—
Mr. Quelch's voice deepened—"I find
that you have been here two or three
hours, Vernon-Smith, failing to report
your arrival, and deliberately keeping
out of sight, or I must have observed
you."

"Oh, sir!"

"I heard what you were saying,
Vernon-Smith, as I came up the pas-
sage, and there is no doubt about it,"
said Mr. Quelch. "You have been
guilty of the insolent impudence I am
only too accustomed to from you. I
shall cane you for this, Vernon-Smith.
Follow me to my study."

"Very well, sir!" said the Bounder
meekly.

Mr. Quelch turned and rustled away.
The Bounder followed him, bestowing
a wink on the fellows in the study as he
went which made it rather hard for
them to preserve their gravity.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob
Cherry.

Keen and wary as he was, Mr. Quelch
had been absolutely taken in by the
cunning Bounder. He had no doubt
whatever that Smithy had arrived at
Greyfriars two or three hours earlier,
and had left him in ignorance of the
fact from careless impudence. Not
for an instant did it cross his mind that
that was exactly what Vernon-Smith
wanted him to think.

In the Remove master's study the cane
was laid on hard. Smithy was starting
the term with "six"—and a very
severe "six." When he left Mr.
Quelch he was wriggling; but he
grinned while he wriggled. At Hall
supper the Bounder sat rather uncom-
fortably, but he was well satisfied in
mind, only too keenly aware that he
had escaped very cheaply indeed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

In Cover!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hook it!"

"But, I say—"

"Scat!"

"I haven't come to tea!" roared
Billy Bunter.

"You haven't?" ejaculated five sur-
prised voices.

"No, you beasts!"

Billy Bunter, in the doorway of
Study No. 1, in the Remove, blinked
indignantly at the Famous Five through
his big spectacles.

It was the following day, and Grey-
friars School was settling down to the
new term. Bunter, however, was find-
ing it difficult to settle down. Skinner
was still on the trail of vengeance.
Skinner's was not a forgiving nature,
and he could not forgive the trick
Bunter had played on him at Lantham
and still less could he forget that
Bunter owed him half-a-crown for the
railway ticket he had "borrowed."

Bunter, as a rule, hated class; but it

was really a relief to get into class
with Quelch. Skinner could not kick
him in class.

But classes for the day were over
now; and Skinner seemed set on spend-
ing his leisure hours in hunting Bunter.

Bunter had done more dodging that
day than in any other day, or week,
in his fat and fatuous career. Bunter
seemed to be getting tired of it, while
Skinner, on the other hand, seemed to
be warming to the work!

Harry Wharton & Co. were at tea
in Study No. 1 when Bunter blew in.
Naturally, they supposed he had come
to tea. For once, he hadn't!

"I say, you fellows, what's a fellow
to do?" asked Bunter dolefully. "That
beast, Skinner, is after me now—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle
at! He's kicked me six or seven times
to-day already!"

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

"Beasts!" howled Bunter. "It's not
funny! He makes out that I pinched
his railway ticket at Lantham. You
fellows know I didn't! You know I
never touched it! You were there, and
saw me with it!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Besides, I'm going to pay for the
ticket!" groaned Bunter. "It's only a
matter of waiting for my postal order.
I've told Skinner that I'm expecting a
postal order."

"He's heard that one before!" grinned
Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think you fellows might stand by
a pal, after all I've done for you," said
Bunter reproachfully. "Didn't I stick
to you all through the hole—"

"Like a leech!" admitted Johnny
Bull.

"Well, look here, you make Skinner
chuck it!" urged Bunter. "I'd jolly
well thrash him, only I hate soiling my
hands on the fellow."

"I shouldn't worry about that," said
Bob Cherry gravely. "You've jolly well
soiled them on something already. A
little more won't hurt."

"Beast! I say, Wharton, as captain
of the Remove, it's up to you to put
down bullying!" pleaded Bunter.

"Oh, quite!" assented Harry. "If
Skinner bullies you I'll stop him fast
enough. He's entitled to kick you for
pinching his railway ticket and diddling
him out of half-a-crown."

"I didn't!" howled Bunter. "And
I'm going to pay the beast when my
postal order comes! Look here, lend
me half-a-crown and I'll pay him now."

"I think it would come cheaper to let
Skinner take it out in kicking."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

"Look out, Bunter!" came Hazel's
voice along the passage. "Skinner's
coming upstairs."

"Oh lor!"

Billy Bunter bolted out of the doorway
of Study No. 1, and raced up the pas-
sage, leaving the juniors laughing.
Bunter was leading a hunted life, but
nobody in the Remove wasted any sym-
pathy on him. The general opinion
was that it was time that William
George Bunter learned to respect the
rights of property. And the fellows
charitably hoped that a few kickings
would help him to learn that valuable
lesson.

The hapless fat Owl scudded up the
passage. He was looking for an empty
study to dodge into.

The door of No. 13 was open, the
study empty. Bob Cherry and Hurree
Jamset Ram Singh were in No. 1 with
their friends, Mark Linley had gone to
tea with Smithy and Redwing in No. 4,
and Wun Lung had gone to see his



As Ponsonby held up his hand, Vernon-Smith grasped him by the back of his collar and flung him over, sprawling on the ground. The next moment the Bouncer reached up for the object in Skinner's hand. To his amazement it was a Holiday Annual. "Thanks!" said Vernon-Smith coolly.

minor, Hop Hi of the Second Form. So No. 13 was vacant, and offered a refuge to the hunted Owl.

Bunter dodged in and shut the door quietly.

Then he sat down in Bob Cherry's armchair and gasped for breath.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter. It was, in Bunter's opinion, getting altogether too thick. He had "borrowed" things before without all this fuss. He owed half-crowns, and larger sums, to more fellows than he could remember. It was unfortunate that his victim this time had been Skinner—a stingy fellow with a hard and unforgiving temper. Really Skinner might have let the matter drop by this time. Instead of letting it drop he seemed bent on making a habit of it.

Bunter's pals, for whom he had done so much refused to stand by him in this extremity. He had thought of appealing to a Sixth Form prefect, or to his Form master. But he had a bitter conviction that a prefect or a beak would take the view, as usual, that he was to blame. They wouldn't believe that he had never pinched Skinner's ticket—indeed, it was certain that he would be severely whopped if a master or prefect learned of that astute transaction at Lantham on the first day of term. There was no help or rescue for Bunter; he had to grin and bear it—to bear it, at least, if he did not grin. Certainly he did not feel like grinning.

He had not even had his tea! But with the alarm that Skinner was in the offing he dared not venture out for tea. Having rested, he rose from Bob's armchair and looked in the study cupboard in search of provender. Like Mrs. Hubbard, he found that the cupboard was bare.

Then a sound of footsteps in the passage drove even the thought of "grub"

from his fat mind. It might be anybody, but it might be that unspeakable beast, Skinner, rooting through the studies after him. The fat junior left the cupboard and bolted into the corner behind the armchair, squatting there out of sight behind the high back. There, in fear and trembling, he waited for the footsteps to pass the door of No. 13.

But they did not pass. They stopped, and the door opened, quickly and softly. It shut again, so rapidly that Bunter supposed for a moment that a fellow had merely opened it and looked in and gone away again. But he heard the sound of someone crossing the room—not, fortunately, in the direction of the armchair in the corner. The unseen one was stepping towards the bookshelf on the wall. Bunter heard him fumbling with the books there, and, aware that the fellow's back would be to him as he stood at the bookshelf, the fat Owl ventured to peer out from cover to see who it was. If it was anybody but Skinner there was no need for the hunted Owl to hide.

But it was Skinner. Bunter could not see his face, but he knew the weedy and rather bony figure well enough. Skinner was taking down a book from the shelf—a large, thick volume—the pictured cover of which was well known to Billy Bunter's eyes. It was Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual.

Bunter popped back behind the chair again.

Skinner turned and crossed quickly to the door. The Holiday Annual was shoved out of sight under his jacket, making a considerable bulge. The door of Study No. 13 closed after Skinner.

Bunter rose again, and blinked over the high back of the chair at the closed door.

Skinner was gone! He had taken the Holiday Annual with him. He had

come there, not for Bunter, but for that book. And Bunter, of course, knew why. A fat grin came over the face of the Owl of the Remove. Evidently Skinner had been watching for an opportunity when the study was empty, and he had found it empty—except for Bunter. Six bangs from that same Holiday Annual the day before had not taught Skinner a sufficient lesson. He was still after that book for Ponsonby.

Bunter chuckled. Only waiting till he was sure that Skinner was quite gone, and the coast clear, the fat Owl of the Remove rolled out of Study No. 13. Skinner of the Remove had hunted Bunter, not wisely but too well. Now it was time for Skinner to pay the piper!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Caught in the Act!

HARRY WHEARTON & CO. were punting a footer in the quad when Billy Bunter rolled out of the House with a fat grin on his face.

Skinner, with his coat on, was strolling down to the gates. It was not yet look-up, and a fellow could walk out of gates if he liked. It was quite a mild day in early autumn, but Skinner had an overcoat on. Bunter blinked after him and grinned. The Holiday Annual was rather too bulky to be hidden successfully under a jacket. Bunter knew why Skinner was wearing an overcoat. He rolled towards the chums of the Remove, waving a fat hand, and squeaked:

"I say, you fellows!" "Stop that ball!" shouted Bob Cherry.

(Continued on page 16.)



(Continued from page 13.)

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter stopped it—unintentionally! It landed on his fat chin, and he sat down.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter. "Whoooh-hoooh!"

The punters came running up for the ball. Bob Cherry kindly gave the fat Owl a hand up, and Bunter staggered to his feet.

"Join up, old fat bean!" said Bob encouragingly. "Hop it! It will shake down your tea."

"Urrrh! I haven't had tea!"

"Then it will shake down your dinner. You had three or four dinners."

"Beast! Look here—"

"Ha, get out of the way, fatty!"

grunted Johnny Bull.

"All right," sneered Bunter. "I'll get out of the way. Skinner's gone out. He, he, he! All right!"

"What is the fat frump sniggering about?" asked Frank Nugent.

"If you don't want me to tell you, I won't!" jeered Bunter. "Skinner's gone out. You may see your Holiday Annual again, or you may not! He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry jumped.

"My Holiday Annual! What do you mean?"

"Oh, you don't want me to tell you!" said Bunter sarcastically. "You want me to get out of the way. All right."

"You blithering owl—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"I saw Skinner go out," said Harry Wharton. "He can't have snaffed that blessed book again! Where did you leave it, Bob?"

"In my study."

"He, he, he!"

"Look here, you fat chump," roared Bob, "has Skinner bagged that book?"

"That's telling!" sneered Bunter. "I may have seen him sneak it out of your study and I may not! I—"

"Oh, kick him!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"I say, you fellows, look here, I came out specially to tell you," said the fat Owl. "And, look here, one good turn deserves another. Skinner's been after me—well, you stop him, and I'll tell you. If you don't promise to stop Skinner chasing me up and down the school I shan't tell you a single word about seeing him sneak that Holiday Annual from the study."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

"Not a single word!" said Bunter firmly. "You can find it out for yourself! Not that that will do you any good, now Skinner's taken it out to hand over to that Highcliffe cad. But I shan't tell you anything, unless—"

"I say, you fellows—" roared Bunter, as the Famous Five, leaving the football where it lay, turned from him and ran down to the gates.

Temple & Co. of the Fourth were coming in at the gates. Bob Cherry hailed them.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo! Seen Skinner?"

"Just gone out!" answered Temple.

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"Which way did he go?"

"Up the road towards Courtfield."

"Thanks!"

The Famous Five ran out and up the road towards Courtfield common. That was the way to Highcliffe—and Skinner had gone that way. He was already out of sight, so apparently he had gone at a trot, losing no time. Neither did the chums of the Remove lose any time.

They ran hard up the road.

At the first turning they spotted Skinner half-way to the common. Round that corner a bicycle was leaning against a tree, and a Highcliffe junior was sitting on a grassy hillock near it, waiting. Skinner had just turned the corner. Ponsonby rose to his feet at the sight of him, with an eager expression on his face.

That expression died away at the sight of the Famous Five coming round the corner at full pelt.

Skinner glanced round at the clatter of footsteps, started, and bit his lip. He had not the faintest idea that the Famous Five suspected what he was doing—but they were the last persons in the world that he desired to see at that moment.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Here you are!"

The five came up, a little breathless.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Skinner sourly. "Can't a fellow speak to a pal without you fellows barging in?"

Pon eyed the Removites uneasily.

"I haven't come over here for a row," he said. "I'm speakin' to Skinner. You can leave us alone."

"Wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole!" said Bob. "You're not nice to touch, Ponsonby!"

"Well, clear off, then, and leave a fellow alone."

"What have you got under your coat, Skinner?"

"Eh? Nothing!"

"Not a Holiday Annual?" asked Bob. Skinner caught his breath.

"Certainly not! What do you mean? Do you think I'd touch your rotten book after you refused to lend it to me?"

"Yes—sort of," said Bob. "Anyhow, take off your coat and let's see."

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" said Skinner between his teeth.

"We'll help you off with it," suggested Johnny Bull.

"Lay a finger on me, and I'll go straight to Quelch!" said Skinner. "You're jolly well mistaken if you think you can bully me!"

"Nobody's going to bully you, Skinner," said Harry Wharton quietly. "You bagged that book yesterday, telling lies about why you wanted it—and you can't expect us to take your word after that. Have you got it about you?"

"No!"

"Well, you've got to prove that, as you're such an untruthful rotter that a fellow can't take your word!"

"What's the good of beating about the bush?" grunted Johnny Bull. "We know he's got it, and that's why Ponsonby's come over on his bike, same as he did yesterday. Skinner got word to him to-day and fixed it up—and it's as clear as daylight."

"Nothin' of the kind!" said Ponsonby. "Well, let's see! Are you taking off your coat, Skinner?"

"No!" hissed Skinner.

"Then we will!" said Johnny Bull, and without wasting more time in words he grasped the cad of the Remove.

Skinner struggled savagely. As he struggled a heavy, thick volume slid from under his coat and thudded on the ground at his feet. Skinner had no pocket large enough to hold the Holiday

Annual; it had merely been packed under his coat, and it naturally fell out.

Bob Cherry jumped at it.

"You rotter!" he roared.

"That's not yours!" gasped Skinner desperately. "It's another copy—"

Bob opened the volume and put his finger on the name written inside.

"You borrowed this from another fellow whose name's R. Cherry," he asked. "Where's the fellow? I'd like to meet my namesake!"

Skinner did not answer that. The game, evidently, was up. Ponsonby made a sliding movement towards his bicycle. It was clear that he was not going to get hold of that long-sought volume this time, and he was anxious to get out of dangerous quarters. But he did not reach his bicycle. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh laid a dusky hand on his collar.

"Not so fastfully, my esteemed and disgusting Pon," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Let go!" hissed Ponsonby.

Instead of letting go, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh tightened his grip, smiling a dusky smile at the Highcliffe fellow's furious face.

"Hold him, Inky!" said Harry Wharton.

"The holdfulness is terrific."

"Look here," began Skinner uneasily, "you've got your book! Pon wanted it to look at. No harm in that. You don't suppose he was going to pinch it, do you?"

"He's none too good to pinch that, or anything else," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "Neither are you, Skinner! Taking property without the owner's permission is stealing."

"It would have been returned—"

"Has Pon told you why he wants it?" asked Wharton.

"Only that there's something written in it he wants to see. Look here, there's no harm done—"

"As it happens, no. But Pon would have snaffed that book if Bunter hadn't seen you pinching it. You've made plenty of fuss about Bunter pinching your railway ticket; now you're caught pinching yourself. And you're going to leave Bunter alone after this. And you're going to have a lesson; and Pon's going to have one, too."

Skinner, in Johnny Bull's grasp, and Pon, in Hurree Singh's, exchanged uneasy looks. They were in the hands of the Philistines, and they were going to have a lesson. And the fact that they needed one was no comfort at all.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Thrashings for Two!

BOB CHERRY stepped into the trees beside the road, opened his pocket-knife, and out a thick switch. He came back with the switch in his hand, and Pon and Skinner eyed it very uneasily. They did not need telling to what use it was going to be put.

"If you touch me with that—" muttered Ponsonby, his voice husky with rage and apprehension.

"I've told you you're not fit to touch," said Bob. "Skinner's going to touch you; Skinner's not particular what rotters he touches. Are you, Skinner?"

"What do you mean, you fool?" snarled Skinner.

"What's the game, Bob?" asked Nugent.

"Both these sneaking cads are going to have a lesson," answered Bob.

"They're going to give it to one another. Skinner's going to thrash Pon—"

"Oh, my hat!"
 "And Pon's going to thrash Skinner."
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co.
 "Take that stick, Skinner," said Bob.
 "Bend over, Pon!"
 "I won't!" roared Ponsonby furiously.
 "Well, I hate touching you, but you're going to bend over! Jam him into the grass, Inky!"
 "The jamfulness will be preposterous," grinned the dusky nabob.
 Pon struggled frantically. But he went down in the grass, face down, and the nabob stood on his legs, and Bob Cherry put a foot on his shoulders to keep him there. The dandy of Highcliffe wriggled like a worm.
 "Now, Skinner—"
 "I'm not going to touch him!" panted Skinner.
 "Pull his ears, Johnny! Keep on pulling them till he begins on Pon!"
 "What-ho!" chuckled Johnny Bull.
 "Ow! Leggo! Stoppit!" raved Skinner, as his ears were pulled.
 "You rotter! I'll go to Quelch—"
 "You can go to Quelch afterwards, if you like, and tell him you were caught pinching!" said Bob. "But just at present you'll thrash Ponsonby. Go it!"
 "Ow! Stoppit! I—I—I'll do it!" shrieked Skinner.
 There was really no choice in the matter for Skinner! Johnny Bull had a firm grip on his ears, and was putting in some hefty work. Skinner felt as if his ears were coming off.
 "Pile in!" said Nugent, with a chuckle.
 "Lay it on hard!" said Bob. "I'll tell you when to stop!"
 Skinner, crimson with fury, grasped the switch. He laid on the first stroke gently! The next moment he uttered a yell of anguish as his ear was pulled.

"Put your beef into it!" said Johnny Bull. "If you don't, I will!"
 There was no help for it!
 Skinner put his beef into it! The switch rose and fell, hard and fast. Ponsonby wriggled and squirmed and roared. But there was no escape for Pon! He was safely held in the grass, and he had to take what was coming to him! Hard and fast the strokes came down, to an accompaniment of wild yells and howls and squeals from the dandy of Highcliffe.
 Whack, whack, whack, whack!
 The Famous Five looked on, grinning! After a lesson like this they rather fancied that Skinner and Ponsonby would not be likely to do any more scheming together.
 "That will do!" said Bob Cherry at last, and the whacks ceased to fall on the wriggling, yelling Highcliffe fellow.
 "Skinner's turn!" said Johnny Bull.
 "Bend over, Skinner!"
 "Look here—" panted Skinner.
 "Bend him over!"
 Skinner plumped down in the grass. He was pinned down there, as Ponsonby had been, and the switch was handed to the Highcliffe fellow.
 "Pile in!" said Bob. "If you don't put your beef into it, Ponsonby, I'm sorry for your ears!"
 But there was no need to urge Ponsonby! He was white with rage, and longing to return what he had received. Skinner, though unwillingly, had thrashed him; and Pon was keen on thrashing Skinner.
 He gripped the switch and started, with a vim that certainly left no cause for complaint—except from Harold Skinner!
 Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Skinner howled and yelled and shrieked. Ponsonby seemed to fancy that he was beating carpets, from the way he laid on the whacks. Pon certainly would have preferred to lay them on the Famous Five. But it was a solace to lay them on somebody, anyhow, and Skinner got the full benefit of the Highcliffe fellow's bitter rage.
 Panting with exertion, Pon whacked and whacked and whacked, and would have gone on longer had not Bob stopped him.
 "That will do!" said Bob cheerily.
 "Sorry to spoil your pleasure, Pon, but Skinner's had enough. Haven't you, Skinner?"
 "Yarocoh!"
 "Sounds as if he has!" chuckled Johnny Bull.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Skinner was released. He staggered to his feet, panting. His first proceeding was to clench his fist and dash it full into Ponsonby's face. The dandy of Highcliffe went over backwards.
 "Take that, you rotter!" howled Skinner.
 "Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "If you fellows are going to scrap, we'll see fair play! Up with you, Pon!"
 "Go it, both of you!" chortled Johnny Bull.
 Pon staggered up, and made a jump at Skinner. They closed in strife, both of them punching furiously.
 But it did not last long! Breathless, they separated, glared at one another—and then Skinner started for Greyfriars and Pon went to his bike. He wheeled it away, with a bitter glare of hatred at the Famous Five.
 Bob Cherry waved him a farewell with the Holiday Annual.
 (Continued on next page.)

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"Call again if you want some more, Pon!" he bawled.

Without answering, the dandy of Highcliffe put a leg over his machine and pedalled away. Pon was a stickler; but it was beginning to dawn on him that he never would succeed in getting hold of that Holiday Annual.

With the much-disputed volume under Bob Cherry's arm, the Famous Five walked back to the school with smiling faces.

Whether Pon kept on the trail of the Holiday Annual or not, they had no doubt that Skinner was done with it. After that severe lesson it was extremely improbable that he would make any more attempts to serve Ponsonby's ends. Indeed, if they met again, it was probable that the result would be scrapping, not scheming.

"I'll tell you fellows what!" remarked Bob Cherry, as they walked in at the gates. "We've been over this jolly old Annual a hundred times, hunting for that message that that ass Pon believes is in it. We've never found anything! Mauly thinks that Pon has got it right, and if there really is fifty pounds reward to be picked up, it's rather a pity to let it go to waste! Look here, we'll jolly well tell the fellows the whole story, and stick the Holiday Annual in the Rag, for any fellow that likes to root it over. And if there's a secret, and any Greyfriars man spots it, more power to his giddy elbow!"

"Good egg!" agreed the Co.

Whether that Holiday Annual really contained, as Pon believed, a clue to the smash-and-grab man's hidden plunder the chums of the Remove doubted.

Lord Mauleverer believed so—and they had respect for Mauly's judgment—but his lordship certainly had not spotted the secret, if it was there! But if it existed, they certainly wanted to know! So Bob's suggestion was passed unanimously, and that same evening it was carried out, and all Greyfriars heard of the mysterious history of that celebrated Annual!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

"**R**OT!" said Coker of the Fifth. Coker of the Fifth knew! Coker had been through that Holiday Annual, and found nothing therein; so, of course, there was nothing to be found!

That settled it, for Coker! Therefore, Horace Coker did not take the trouble to drop into the Rag and root over that famous Holiday Annual!

But he was almost the only fellow at Greyfriars who didn't!

After prep that evening, when the rather battered volume was deposited on the table in the Rag, and the story was told—about a dozen times over—there was a lot of excitement.

It increased the next day!

And the next!

It increased and intensified.

Everybody, of course, had heard of the Holiday Annual! It was rather well known! But any fellow at Greyfriars who had never heard of it had no chance of remaining in that state of benighted ignorance!

All Greyfriars talked of it! Never had any publication received so thorough an advertisement!

In morning break, after class, at odd moments, day and evening, fellows walked into the Rag to root over it.

Every man in the Remove went

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through it twice or thrice. Skinner, now that he knew why Ponsonby had wanted it, certainly had no desire to hand it over to Pon, but he went through it himself, again and again, eager to spot the secret—if any—and finger that reward of fifty pounds.

Fags of the Third and the Second Forms tried their luck—though in vain! Nugent minor, of the Second, like Coker, pronounced that it was all rot—on the same grounds; he couldn't spot the secret! Bunter minor, also of the Second, left jammy finger-prints all over it! Tubb and Paget and Wingate minor of the Third sat round it all through break one morning, hardly letting another "man" have a "squint" at it; and Tubb kicked it across the Rag when he left—unsuccessful.

All the Forms were interested. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth took their turn—Hobson and his merry men of the Shell—even great senior men of the Fifth Form condescended to take an interest.

But if the secret was there it was buried deep!

Nobody seemed able to spot it!

How many times the story of that Holiday Annual had to be told Bob Cherry could hardly have computed. Over and over and over again—till he was bored almost to tears with it.

And Bob vowed at last that he wouldn't tell it even once more. Yet once more he had to tell it, however, when Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of the school, came in before prep one evening to look at that thrice-famous volume.

The captain of Greyfriars was a very specially important person; and a point had to be stretched in his favour.

"Is that it?" asked Wingate, with a smile.

"That's it!" assented Bob.

"Is that a book?"

"Eh? Yes! Can't you see it's a book?"

"Hardly! Looks to me more like a collection of grubby fingermarks."

Bob grinned.

"The fags have been rather handling it," he said.

"Yes—it looks like it!" agreed Wingate.

That volume was assuredly showing signs of wear and tear and hard usage. Many of the fags had left, as it were, their trail on it—sticky patches of toffee, or butterscotch, or jam! Still, Wingate of the Sixth condescended to pick it up and turn the pages. One of the features happened to be a South Sea story, about a character known as "King of the Islands"—and Wingate, catching the interest of it as he looked at it, sat on the corner of the table in the Rag, and began to read. Then he remembered what he had come for, and put down the book.

"Now, what's the yarn about this?" he asked. "From what the fellows are saying, it seems that you've got an idea that there's some clue in it to the stuff taken from old Lazarus' shop in Courtfield last term. Sounds like a tall story to me."

"You see, we had that book, as it happens, on the day the smash-and-grab raid took place," explained Bob. "That fat Owl, Bunter, snaffled it from me, and scooted with it. And the smash-and-grab man—"

"Micky the Sprat!" explained Nugent.

"He's in chokey now," said Johnny Bull.

"As well as Skid Smith, his confederate," added Harry Wharton. "Old Grimey got them both."

"One at a time!" said Wingate, laughing. "Mean to say that this book was ever in the hands of Micky the Sprat?"

"Yes; there seems no doubt about that," said Bob. "He came on Bunter in the wood, and that ass, of course, never knew who he was, or what he'd been up to. He spun Bunter a yarn about a friend at Lantham who had a little boy who'd like to see this book—pulled the fat chump's leg, you know. He got Bunter to promise to take the book to Lantham, and show it to his friend, Mr. Smith. Bunter, of course, never had the faintest idea that he'd put anything in it."

"Had he?" grinned Wingate.

"Well, it comes out that that cad Ponsonby of Highcliffe was on hand, spying," said Bob. "He laid for Bunter, and got the book away from him—but we got it back again. While we were hiking in the hols, Pon was after us all the time, trying to get hold of that book. He's owned up what he wanted it for—he believes that Micky the Sprat put some sort of secret message in it, to tell his pal where to pick up the plunder."

"By gum! It looks like it, if the man tried to get Bunter to take the book to the other man at Lantham!" said Wingate. "He must have had a motive—and what he told Bunter was rot."

"Exactly! Looks like it!" said Bob. "The police were all round Micky the Sprat, and they got him soon after Bunter left him. Bunter wasn't able to play up, because Pon grabbed the book off him, and the police grabbed the man, Skid Smith. If there's really a secret message in the book, nobody's seen it—not even Pon when he had it for a time. He scoured the pages looking for invisible ink—but there wasn't any! But he jolly well believes it's there somewhere—and if a fellow could spot it, he could get the fifty pounds reward for finding the plunder."

Wingate looked thoughtful.

"Well, everybody at Greyfriars seems to have had a go at it," he said. "I'll take the book to my study, if you don't mind, and have a go myself."

"Wish you luck!" said Bob.

And the Greyfriars captain carried the volume off to his study, and fellows who came rooting into the Rag after it, had to be turned empty away, so to speak. But after prep, Wingate dropped into the Rag again, and tossed the Holiday Annual on the table.

"Jolly good!" he said.

"Found the secret, Wingate?" asked a dozen excited voices.

"Eh? No! I've read a yarn about a South Sea Island, and it was ripping. Haven't found any secrets."

So that was that!

Wingate was one of the latest to try it on. The opinion was spreading that it was, as Coker said, all "rot," and that Ponsonby of Highcliffe was a silly ass to believe anything of the kind. Fellows gave it up, and interest in the Holiday Annual waned. But a day or two later it appeared that the matter had reached the ears of the beaks.

In the Remove-room one morning Mr. Quelch mentioned the matter.

"Cherry!"

"Yes, sir!"

"I have heard a most extraordinary story in connection with a book in your possession. Kindly bring it to my study after class."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" said Bob.

After class, accordingly, Bob marched into his Form master's study with the Holiday Annual under his arm. It was rather flattering for a "beak" to take an interest in it; but undoubtedly Bob was getting a little tired of the subject.



"Stop that ball!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Yaroooh!" Bunter stopped it—unintentionally! It landed on his fat chin, and sent him staggering backwards.

Once more the story of Micky the Sprat, of Bunter's fatuous obtuseness, and of Ponsonby's sly roguery, was told. A story to which Mr. Quelch listened with interest, all the more because he had had a hand in defeating the smash-and-grab raider in Courtfield on the occasion of the robbery at Mr. Lazarus'.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch. "If there is anything in this, and if such a clue exists in the book, it should be placed in the hands of the police, Cherry! Had you not thought of that?"

Bob suppressed a grin.

"Oh, yes, sir; but it sounds so steep, I'm afraid the police would think it was only a schoolboy lark! Any number of fellows have been through the book without finding anything."

"A detective's eye might be keener, Cherry! At all events, you may leave the book with me, and I will decide whether it had better be placed in the hands of Inspector Grimes."

"Certainly, sir."

And the Holiday Annual was left with Quelch. In Study No. 1, the Famous Five grinned over the idea of a stately and sedate gentleman like Mr. Quelch perusing that entrancing volume, and wondered whether he would be as interested in the adventures of King of the Islands, or Billy the Bear, as they had been themselves.

Fellows who came to the Rag for another "squint" did not find the volume there, and Bob could only tell them that Quelch had it.

The next day Bob meekly inquired whether Quelch had done with it.

"I think, Cherry," said the Remove master, "that there is, as you have supposed, nothing in it! Certainly I have found nothing! Nevertheless, the possibility exists—and, if you have no objec-

tion, I will show the book to Mr. Grimes, who is calling here to see me."

Bob had, of course, no objection, and certainly would not have stated it, if he had had one! So the Holiday Annual remained in Mr. Quelch's study—to be inspected by Inspector Grimes, when that official gentleman found time from his many duties to look in at Greyfriars.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Pon is Pally!

"YOU, old fellow! Quite a pleasure to see you!"

Billy Bunter jumped.

If it was a pleasure to Cecil Ponsonby to see William George Bunter, it was quite an unreciprocated pleasure! Bunter was not in the least pleased to see the dandy of Highcliffe.

He was, in fact, deeply alarmed.

It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and Billy Bunter was rolling along the road over Courtfield Common. He was heading for the bun-shop at Courtfield—being in funds that afternoon.

Bunter's celebrated postal order, unaccountably delayed in the post, had not arrived. Nevertheless, Bunter was in possession of the handsome sum of five shillings.

Since the Holiday Annual incident, Skinner had given up hunting Bunter. A kicking or two from the Famous Five had induced him to do so. This, they considered, was only fair, after Bunter had saved that precious volume from the clutches of Pon.

Still, Bunter owed Skinner half-a-crown, and it was acknowledged that Skinner had a right to be paid for his purloined railway ticket. So, after due consideration, the Famous Five had put sixpence each for the purpose, making

half-a-crown. After which, Billy Bunter borrowed half-a-crown from Lord Mauleverer, explaining to his lordship that it was a worry on his mind to be in debt to a rotter like Skinner.

Neither half-a-crown reached Skinner! Bunter, of course, was going to pay Skinner! But, having thought the matter out carefully, he decided that a rotter like Skinner deserved to be kept waiting for his money. So now, happy in the possession of five shillings, the Owl of the Remove was rolling off to Courtfield to expend the same at the bun-shop, safely out of sight of the fellows who had found the money. This, Bunter thought, was rather deep! He did not realise that it was also rather rascally! Bunter had his own way of looking at things, and his mental processes were weird and wonderful.

But it looked as if Nemesis was on his track, for half-way to the town, in quite a lonely spot, he came on Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson of Highcliffe. And Pon's pleasant greeting did not reassure him.

He blinked at Pon through his big spectacles, rather like a frightened, fat rabbit.

Many a time had Pon ragged the Owl of the Remove, who was no fighting-man. Fighting-men were not honoured with raggings from Pon!

Billy Bunter fully expected another ragging, and there was no escape; he had no chance in a foot race.

"Fancy meetin' you!" went on Pon pleasantly. "Haven't seen you for quite a long time, old chap!"

"Look here——" said Bunter feebly. "There's a ditch quite handy," remarked Monson meditatively, and Gadsby grinned. "Plenty of water in it, too."

"A wash will do him good," observed

Gaddy. "They never wash at Greyfriars, I believe."

"I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Bunter, with a wild blink round the lonely common.

He longed for the sight of a Grey friars cap. But there was nobody to be seen.

To his surprise, Ponsonby frowned at Gadsby and Monson.

"Chuck that, you fellows," said Pon severely. "I know you're only jokin', but Bunter might think you meant it." Gadsby and Monson could only stare.

"Look here, Pon—" began Monson. "Chuck it, I tell you! No larks with a pal like Bunter. You fellows can hike off. I want to speak to my friend Bunter."

In sheer astonishment, Gadsby and Monson walked on, leaving the dandy of Highcliffe alone with Bunter. Billy Bunter would have been glad to hike off also; but there was no escape for Bunter. He blinked dismally at Pon, nothing doubting that the Highcliffe fellow was playing with him like a cat with a mouse.

"Let's sit down," said Pon, indicating a seat by the wayside. "Smoke?"

He opened his cigarette-case. "Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Really, it looked as if Pon wanted to be friendly. If so, it was a great relief. But it was very astonishing.

"Or perhaps you'd rather have some toffee?" remarked Pon.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter promptly. Ponsonby produced a packet of toffee.

He handed it to the Owl of the Remove. Bunter was almost too astonished to eat it. But not quite. He gobbled toffee and blinked at Pon.

"I'm jolly glad I've met you, old fellow," went on Pon, with the same airy friendliness. "I want you to drop in at Highcliffe some afternoon. Tea in the study, you know."

"I'll watch it!" gasped Bunter.

He was much more likely to get a ragging than tea in Pon's study, if he dropped in at Highcliffe.

"Eh! What?"

"I—I—I mean, I—I'll be glad!" stammered Bunter. "I say, I—I think I—I'd better be getting along!"

"Oh, don't rush off when you've just

met a friend," said Ponsonby agreeably. "I don't often get a chance of talking to a fellow like you, Bunter. They're not very brainy at Highcliffe."

Bunter could only blink. He knew, of course, that he was a brainy fellow—nobody better. But it was amazing for Ponsonby to realise it like this.

"Besides, I want you to do something for me, old bean," went on Pon, eyeing Bunter sideways.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I dare say you remember that Holiday Annual of Cherry's?"

Bunter understood now.

As Skinner was no longer serving Pon's turn, he was looking for another catspaw. He had selected Bunter.

"I'd like to have a squint at it," said Pon carelessly. "I don't want the book itself; just a squint at it. You could manage it for me."

"I—I—I—" Bunter was about to state that he couldn't, that famous Annual now being in Mr. Quelch's keeping. But he remembered in time that he was at the mercy of the Highcliffe fellow. Pon was not going to rag him, because he fancied that he could make use of him.

If he found that Bunter was not usable, so to speak, that ragging would follow as surely as night followed day. Bunter checked himself in time.

"I'll leave the book in your hands," went on Pon. "You can hold it all the time; I simply want to look at it. No harm in that, old fellow."

"That's all right," assented Bunter. Bunter was prepared to assent to anything till he got to a safe distance from Pon.

He was well aware just how long the book would remain in his hands if Pon was within snatching distance. But Bunter could be sly as well as Pon.

"Well, will you do it?" asked Pon. "Of course, one good turn deserves another. If you happened to be stony—"

"I've been disappointed about a postal order," remarked Bunter thoughtfully.

"If a quid would be of any use—"

"The fact is, the postal order I'm expecting is for a pound," said Bunter.

"If you like to lend me the pound, I'd

let you have the postal order immediately it comes, Pon."

The Owl of the Remove was quite at his ease now.

"Done!" said Pon. "Always glad to oblige a friend—and we're friends, aren't we, Bunter?"

"Oh, yes! Rather!" gasped Bunter. "Well, when can you manage it?"

asked Pon. "I suppose they'll be playing football to-day; easy to borrow the book for half an hour."

"They're playing the Fourth," said Bunter. "Not a man in the studies this afternoon."

"No time like the present—what?" "N-n-n-no!" stammered Bunter. "But—but I'm going to Courtfield."

The Owl of the Remove had not the slightest intention of making any attempt whatever to snaffle that Holiday Annual for Pon. He was only anxious to escape, and to get to the bunshop.

"Well, look here," said Ponsonby, "I've got the quid in my pocket if you want it, and there's no time like the present. I'll walk back to Greyfriars with you and wait in the spinney near the school. It won't take long."

Bunter blinked at him. Pon's manner was very agreeable, but the gleam in his eyes told another tale. Ponsonby was quite prepared to pay a pound for the volume which he believed to contain a secret worth fifty pounds. He was willing to pretend that the bribe was a loan, if Bunter liked. But he was not prepared to let Bunter off scot-free if he declined to be made use of. Bunter was an ass, but he was not ass enough to be unaware of that.

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter at last. "Let's!"

And, rising from the seat, he walked back towards Greyfriars with the dandy of Highcliffe. They passed Gadsby and Monson, dawdling on the road. Pon dropped behind to speak to them in a whisper.

"Cut back, you men, and get my bike to the spinney near Greyfriars," he muttered hastily.

"What the thump for?"

"Because I shall have to cut off pretty fast when I get hold of that dashed Holiday Annual."

"Oh!" said Gadsby and Monson together. And they started back to Highcliffe, picking up the motor-bus on the way to save time.

Ponsonby sauntered on with Bunter. He stopped at the spinney at a little distance from the school.

"I'll wait for you here," he said. "Not a syllable to anybody, of course."

"Of—of course not!" stammered Bunter.

"You'll bring the book to me here?" Pon's eyes were keenly on the fat face of the Owl.

Billy Bunter had no idea of doing anything of the kind. But he dared not say so. And though Bunter was not at all particular about veracity, he hesitated to tell the lie direct. So he was in a difficulty. As he hesitated, a dangerous glitter shot into Ponsonby's eyes.

"I'm takin' your word for it, Bunter," he said. "Can I depend on you bringin' the Holiday Annual to me here?"

"Oh, certainly!" gasped Bunter.

"Honour bright?" asked Pon.

"Yes!" gasped Bunter.

"That's all right, then! Don't keep me waitin' long, will you?"

"Right-ho!"

Billy Bunter rolled on to the school. He gasped with relief at getting out of Pon's reach. He rolled into the quad, and one of the first objects that met his eye was his minor, Sammy of the Second, seated on a bench under

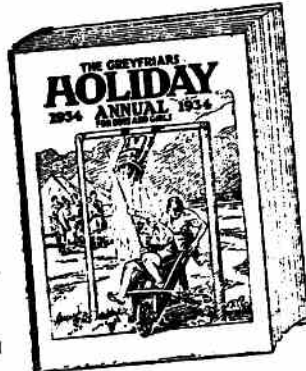


"I say—where's my HOLIDAY ANNUAL?"

"Some cad has 'borrowed' it. But I'll get it back. I'd sooner lose a good meal than lose my HOLIDAY ANNUAL—and that's saying a lot—for me.

"You can read all about me—and the other Greyfriars fellows—in the HOLIDAY ANNUAL, by the way. I'd get a copy if I were you. Why not take Billy Bunter's advice? Not only can you read all about him—the fattest and funniest schoolboy in creation—but there are also heaps of fascinating stories about the famous schoolboy pals of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood Schools.

Don't miss this big budget of school and adventure yarns. Tell your newsagent you want the HOLIDAY ANNUAL.



Now on sale at all Newsagents and Booksellers 5/-

one of the old elms, reading an exceedingly grubby copy of the Holiday Annual. Billy Bunter stopped and blinked at him.

"You got it?" he said. "I thought Quelch still had it."

Sammy blinked up at him.

"Think Bob Cherry's Annual is the only one at Greyfriars?" he grunted. "This is Gatty's."

"Oh!" said Bunter.

A peculiar gleam came into his little round eyes, behind his big, round spectacles.

"I wonder if Gatty would sell it," he said.

"I suppose he would; he's read it," said Sammy. "Shut up while a fellow reads."

Billy Bunter rolled on. Deep thoughts were working in his fat mind now, and there was a grin on his face as he went in search of George Gatty of the Second Form.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Secret at Last!

INSPECTOR GRIMES stared. Seated in Mr. Quelch's study at Greyfriars, the Courtfield inspector had listened to the strange story of the Holiday Annual.

It made him stare. So far, the inspector, with all his searching, had found absolutely no clue to the missing plunder; and he was beginning to believe that Micky the Sprat had told the truth, and that it had been lost in the river.

It was rather startling to him to learn that a clue might possibly exist, hidden in a book belonging to a schoolboy.

There was deep doubt and scepticism in his face. It did not seem to him probable. Still, he was willing to look into it.

"That," said Mr. Quelch, indicating the bulky volume on the table, "is the

book. I thought if my duty by bringing the matter to your notice, Mr. Grimes, if you care to examine the volume—"

"Oh, certainly!" said Mr. Grimes, still staring. "I suppose there is a possibility—hem! Certainly, from what you have told me, the thing seems to hang together! I will certainly examine the book!"

Mr. Grimes shifted his chair to the table, drew the Holiday Annual towards him, and proceeded to examine it.

Page after page he turned with the greatest care.

There were plenty of clues to the fellows who handled it—in the shape of grubby marks and stains! Bunter's jammy finger-marks, and traces of Bunter minor's toffee leaped to the eye. Every page was scorched, from the vain quest for invisible ink. Mr. Quelch, leaving the police-inspector to his task,

(Continued on next page.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

I HAD a letter the other day from a reader of the MAGNET who is at present in the United States, and he tells me he has just visited one of the places I'd very much like to visit myself. It was

THE GRAND CANYON OF COLORADO, and believe me, chums, it is "some" place! He sent me along a folder of pictures of the canyon, and when I'd looked at them, I felt I wanted to get up from my desk and dash off there straight away. America is the country of "big" things, and the Grand Canyon must certainly be the biggest crevice on this earth. It is three hundred miles in length and the river flows between almost vertical walls of rock which, in some places, are 7,000 feet in height. The bottom of the canyon is always in darkness, and stars can be seen overhead in the middle of the day.

Incidentally, it is possible to see the stars in the middle of the day, even in Great Britain. All you have to do is to go to the bottom of a pit shaft and look upward. Despite the fact that it is daylight on the earth, you will see the stars quite plainly.

A question which Jack Peters, of Altrincham, asks me will interest those of you who like to read stories of adventure in the tropics. He asks

WHY ARE TROPICAL COUNTRIES COLD AT NIGHT?

when they are so hot in the daytime? The reason is because of the absence of clouds. Clouds check the radiation of heat from the earth during the night, and when there are no clouds, the earth gives up its heat quickly, thus making tropical nights intensely cold in hot, desert regions. You will find, even in this country, that clear nights are always the coldest.

Clouds only form when there is dust in the air, and the more dust there is in the air, the more numerous are the cloud particles. That is why there are so many fogs in London and large cities—because the water in the air collects around the dust particles and then sinks low.

DO you know which is THE FASTEST FLYER?

Most people would say "The Schneider Trophy Plane"—but they would be wrong! When it comes to speed records, insects have men beaten hands down! There is a fly which is so small that it can hardly be seen—but it travels at the rate of five hundred man-sized steps a second. If a man could travel at the same relative speed, he would be able to cover a mile in about three seconds.

When it comes to athletics, insects make our champions look ridiculous. A midge can fly twice as fast as the swiftest man can run. A flea is the world's champion long-distance and high jumper. It can jump one hundred times its own height!

So far as weight-lifting is concerned, the horn-beetle has man "whacked to a frazzle." It is said to be able to lift two hundred times its own weight. If a man could do that, he would be able to carry fifteen tons easily!

And now for a joke for which R. Fisher, of 117, Welham Road, Streatham, S.W.16, will receive a prize of a handsome Sheffield steel penknife.

Farmer (trying to sell very lean horse): "It's a good animal for drawing."

Prospective Buyer: "So it may be. But I'm a haulage contractor, not a cartoonist!"

I WAS talking about the Battle of Trafalgar the other day to a naval officer, and he told me about a curious thing that happened in the year of Britain's great sea victory. In 1805—the year of Trafalgar—the world witnessed

THE GREATEST POSSIBLE NUMBER OF ECLIPSES

which can possibly happen in a year. There were no fewer than seven—five of the sun, and two of the moon. Such a thing happens only once in 130 years, and this is interesting because the year after next—in 1935—the same thing will

happen, so the chances are that you fellows will see an interesting heavenly spectacle that will not be seen on this earth again until the year 2065!

Ready for a Greyfriars limerick? Then here's one in return for which Ralph Gibbons, of 39, Undercliff Road, Lewisham, S.E.13, will receive one of our useful leather pocket wallets:

Boasted Smyth: "I'll bet I can beat All you fellows at any old feat." But he found how absurd Was this swaggering word When Bunter showed what he could eat.

JUST to finish up with, here's a tip for those of my readers who go in for amateur theatricals. I dare say you know what a terrifying ordeal

STAGE FRIGHT

is. It seems incurable, but a certain professor claims to have found a means of overcoming it. He says that all you have to do is to imagine that you are eating a lemon, and the tongue, membranes, and muscles of the mouth will become natural once more. Sounds easy, doesn't it? And, by Jove, I can see vast possibilities in it. For instance, if you should happen to be hauled up before the "Head," and you're wishing the ground would open and swallow you—well, try to imagine that you're sucking an acid drop!

But don't blame me if it doesn't work! And don't tell the Head I told you to try it!

NOW stand by for next week's tip-top programme.

The long complete yarn of the cheery chums of Greyfriars is entitled

"THE ACE OF JOKERS!"

And, of course, it's by your favourite author, Frank Richards. It's as full of good things as a tuck-hammer. So don't miss it, chums.

Also, be sure and read next week's nerve-tingling adventure yarn of Um-zugan the Mighty, and the "full-of-fun" issue of the "Greyfriars Herald."

Oh, by the way, have you got your copies of "The Greyfriars Holiday Annual" and "The Popular Book of Boys' Stories"? If you haven't, don't forget that the "Holiday Annual" costs only 5s. this year, and the "Popular" book is only 2s. 6d.

Au revoir until next week.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,340.

turned to his own work—a chapter of his celebrated "History of Greyfriars."

It was about an hour later that the silence was broken by a sharp grunt from Mr. Grimes. The Remove master glanced round.

"Many persons seem to have examined this book, sir!" said Mr. Grimes. The Remove master thought he noted a gleam in the inspector's eyes.

"Very many, I think," said Mr. Quelch, with a smile. "Since Cherry made the matter public, I think that the whole school has searched through that volume."

"It looks like it!" said Mr. Grimes. "Are you aware whether any boy has scribbled in it with a pencil?"

"No; but I should think not," said Mr. Quelch. "Neither have I seen any pencillings in it, Mr. Grimes."

"Look!" said the Courtfield inspector. Mr. Quelch looked. The inspector's plump finger indicated a faint pencilled cross on page 24 of the Holiday Annual.

"Did you observe that, Mr. Quelch?" "I may have done so," said the Remove master. "If so, I made no note of it. Doubtless some reference mark left by the printers."

Grunt from Mr. Grimes.

"Pencilled marks are not infrequently found in printed volumes," said the Remove master, in surprise. "A small pencilled cross can hardly have any connection with a message written in the book. Mr. Grimes—"

"The mark occurs under a word," said Mr. Grimes.

"No doubt."

Mr. Grimes grunted again.

"The word is 'search,'" he said.

"Quite so."

Another grunt! Mr. Grimes, letting the subject drop, turned the pages again, scanning every one of them with an eye like a hawk. A sudden exclamation from him drew the Remove master's attention again. The book was now open at page 67, and Mr. Grimes' plump finger was on the first column on that page.

"Here is another pencilled cross," he said. "It is very faint, but discernible. It indicates the word 'under.'"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, indeed!" grunted Mr. Grimes. "You and your boys, Mr. Quelch, are naturally not so accustomed to the cunning ways of crooks as a police officer must necessarily be. There is no message written in this volume, in either visible or invisible ink."

"Then it is useless to you!" said Mr. Quelch. "I am sorry—I fear that I have wasted your time; and in the circumstances, I considered—"

"You have not wasted my time, Mr. Quelch! You have done me, and the law, a very great service, I believe."

"I am glad to hear that, Mr. Grimes. But how—"

"There are more ways of killing a cat, sir, than choking it with cream," said Mr. Grimes, "and more ways of sending a message than writing it down in words."

"Some sort of cryptogram—"

"Not at all! If it is indeed a fact that Micky the Sprat was seen with this book and a pencil, and that he tried to induce the boy Bunter to show it to Skid Smith—"

"That seems assured, Mr. Grimes."

"I do not doubt it, sir—but if, as I say, it is the fact, the message sent to one crook by another was not written—it was already printed in the book by the publishers."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Not intentionally, or knowingly, of course," grinned the inspector. "What I mean is, it is not uncommon for such

a rogue to communicate with another rogue by means of a newspaper or a book—by making a slight mark against certain words which, taken one after another, form a message."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Who would have thought of such a device as that?"

"A police officer, Mr. Quelch, has to think of such devices, and detect them," said Mr. Grimes, with a plump and satisfied smile. "I am not surprised that the hidden message was never discovered, in a search made by school-boys—but had some crooked rascal like Micky the Sprat, or Skid Smith, looked for it, he would have found it very quickly."

Mr. Quelch looked keenly interested. "Does that mean, Mr. Grimes, that you have found a message?"

"It does, sir!"

"Bless my soul! And it is a clue—"

"Not merely a clue, but an absolutely certain indication of the hiding-place of the plunder from Mr. Lazarus' shop!" Inspector Grimes almost chirruped. "You have heard of the island in the river, Mr. Quelch?"

"Popper's Island?"

"Exactly! Micky the Sprat swam to it in his attempt to make his escape—some boys of this school found him there—"

"I am aware of it, sir! But what—"

"On that island," said Mr. Grimes,

"there is a big tree—"

"A very large oak, over-topping the other trees on the island," said Mr. Quelch. "It is a well-known landmark, and is, I believe, hollow."

"Exactly! And under that big tree, I fancy that Micky the Sprat buried the bag of plunder."

"But why?"

Inspector Grimes tapped the Holiday Annual.

"The message is here," he said. "If you care to see it, I will point it out to you—but you will, of course, utter no word on the subject until I have made a search on the island."

"Most assuredly! I admit that I am curious—"

"Look, my dear sir—as you have placed the clue in my hands, I can scarcely do otherwise than allow you to see it!" smiled the inspector. "I have traced the message through the book." He turned to page 24 of the Annual. "You see that faint cross under the word 'search.'"

Mr. Quelch nodded.

The inspector turned to page 67.

"You see, that tiny mark reappears, written beneath the word 'under' in the first column."

"Quite!"

"Page 71 next," said Mr. Grimes. "You see that the word 'the' is ticked in a similar manner."

"Undoubtedly."

"Now page 86," continued Mr. Grimes, "near the top of the second column, you observe that little mark under the word 'big.'"

"I begin to comprehend," said Mr. Quelch, "and—"

"Write down the words, sir, as we pick them out," said Inspector Grimes, and Mr. Quelch took up his pen. "Now we turn to page 115. In the top line of the first column is the word 'tree' ticked in the way we are getting used to."

"Exactly."

"Now page 158," said the inspector, turning to it. "Here we find that almost—but not quite—imperceptible mark under the word 'on.'"

"You are undoubtedly right!"

"On page 170 the word 'the' is again indicated."

"Precisely."

"On the last page of the book you find the final mark—under the word 'island' in the index."

Mr. Quelch gazed at it. "Now," said Mr. Grimes, "we have been through the volume from end to end, and found eight words indicated by a slight pencil-mark. What do those eight words make, read in sequence?"

"Search under the big tree on the island!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in great astonishment.

The inspector almost purred.

"There can be no doubt about the island," he remarked. "There is only one island in this locality—and we know that Micky the Sprat was for a time on Popper's Island during his flight. And the 'big tree' is unmistakable—especially as it is hollow, and so it would be easy for anything to be concealed in the earth and mouldy rubble under the hollow trunk. That this message refers to the hidden plunder can scarcely be doubted. The Sprat was dodging absolutely certain capture when he sent it. And for what could he be telling his confederate to search under the big tree on the island except the plunder he had hidden in the course of his flight?"

Grave gentleman as he was, Mr. Quelch was looking quite excited.

"If this is correct, sir, you have only to get across to Popper's Island, in the river Sark, and lay your hands on five hundred pounds' worth of stolen jewellery!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly!"

Inspector Grimes rose.

"I will take my leave," he said. "I must lose no time! Not a word, sir, till you hear from me again."

"Rely upon me!" said Mr. Quelch.

Inspector Grimes took his leave, and his waiting taxi bore him away at a rush. Precisely twenty minutes later the boatkeeper at Popper Court was rowing him across to the island in the river. And Mr. Grimes' fat face was flushed with eager expectation as he plunged through the thickets to the centre of the island and squeezed himself, with a trowel in his hand, into the hollow of the big oak. And Mr. Quelch, waiting for news at Greyfriars, was almost as eager as Inspector Grimes.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Sold!

PONSONBY waited eagerly in the spinney for the return of Billy Bunter. He was careful to keep out of sight, so near to Greyfriars School, but he watched the road, where a good number of Greyfriars fellows passed from time to time. And a taxi passed with Mr. Grimes in it, bound on an errand of which Pon little dreamed!

For a whole hour Ponsonby waited, and was joined there by Gadsby, bringing his bicycle. Gadsby left him the machine and departed, and Pon continued to wait. His opinion of Billy Bunter was that the fat junior would do almost anything for a pound, and, knowing Bunter's obtuseness, he did not doubt that he had made the fatuous Owl believe that he was going merely to "look" at the Holiday Annual when it came, leaving it in Bunter's possession. He did not make allowance for the slyness that so often accompanies obtuseness, and it did not even occur to him that Billy Bunter was capable of taking him in, lock, stock and barrel.

When at last he spotted a fat figure rolling up the road his last lingering doubt of success vanished—he had won at last. Even at a distance he could



"Shake the money out of him if he won't shell out," said Johnny Bull, adding his grasp to Bob Cherry's. Billy Bunter was swept off his feet and turned upside down. As his bullet head tapped the floor of Study No. 1 a half-crown and a sixpence rolled out of his pocket.

see a bulky volume under Bunter's fat arm.

"The silly ass!" breathed Pon. Bunter was carrying the *Holiday Annual* under his arm, as if he did not care whether all the world saw it there. True, Bob Cherry and his friends were on the football ground, and not likely to see him; but in such a matter it was necessary to be careful. Keeping behind a tree, Ponsonby watched the Owl of the Remove anxiously.

Billy Bunter's movements were leisurely, as usual. He at least saw no occasion for hurry.

But he reached the spinney at last and came away from the road, blinking round through his big spectacles in search of the dandy of Highcliffe. Pon fairly jumped towards him.

"You've got it!"

Billy Bunter promptly put the *Holiday Annual* behind him. But not before Pon had seen it quite clearly—and seen that it was the thick volume of the *Holiday Annual* dated 1934. He knew the picture on the cover well enough—it was very familiar to his eyes. Both the date and the picture on the cover caught Pon's eyes before Bunter put it behind him. And his eyes gleamed with triumph.

"Hand it over!" he breathed. "Oh, really, Pon! You're going to lend me a pound before I hand it over," objected Bunter, blinking at him, "and you're only going to look at it, you know! No snatching!"

Ponsonby laughed. He was quite willing to pay the promised pound so far as that went. The *Holiday Annual* was, in his belief, worth exactly fifty times as much as that to him. But certainly he was not willing merely to "look" at it, as he had agreed. A look at it would hardly

reveal the secret that had baffled so many searchers. Pon wanted that volume to examine at his leisure—and he was going to have it!

He jerked a pound-note from his note-case, and Bunter's little round eyes glistened behind his big, round spectacles. All was grist that came to Billy Bunter's mill. Like Vespasian of old, Billy Bunter considered that the smell of all money was sweet!

"Here you are!" Bunter brought one fat hand from behind him and grabbed the currency note! Promptly it disappeared into his pocket.

"Now hand it over!" said Pon sharply.

"I'll let you look at it," said Bunter cautiously; and he brought the *Holiday Annual* into sight once more.

The next moment it was snatched from his fat hands.

"I say!" shouted Bunter.

"Oh, don't be a fat goat!" sneered Ponsonby. "I've paid you, haven't I, you fat rotter? Bob Cherry can have it back when I've done with it! But I advise you not to tell him that you've sold it to me—I fancy he would kick you from one end of Greyfriars to the other."

"I haven't sold it to you—"

"You jolly well have!" grinned Ponsonby—and he drew his bike from the tree it was leaning against.

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

"I—I say, if you clear off with that *Holiday Annual*—"

"Exactly what I'm going to do," said Ponsonby, and he wheeled the bike away through the bushes.

Bunter rolled after him with a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"Look here, Pon—"

"That's enough! Get out!"

"I mean, if you really want to keep that *Annual* I—I'll jolly well sell it to you for this quid," said Bunter. "I'll chance it!"

Ponsonby chuckled. "Done!" he answered.

"It's a bargain!" said Billy Bunter. "Mind, you're making the bargain of your own accord—I don't owe you this pound now! You're paying me the pound for that *Holiday Annual*! I shan't mention it to Bob Cherry."

"I shouldn't!" grinned Ponsonby.

And having reached a clear path he mounted the bicycle and shot away, leaving Billy Bunter blinking after him through his spectacles.

Pon lost no time.

He was too near Greyfriars for safety with that precious volume under his arm, and it was too bulky to be easily hidden. He got his bike quickly out into the road and pedalled away. Bunter, rolling out into the road, saw him vanish in the distance in a cloud of dust, heading at top speed for Highcliffe.

"Oh crikey!" murmured Bunter.

He grinned.

Obviously, Pon was going to get his prize safe home to Highcliffe before he expended time examining it. That suited Bunter admirably—it gave him plenty of time to get into Greyfriars before Pon made a startling discovery! And the fat junior, grinning, rolled along to the school and rolled into the gates. His minor, Sammy, met him as he rolled into the quad.

"Look here, Billy, if you're in funds—" began Sammy.

Bunter chuckled.

"Come along to the tuckshop, Sammy!" he said with a burst of

generosity. "I'll stand you some tarts!"

"What-ho!" said Sammy; and the fat minor rolled off with the fat major. "I say, been robbing a bank, or what? Gatty says you gave him five bob for his Holiday Annual—the one you saw me reading! It wasn't worth it—it was second-hand! You could have got a new one—"

"A new one wouldn't have done," grinned Bunter. "It would have looked new. I've sold that Annual, Sammy, for a pound."

Sammy Bunter jumped. "Wha-a-t? Who's been idiot enough to give you a pound for a second-hand five bob book?" he ejaculated.

"Ponsonby, of Highcliffe."

"Is he mad?" gasped Bunter. "Well, he's a bit of a fool, as well as a bit of a rogue," said Bunter. "I rather think he believed that it was Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual—see?"

"Oh crikey!"

"He had the cheek to ask me to snaffle Bob's Annual for him, and I said I'd bring him a Holiday Annual, or the cad would have pitched into me. Well I took him a Holiday Annual."

"Oh crumbs!"

"He was in a jolly hurry to get off with it, in case some fellow got after him. Thinking it was Bob's Annual, of course—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Sammy. "He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "When he finds out—"

"He won't find out till he gets to Highcliffe. He was in too big a hurry to get clear of Bob with it—"

Sammy yelled. "Of course, I never said it was Bob's Annual," said Bunter virtuously. "I'm not the fellow to tell a lie, I hope! No bizney of mine if he thought it was, was it?"

Sammy shrieked. "He promised to look at it, not to snatch," said Bunter. "Then he snatched it, the rotter! So I said he could keep it for the pound! He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the two Bunters, in a hilarious state, rolled happily towards the tuckshop to deal with tarts!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came cheerfully off the football field, having beaten the Fourth by a comfortable margin of five goals to one. After changing, they went up to Study No. 1, in the Remove, to tea.

So early in the term, funds were still fairly plentiful, so there was rather a spread in Study No. 1, and several fellows were asked to join the Famous Five there—the Bounder and Tom Maulverer, and Peter Todd and Lord Maulverer. Tea was going on when a rather sticky and jammy fat face looked in, and a pair of big spectacles glimmered at the tea-party.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Have you paid Skinner, you fat villain!" asked Harry Wharton.

"Eh, what?"

Bunter had forgotten Skinner and the two half-crowns he had borrowed for the purpose of paying one.

"Look here, Bunter," said Lord Maulverer, "I lent you half-a-crown to pay Skinner and if you haven't paid him I'll jolly well kick you!"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

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"You did?" roared Bob Cherry. "Why, so did we! Bunter, you fat brigand—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "So Bunter's raised the wind twice—and I'll bet that Skinner never saw either half-crown!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Skinner! Let's ask him—"

Skinner, with a sour grin on his narrow face, looked into the study. Harold Skinner seemed to be in possession of something amusing.

"Got your Holiday Annual safe, Cherry?" he drawled.

"Eh? I left it with Quelch," answered Bob. "I believe old Grimey's been here to-day to see it. Why?"

"Has Quelch got it now?"

"I suppose so."

"Oh, all right," said Skinner, with a cheery grin. "Only, I saw Pon on a bike near Courtfield, riding like mad, with a Holiday Annual under his arm. Perhaps he's just bought one, though, in the town."

"He, he, he!" from Bunter. Bob Cherry jumped up.

"Is that true—?" he began.

"Well, I saw him," said Skinner.

"Looks to me as if he may have dropped in here while you men were playing football. What?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Harry Wharton

chucking away his money," said Bunter breezily. "He may have fancied that it was Bob's Annual, and he may not. I'm sure I couldn't say. Anyhow, he bought it fair and square."

"You fat spoofer—" gasped Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner.

"Fancy Pon's face when he gets it home, and goes through it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. The thought of Ponsonby's face when he came to examine his prize was quite entertaining. The Removites yelled.

"Rather neat—what?" grinned Bunter.

"You're an unscrupulous young scoundrel!" said the captain of the Remove, laughing. "But it serves Pon right—the cad! And now you're in funds, Bunter, you can pay Skinner that half-crown."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as Bunter made a strategic movement towards the door.

"I—I've got to see a fellow—"

gasped Bunter.

"That's all right," said Bob, catching him by the collar. "The fellow's here. Skinner's the fellow you've got to see."

"I mean, I've got to see Quelch. It's rather important. You know Quelch hates a fellow to keep him waiting—"

"Shell out!" said Skinner.

"Beast!"

"Shell out, you fat fraud!" said Bob. "Look here, you beast, I've only got three bob left out of Pon's quid, and I haven't had tea—"

"Shell out!"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "I'm going to pay Skinner when my postal order comes! In the morning—"

"Shake it out of him," said Johnny Bull, and he added his grasp to Bob's.

Billy Bunter, swept off his feet, tapped the floor of Study No. 1 with his bullet-head, upside down.

"Urrrrrrgggh!" spluttered Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A half-crown and a sixpence rolled out of Bunter's pockets as he was reversed. Skinner picked up the half-crown.

"Thanks!" he said.

And Skinner walked away, indemnified at long last for his lost ticket on the first day of term.

Bump!

Bunter, suddenly released, bumped on the study carpet and roared.

"Ow! Wow! Beasts! I say, you fellows, now I've only got sixpence! I say, look here, I haven't had my tea!"

Billy Bunter scrambled up, fielded the sixpence, and blinked wrathfully and indignantly at the tea-party. "Look here, my postal order won't come till to-morrow, and I haven't had my tea, but if you like I'll tea with you fellows, now that mean beast Skinner's got my half-crown—"

"All together," said Bob Cherry, "and see who can kick Bunter farthest along the passage!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Stand still, Bunter!"

But Billy Bunter did not stand still! He made one desperate bound out of Study No. 1 and fled for his fat life.

Study No. 1 finished tea without the assistance of William George Bunter. That cheery function was just over, when Nugent minor of the Second Form looked in.

"Cherry here?" he asked. "You're wanted in your beak's study, Cherry."

"Oh scissors!" said Bob. "What's the trouble now?"

(Continued on page 28.)

KEEP A SHARP EYE
ON THE
MAGNET
CHUMS!
THERE'S A
BIG TREAT
IN STORE FOR
YOU!

blankly. "Look here, Skinner, if you've been playing tricks again—"

"Think I'd be fool enough to snaffle anything from Quelch's study?" sneered Skinner. "I fancy I know who might be fool enough, though. I hear that Bunter has been spending money right and left at the tuckshop."

"Bunter!" roared the juniors.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Pon seemed in a mighty hurry to get home with that Holiday Annual under his arm!" grinned Skinner. "Know anything about it, Bunter?"

The juniors were all on their feet now, and expressive looks were fixed on Billy Bunter. That fat youth, however, did not seem alarmed. He grinned.

"I say, you fellows, it's all right," he said. "Pon wanted me to sell him a Holiday Annual, and offered me a pound—"

"You've sold him my Holiday Annual?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Yours isn't the only Holiday Annual at Greyfriars," grinned Bunter. "Gatty of the Second had one, and I bought it off him."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Pon gave me a pound for it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Bounder.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Nugent, staring blankly at Bunter.

"No reason why he shouldn't buy a Holiday Annual for a pound, if he likes

UMZUGAAN, THE MIGHTY!

By
ROLAND HUNTER.

As the snapping vulture swooped down, Umzugaan, the Mighty, snatched up a huge buffalo bone and leapt at the bird savagely. It was to be a fight to the death!

Nkosa, the Headman!

UMZUGAAN, THE MIGHTY—the young Zulu—stood like a statue in the African forest, staring up through the gap in the leafy roof above him. His gaze was focused on a vulture that circled in the sky some distance away.

Umzugaan had seen vultures before, but never as big as the one that now attracted his attention. The great bird swooped, rose, circled, then sank until the trees hid it from view.

Puzzled, Umzugaan headed again along the half overgrown trail. He sniffed the air expecting to scent blood, for no ordinary vulture would wait around unless in hope of snatching something from a lion's meal.

But there was no blood taint in the breeze, only the scent of men—a familiar scent, yet with something about it that bewildered Umzugaan.

There were strange rustlings in the thickets, but he could see no danger. The scent became stronger to his nostrils as he advanced. He stopped again, quivering with tense anticipation. He was on the verge of a clearing in the centre of which was a man—such a man as Umzugaan had never seen before. He was not more than four feet in height, and his head seemed out of all proportion to his plump body and bowed legs. His clothing consisted only of a bead kirtle. His hair was greased and oiled until it stuck up on his head in the form of a cone, and through it was thrust the whitened leg bone of a lamb. His teeth were filed to points and coloured red.

The pygmy, for such as he was, hauled behind him, on a length of cord, an unwilling dog that whined and whimpered with fear. The air was heavy with a rotten smell of crumbling bones, and over the tree-tops flapped the enormous vulture.

As Umzugaan gazed in astonishment the thickets on the far side of the clearing parted and a leopard sprang into view. One bound, and it was not more than three yards from the pygmy's back. The dog yelped shrilly, and Umzugaan sprang to the rescue. He thrust the little man aside roughly, and dropped on one knee—as the leopard, with a savage snarl, leapt in the air.

The spear of Umzugaan flashed in the sun as he held it poised in a slanting manner, the haft resting firmly on the ground and held steady by his strong hands. His eye was true, his nerves like steel. The point of the spear buried itself in the breast of the leaping leopard as the animal came down.

Umzugaan put forth all his great strength and twisted the weapon to one side so that the stricken animal fell clear of his naked body. Leopard and man seemed mixed up in a whirl of limbs, and a cloud of dust rose as the leopard fought to get at the great man.

The little pygmy had gained his feet, and stood watching the scene with



bulging eyes. He saw the enormous Zulu standing over the snarling leopard. The animal was on its back, and the spear was in its breast, held there, pinning the leopard to the ground, until its head slumped sideways and the flaying paws drooped in death and were still.

Umzugaan withdrew his spear, and wiped the blade on the grass. Then something wet touched his bare leg, and glancing down, the Zulu saw the mongrel dog licking his leg in gratitude. The cord that was fastened round his neck dragged on the ground.

"The gratitude of a dog," said Umzugaan, with a booming laugh. "Is it not better than the venom of a snake?"

As the pygmy made a dive for the cord the dog snarled and darted away into the thickets. The little man cursed, and would have pursued the animal, but Umzugaan gripped him by the arm.

"Let the dog go," he cried. "Thy life hath been spared. Now spare the dog!"

The pygmy scowled, and shook his arm free.

To the Zulu's surprise he was answered in a language so much like his own that he had no difficulty in understanding.

"How dost thou know the dog was to die?"

"Thou hast knives in thy belt, Little Man," retorted Umzugaan. "And what man would drag a dog on a cord in Africa except to slay?"

A strange look crept into the pygmy's eyes.

"To slay? Thou art right, O Stranger! The dog was to be a sacrifice to the god we worship, and thou hast permitted the escape of the

sacrifice. Say, now—why should I not sacrifice thee in the place of the dog?"

Umzugaan laughed, leaning on his throwing-spear and gazing down with amusement at the pygmy—just four feet of cruel, baffled rage.

"Thou, Little Man, sacrifice me! Am I not Umzugaan, the Mighty?"

The little man whistled shrilly.

"Hearken to me!" he snapped angrily. "Because I owe thee my life I will not slay thee. But thou shalt not leave here until I think fit to let thee go! Behold, I am Nkosa, the headman!"

"I am Umzugaan the Mighty. My father was killed by a black lion, the companion of Masasi, the devil man. I walk on the trail of Masasi and the black lion, to slay them, and seek the truth of my father's death. And thou, O Nkosa, cannot stop me!"

Shouldering his spear, Umzugaan strode off along the trail. But there were rustlings behind every bush and tree, and the undergrowth was alive. Faster and faster walked Umzugaan, his brows drawn menacingly over his flashing eyes. He knew he had spoken without fully understanding, but now his danger was plain to him.

He sniffed the air, and all around was the scent of men, but not one was in sight. The thickets swayed and rustled, twigs cracked, at times a faint chattering came to his ears as if the monkeys that played in the tree-tops had come to earth, yet the chattering was louder than theirs.

Suddenly, where the trail wound round, his way was barred by a horde of little men, their hide shields forming a wall over which their misshapen heads showed. Their eyes were bloodshot, and their teeth bared.

Umzugaan set his back against a tree, stuck his throwing-spear in the ground within reach of his hand, and presented his stabbing spear, to fight at close quarters.

"Umzugaan, the son of Umzugaan!" he roared. "Come, then! I am ready!" The little men before him did not move, however.

Suddenly they parted, leaving a slight gap in their ranks, and Nkosa came walking through, a sneering grin on his ugly face.

"Did I not tell thee, O Umzugaan?" he cried. "Canst thou fight a tribe? Thy life is in my hand, but I will spare it because I owe thee my life. Throw thy spears from thee, and walk to our village, unarmed, so that we may talk more of these things. Through thee the sacrifice escaped, and the wise men shall say whether thou art to be punished or not."

Umzugaan only grunted. He knew his cause was hopeless, and he had no wish to throw his life away needlessly.

He tossed his spear from him and waited, with arms folded across his broad chest, for what was to happen next. Nkosa gave the order, the pygmies formed up around Umzugaan, and the horde moved off along the trail until they came to the village in the clearing. Here a crowd of more men, women, and children came out to gape at the stalwart young Zulu.

The Village of the Vulture!

IT was a strange sight to the eyes of Umzugaan. The huts came no higher than his shoulder, and the people were like midgets. It seemed absurd that he should be so helpless in their midst, yet he was, for the time being. He noted the bows and arrows they carried. He saw that they kept their arrows in neat, bamboo quivers, and guessed that the tips were resting in some virulent poison.

In the centre of the village sat the old wise men of the pygmies. Umzugaan was led before these, and Nkosa explained all that had happened, and how the sacrifice had escaped into the forest.

Umzugaan listened, gazing about him the while and seeking some means of escape. Suddenly he saw a man crawling with difficulty from the doorway of a hut behind the assembled wise men. This was no pygmy, but a full-grown man. The new arrival squeezed himself out into the open, and as he rose to his feet the Zulu quivered with anger. He knew the man at once. It was Masasi, the devil-man—the witch-doctor—the companion of the black lion, although there was no sign of the lion.

Umzugaan was not bound, and he forgot the danger of the pygmies and their arrows. Masasi was jeering at him.

"Where is thy magic and thy strength, O Umzugaan," he said, "that thou should be here, unbound, and afraid of little men?"

Umzugaan trembled with rage. "The magic of my strength is still here, O Masasi!" he raved.

Then he bounded forward, and leapt clean over the heads of the pygmy wise men who sat in judgment upon him. His move was so unexpected that Nkosa's men were taken completely by surprise, and dared not shoot with their bows and arrows for fear of hitting their own people.

Masasi, quailing with fear, turned

and fled for his life between the huts. He had no black lion at hand to help him now, and Umzugaan was beside himself with anger, heedless of the fact that a tribe of pygmies was close on his heels, seeking to capture him. His one idea was to kill Masasi, and the devil-man knew that his life hung by a thread.

Yet Masasi had one big advantage. He knew the surrounding country and he fled for the verge of the forest, and was lost to sight amongst a cluster of boulders, overgrown with trailing creepers, where the cloying scent of some great flower hung heavy on the torrid air.

Umzugaan lost sight of the witch-doctor and paused, gazing about him. Then something flashed over the top of a rock. He swung round slightly on one foot, and turned his head, and a knife flashed past his cheek. For a second he saw the savage, painted face of Masasi over the rock, then it was gone.

The young Zulu ran forward and, with a prodigious leap, jumped clean over the great rock that stood higher than any pygmy. He came down on the other side and cried out with dismay, for his bare feet struck smooth rock—a flat slab that was polished and slippery.

He could not save himself. He went slithering down a decline, towards a great mass of what looked like giant creepers. His hands were outflung to save himself. He gripped the creepers as he fell, and the hideous laugh of Masasi, from close at hand, sounded in his ears.

He sensed that he had been trapped, and he soon knew the truth, for the great creepers, some as big round as his legs, were moving in a strange manner. They flung out like great snakes and coiled about him. One was round his neck, another round his waist. His arms and legs were seized and held in awful coils that were hauling him towards the heart of that hideous thicket.

And from the midst of the coiling tentacles was thrust an enormous flower. The petals were a beautiful pink, flushed here and there with deeper red. The scent of it was sickly sweet, and overpowering, so that the Zulu's senses reeled. The petals opened out, and he saw on the inside of the terrible blossom an array of deadly thorns that would tear his flesh like knives.

It was a flesh-eating plant, and he was to be the food of the flower. He fought at the creepers, trying to tear them from his body. His muscles stood out on his arms and legs as he struggled, while Masasi and the pygmies sat up on the rocks, laughing at him.

Never had Umzugaan fought as he fought then. Half a dozen of the clinging creepers he snapped with his bare hands, and the sap ran out of the plant in a thick, black fluid. He got to his feet and gained the freedom of one arm.

The pygmies had taken his spears, but a clasp-knife he had in the belt of his kaross had been overlooked by them. He bared the blade, and slashed with great strokes at the tentacles that held him to the hungry plant, until the black sap gushed like a waterfall and streamed out on the ground at his feet.

Umzugaan was wet from head to foot with perspiration. The creepers he had cut off writhed under his feet, and from the heart of the horrible flower came a queer, whining sound, whether of the wind in the thickets or not, he could not tell.

He freed himself at last, and went recoiling backwards, slithering away amongst the rocks, to fall on his back while the out tentacles dropped from him.

Then, with a howl of rage, the pygmies swarmed on top of him. Umzugaan fought, and his knife bit home a score of times. Tiny men were flung from him bodily against the rocks, and many dropped dead with their skulls cracked. His knife did its work with deadly accuracy. A dozen or more he killed, and twice as many he wounded before his weapon was knocked from his hand, and a horde of pygmies held his writhing limbs, while some of their number bound him with strong cords.

"Take him before Nkosa and the wise men!" ordered Masasi.

It took two dozen pygmies to carry Umzugaan's struggling, writhing form into the village, and there they dropped him down on the ground with a bump.

The pygmies were chattering all around him. He gazed up at the sky, dimly aware that the sun was setting in the west, and the shadows were lengthening. In the darkening sky circled an enormous vulture. Nkosa saw it and stood upright, pointing.

"Behold!" he cried. "The god we worship!"

The pygmies went down on their faces in the dust chanting dismally for a time, then giving way to silence, in which the only sound to be heard was the faint flapping of the vulture's wings, circling round and round above the village.

Eventually the wise men spoke, in a hideous chorus.

"What is thy wish, Nkosa?" they asked.

"The sacrifice escaped to the forest," said Nkosa. "The fault belongs to the big stranger. Behold, he fought the plant that eats, and has slain it. So much sap has been shed that the plant droops and withers. Unless we appease the spirit of the vulture that rules these forests, then will we be accused. Say what we shall do, O wise men!"

The grey heads nodded and shook, and the lips muttered for some time, until the verdict came distinctly:

"The big stranger must die!"

"It is well!" said Masasi, with a snarl. "If Umzugaan is not slain, then will I curse this village and all who dwell therein. And who is greater in magic than I, Masasi?"

He rattled his girdle of monkeys' tails and lions' teeth.

"Shall he die by the spear, or the arrow?" asked Nkosa.

"Such death is too merciful!" hissed Masasi. "He it was who spared the sacrifice to the vulture. Let him be the sacrifice now!"

Umzugaan's blood ran cold for a moment, then all his wild courage came surging back. He struggled with his cords, but they would not give.

"Take him up and fling him into the pit," shrieked Nkosa. "The vulture must feed at sunset!"

The Penalty Paid!

THE pygmies carried Umzugaan through the forest to a clearing, in the centre of which was a large pit, fully fifty yards across.

They swung the bound Zulu and hurled him in. Umzugaan felt himself falling through space, and the rush of air took his breath away. Then he struck the bottom with a jarring jerk.

He had expected every bone in his body to be broken, but he was only bruised and shaken. He lay still for a moment to regain his full senses, then glanced around in the fading light. He saw that the floor of the pit was several feet thick with a layer of bones—bones that had lain there for countless ages and crumbled to a powder, with newer bones on the top.

For a space he saw the ugly faces of the pygmies at the top, peering down at him, then they vanished, and above him, in the sky, circled the huge vulture, twice as big as any vulture he had seen before.

It circled round and round, and came down slowly, in maddening spirals, and the flapping of its huge wings echoed and re-echoed in the horrible, gloomy vastness of the pit, the walls of which were too smooth for him to climb had he been unbound.

He fought and struggled to free himself, and managed to loosen the thongs that bound his wrists, although not sufficiently to get a hand free.

Then from above he heard frantic cries, and a tiny body came hurtling over the edge to drop into the pit, squirming and writhing within a yard of Umzugaan's face.

It was the dog—the mongrel cur—the scavenger of the pygmy village. Whether it had jumped in purposely or whether, scared of the pygmies, it had blundered in accidentally, Umzugaan never knew. But there it was, snuffling against him and whimpering.

"Once I saved thee," said Umzugaan, with a bitter laugh. "Now we perish together!"

The horrible vulture came down with a rush, its awful beak down to strike at the bound man's face. The dog bounded on to Umzugaan's chest, barking furiously, and up above appeared the faces of the watching pygmies.

One huge wing of the vulture sent the dog spinning, but in a flash the tiny animal was on its feet again, and, with a bound, had sprung to the attack. It flew at the vulture, and its teeth found hold in the scrawny neck, where it was bare of feathers.

The horrible bird thrashed about, striving to rid itself of the hairy fury, and rose in the air, the dog still hanging to its neck. Down it came again, flinging itself about, thrashing madly with its wings; but still the dog held on.

Umzugaan squirmed this way and that, wrenching at his cords with all his might, so that his great muscles stood out on his arms and chest. He suddenly became aware that the thongs were giving, and realised what had happened. He was lying on a sharp bone. The weather of years had helped to sharpen it, until it was as keen as a knife. Whether bone of man, beast, or bird he knew not, and did not care. He chafed the cords violently upon it, and felt the bone pierce his own flesh, felt the warm blood surging over his hands.

The vulture, trying to rid itself of the dog, rose to enormous heights, then swooped down, beating its great wings so that the echo of them in the pit sounded like claps of thunder, and its angry cries—Kee-ee-ee!—hissing and vicious, awoke the echoes of the surrounding forest.

Then down it came, alighting on the pile of bones, trying to crush the dog to the ground under its breast bone.

But by that time, with one savage wrench, Umzugaan had snapped the cords that secured his wrists. A second later his feet were free, and he stood upright, singing his battle song:

"Umzugaan, the son of Umzugaan!"

He had nothing but his bare hands, but he never hesitated. He sprang on the back of the vulture, as it fought with the dog, and encircled the scrawny neck with one strong arm. The dog, weakened by its struggles, released its hold of the bird's neck and dropped, panting and bleeding, to the ground.

Umzugaan held on, forcing the bird's head back. The beak and the talons could not reach him. He straddled the body of the vulture, wrenching the head back, while the bird of prey fought to shake him off. The strength of Umzugaan was amazing, but he could not hope to hold the vulture for long. The great wings threshed the air, and man and bird began to rise from the ground, locked in a deadly embrace.

The odds were against the big Zulu. His hands were losing their grip on the featherless throat of the vulture, and suspended in midair, the bird being unable to lift its own weight and that of the man more than a few feet from the ground, Umzugaan felt himself rolling from his position.

One wing tip tilted downwards. As if in a frenzy the vulture tried to turn its head to strike at its foe. The movement came near to being the end of Umzugaan, for the tilting of the bird's body rolled him to one side, and the vulture turned over on its back and dropped.

Luckily for the Zulu, he rolled off the body before it actually hit the ground, and had the quick wit to scramble out of the way as the bird fell.

In a flash the vulture had shot up into the air again. It was free! But it had no intention of leaving the pit. It had been in the habit of coming to the pit for food, and would not be denied.

As it swooped down again with lightning speed Umzugaan hurled himself forward, yards away, so that the talons clanged on the rocks behind him.

Round he spun, not at all clear how to return to the attack. His bare hands were not enough against this foe. He needed a weapon, but had no time to seek one.

The vulture fanned the air with its wings. Feathers flew, and the scrid dust of the pit rose in suffocating clouds. The bird shot up above Umzugaan's head, then swooped to kill.

Again the big Zulu flung himself out of the reach of those terrible talons, although the hooked beak struck him a glancing blow and gashed his arm.

He went back against a rock, twisted his ankle on a stone, and fell in a heap. His hand came in contact with something hard and round. He snatched it up. It was a big bone of some sort—a thigh bone of a buffalo—and the feel of it gave him new heart.

The bird had stumbled awkwardly and was trying to regain its balance. It turned to face the man, and Umzugaan leapt at it savagely. He dodged the wicked thrust of the hooked beak and struck at the ugly head with all his might. The hard bone crashed on the bare skull and the bird gave vent to one long-drawn-out cry and then collapsed in a flurry—dead.

The sun had dropped now, and the pit was in darkness. The pygmies, around the brink, enraged by the death of their horrible god, sent a shower of poisoned arrows into the pit. Umzugaan crouched close to the wall, the dog beside him. He stroked the animal's head, to reassure it.

Then he became aware that the dog was scrabbling wildly at the litter of bones close to the wall. Deeper and deeper the dog dug, until, as the rising moon above pierced faintly the gloom of the pit, Umzugaan saw the top of a

tunnel. With a grunt he went down on hands and knees and dug with bruised hands, helping the dog, until the heap of bones collapsed and they fell into the mouth of the tunnel, the existence of which no one had suspected before. The keen nose of the dog had detected the current of air entering the charnel pit.

Umzugaan had to crawl on all fours, as the tunnel was not high enough to permit him to stand erect. The dog followed close behind, whimpering slightly. Eventually they reached the end of the tunnel, and scrambled out into a glade of the forest, from between two huge rocks.

Umzugaan rose and stretched himself, then suddenly glanced down at his feet. The dog was there, lying on one side, tongue out, gazing up at him appealingly. There was a gash in his side where the vulture's talons had caught him.

The Zulu stooped and patted the tiny head.

"Great is thy courage, little one!" he said gently. "Thy gratitude is greater, even, than man's."

He raised the mongrel cur in his arms, only to see it breathe its last.

Umzugaan's brows came down over his flashing eyes.

"Little one," he murmured, "thy sacrifice shall be avenged!"

With a flat stone he managed to scoop out a grave for the gallant dog, and buried it there in the forest glade. Then he arose, and, breaking a stout bough from a tree, strode towards the pygmy village. Once he paused and examined the soft soil of the trail. The marks told him that Masasi and the black lion had already left. No doubt Masasi had witnessed the death of the vulture god and feared for his own skin. But he could wait.

Umzugaan continued on his way. The bulk of the pygmy warriors were squatting round the brink of the pit, waiting for the moon to shine into the horrible place, and by its light to shoot down the big stranger who had slain their god.

But a few warriors remained in the village, and Nkosa was behind them when Umzugaan stalked in amidst the huts. They started up, reaching for their bows and arrows. But the war-cry awoke the echoes.

"Umzugaan, the son of Umzugaan!"

Whirling his broken bough, Umzugaan charged into the midst of them. Man after man he brained before their huts, and Nkosa turned and fled. But Umzugaan caught him, dropped his bough, and held him with his bare hands.

"The dog saved me, and the dog died for me!" he cried, in his booming voice. "Thou shalt die in payment for the dog!"

Within a short while Nkosa had paid the penalty.

Then Umzugaan turned and ran from the spot. He could not fight the tribe. He raced through the forest to the broad river, swam across, with the crocodiles snapping at his heels, gained the other bank, and set off once more through the night on the trail of Masasi and the black lion, with but three moons in which to accomplish his object.

THE END.

(Don't miss the next story in this superb series of thrilling adventure in the African jungle, starring Umzugaan, the Mighty. You'll find it in next Saturday's tip-top issue of the MAGNET.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,340.

THE SECRET OF THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!

(Continued from page 24.)

"News of the jolly old Holiday Annual, perhaps," suggested the Bounder. "Quelch or Grimes may have spotted something."

Bob Cherry went down the stairs and repaired to his Form master's study. His famous Holiday Annual was lying on the table there, and Mr. Quelch, with a kind smile, pointed to it.

"You may take your book now, Cherry," he said. "And you will be very glad to hear that Inspector Grimes succeeded in discovering a secret message in it."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob. "I—I mean did he, sir?"

"He did," said Mr. Quelch. "And I have just received a telephone-call from Mr. Grimes, Cherry, informing me that the jewellery taken from Mr. Lazarus' shop last term by the smash-and-grab raider has been found."

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "No doubt you are interested to see the secret message in the book, my boy," smiled Mr. Quelch; "I will point it out to you."

And he proceeded so to do, much to Bob's surprise and interest.

"Search under the big tree on the

island!" repeated Bob. "Phew! That must mean Popper's Island, where we rooted that villain Micky the Sprat out of the hollow tree—"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Quelch. "And Inspector Grimes has found the bag containing the whole of the plunder taken from Mr. Lazarus' shop buried under the rubbish in the hollow tree. He was able to discover it directly after reading that secret message in your Holiday Annual, Cherry."

"Now you may take your book, Cherry, with the satisfaction of knowing that it has been instrumental in rendering very valuable aid to the law," said Mr. Quelch benevolently.

And Bob left the study with the Holiday Annual under his arm. He fairly raced back to the Remove passage and burst in on the fellows in Study No. 1, brandishing the bulky volume in the air.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "What do you men think?"

"I think you'll bring the roof down at that rate," answered Nugent.

"Fathhead! They've found it!"

"It—what?"

"The jolly old plunder! And the message was in the book all the time! But I fancy Pon would never have spotted it, even if he had got hold of the book. It was jolly deep! Look!"

"Oh, my hat!" And every head in the study was bent over the Holiday Annual to trace that mysterious message.

Harry Wharton & Co. were feeling quite happy and satisfied at the outcome of the affair. Pensonby, at Highcliffe, was gritting his teeth with rage as he examined the Holiday Annual for which he had paid William George Bunter a pound. A brief examination revealed that, though it certainly was a Holiday Annual, it was not the copy of that famous publication that Pon wanted. Pon, no doubt, would have tried again; Pon was a stickler. But the next morning he had news that completely knocked his schemes on the head. The hidden plunder had been found.

That settled the matter, even for Pon. His dream of the fifty pounds reward was gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream, and Pon was left with his disappointment.

THE END.

(Next week's grand long story of the chums of Greyfriars features an old favourite in William Wibley, the school-boy impersonator. Note the title, chums, "THE ACE OF JOKERS!" and prepare yourself for the greatest laugh ever.)

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DISCLAIMER!

The rumour that our study is haunted is hereby repudiated. The article of food which was seen walking through the doorway during vac was merely a piece of cheese left over from last term.—HARRY WHARTON, Study No. 1.

No. 55 (New Series).

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

October 21st, 1933.



INTENDING BORROWERS

are asked to note that for a loan of Five Bob I now require Ten Bob at the end of the week. The Head told me I ought to take more "interest" in the School, and I guess I will— FISHER T. FISH, Financier, Study No. 14, Remove.

AS OTHERS SEE THEM

What I Think of David Morgan

By William Scott

So Morgan thinks I'm a rebel, does he? I'm almost inclined to punch the rotter and draw the crimson claret from his Cambrian cork. Unfortunately, however, I'm not particularly fit just now, and Dr. Pillsbury says there's something wrong with my nerves—so, perhaps, on consideration, I'll let him off this time!

After all, there's a certain amount of excuse for this woebegone Welshman's jaundiced view of men that matter (this includes me, of course!). Time was when Morgan was a fellow of some importance in the Remove—a regular member of the Big Noise in the Debating Society. But now he's a mere nobody.

Why it's because, you ask. Well, some would say it's because of the coming of Wharton, Vernon-Smith, Redwing, and the other high-sheppers of to-day. My own opinion is that Morgan never was anything to about about, and that the obscurity in which he now dwells is the right position for him to occupy.

Don't think I'm prejudiced against Welshmen. I'm not. I'll grant that there have been many famous Welshmen in history, and there are probably many more to come.

But you can take it from me that David Morgan of the Remove at Greyfriars will never figure among them!

(Scott's done his worst—but between him and Morgan we know which we still prefer ourselves!—Ed.)

LONZY'S LITTLE LETTERS

Dear Editor.—My consanguinous relative, Peter, having referred to me on the penultimate day of last week as a "walking dictionary," permit me to give public expression to my disapprobation of the utilisation of such terminology and to couple that act with the simultaneous effectuation of the indicative asseveration that for a dictionary, which is merely an inorganic lexicographical object, to display pedestrian proclivities would indubitably be an incongruous, unnatural, and utterly incredible phenomenon.

Trusting that you agree with my diagnosis,
Yours truly,
ALONZO TODD.

(If that's the best effort you can make to convince us that you're not a walking dictionary, Lonzy, we're going to remain unconvinced for a long, long time!—Ed.)

THEATRICAL PRODUCER IN COURT

Playwright's Reputation at Stakes

In the Remove Court of Justice, Richard Penfold, playwright, sued William Wibley, theatrical producer, claiming five shillings damages in respect of alleged harm to his professional reputation in the production "Attaboy!"

Outlining the case for Plaintiff, Peter Todd, K.C., said that rarely in his experience had he encountered a more flagrant example of the mutilation of a masterpiece than was offered in this case. Dick Penfold, as all the world knew, was a playwright with an established reputation. Some time ago he wrote a play for production by the Remove

Dramatic Society. The play in question was written at the special request of a theatrical producer named Wibley. He did not want to produce the play, but he would therefore against Wibley, and he would therefore say nothing about him except that he was a wretched, degraded, unscrupulous worm. Wibley's actions would speak for themselves.

The moment Wibley started to produce the play he started meddling about with it. He changed the title of "Driven From Home" to "Attaboy." He transformed it from a play of four acts and ten scenes to a play of two acts

on afterwards, but he'd only got half-way when Fishy put the machine in reverse and sent him whizzing down to the bottom again!

COKER MINOR—PREFECT

Rowdy Scenes follow Appointment

The unusual spectacle of suffering lot in the Remove, but we're not going to stand for that!

On Wednesday, Coker minor tried to stop Ogily and Brown and Bulstrode from climbing over the school wall after locking-up time. Ogily and Brown and Bulstrode just walked over him and left him gasping in the mud.

On Thursday, Coker minor had the job of shepherding us to bed. He looked into the Rag at bed-time and bleated "Bed-time, you chaps!"

Nothing can stop the onward march of progress, and all the at the foot of the Remove beaks and pincettes at Greyfriars is a fair, "yelling" with Coker of the didn't succeed in stopping the Remove! If it had been for Fish's moving stairs this week.

As a matter of fact, another use for it was discovered only half an hour after the official opening.



There have been countless incidents of a similar kind right through the week. How long is it going on!—in the question in everybody's mind as we go to press. Obviously the present position can't last. We're getting more defiant every day, and Coker minor's prebendship has become a farce. Sooner or later things will come to a head and there'll be a rare old bust-up!

How soon it will be remains to be seen. Perhaps we'll be able to say more about it next week!

Mr. Justice Wharton, who woke at this point, began to award the amount claimed when Wibley, who was conducting his own case, pointed out that the case for the defence had not been heard. Judgment was accordingly postponed.

Wibley, in a really "hot" speech, said that this composed entirely of hosh, bunkum, and belshash. Penfold's play, far from being a masterpiece, was one hundred per cent pure, unadulterated tripe. In proof of that statement he would mention that it had been rejected by over fifty theatrical producers.

NUGENT MINOR'S GREAT DAY

Public Presentation by Remove

A function of quite an unusual kind took place in the Rag last Tuesday evening, when Dick Nugent, of the Second, was publicly presented with a small bottle of blue-black ink to commemorate the anniversary of an occasion when he was seen to wash his hands.

Wharton then presented the bottle of best blue-black to the leader of the Second amid frenzied applause.

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!

Bilbowe major's hannahake is the grip of a vice, and he receives a boot on his well-oiled ankles in offering his hand to unsuspecting victims—who invariably dance in anguish!

Wharton made a promising start for the football season by defeating Redolphy 6-0 at Redolphy, Wharton (3) Vernon-Smith (3), and Horace Singh were the scorers.



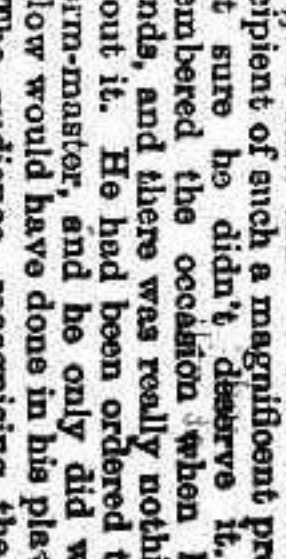
Bob Cherry takes a cold bath every morning for fitness. Bunter takes a bath once a year, and then only if forced. He says water is no good for an athlete's legs!



Johnny Bull has given up his concert and is trying to become proficient on a saxophone. His stud-makes with now that they had encouraged him to risk to his concert!



Peter Todd commences that Bunter start for the football season by defeating Redolphy 6-0 at Redolphy, Wharton (3) Vernon-Smith (3), and Horace Singh were the scorers.



With his customary generosity, Master Nugent afterwards started out his gift among his friends, and half the members of the Second were soon sneering their fingers and faces with best blue-black to the accompaniment of howls of pleasure.



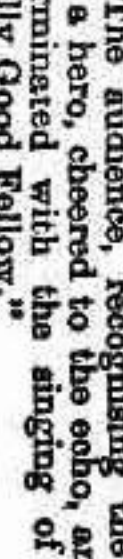
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