

A Merry Christmas Number!

The MAGNET

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AN IDEAL XMAS PRESENT

Price 5L

The FACE at the WINDOW!

(A Dramatic Incident from This Week's Grand Christmas Story of HARRY WHARTON & CO. and Convict 33.)

CHRISTMAS at HILTON HALL!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bump!

"ABOUT CHRISTMAS—" said Billy Bunter.

He got no further.

Five fellows, who had been walking and talking in the old quad of Greyfriars, suddenly broke into a run.

Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove did not seem to want to hear about Christmas—from Billy Bunter.

They scudded.

Billy Bunter blinked after them, through his big spectacles, in surprise and indignation.

"I say, you fellows!" he roared. "I say, don't clear off while a fellow's talking to you. I say, stop!"

But the Famous Five of the Remove did not stop.

They accelerated.

Billy Bunter grunted angrily.

Just before Greyfriars School broke up for the Christmas holidays, the fat Owl of the Remove was rather anxious to discuss the "hols."

But never had Billy Bunter's fascinating company been so little sought after.

Fellows would turn corners, or slam study doors, or hurl Latin grammars, when they saw Bunter coming.

Getting "fixed up" for Christmas was rather difficult in these circumstances. Time was getting short now, and Bunter was anxious to get fixed up. Everybody else seemed to want to leave him unfixed.

"Beasts!" grunted Bunter.

He rolled after the Famous Five, as they trotted away by the path through the frosty elms.

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"I say, you fellows!" he bawled.

Bob Cherry looked back over his shoulder, with a cheery, grinning face.

"He's after us!" he remarked.

"Trot on!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"The trotfulness is the proper caper!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Put it on terrifically!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter put on a spurt. Really, he wanted to speak to these unsociable beasts before the bell went for third school.

"Put it on!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

Five sturdy and healthy juniors enjoyed a rapid sprint on a firm, frosty winter's morning. The fat Owl of the Remove, toiling in the rear, did not enjoy it. He had more weight to carry than any member of the Famous Five—in fact, as much as any two of them. Looking back at the gasping, spluttering Owl as they ran, with laughing faces, the chums of the Remove trotted rapidly over the carpet of snow on the Elm Walk.

It was because they were looking back just then, as they ran, that the unexpected happened.

Certainly they did not suppose that any fellow was loafing about in that rather secluded spot. And if a fellow was there, there was no reason why he should not see them coming, and step out of the way.

But, as it happened, a fellow was there, and he did not see them coming. Neither did he hear them, as their footsteps made no sound on the soft snow.

It was a senior—a Fifth Form man—who was there. It was Cedric Hilton,

the slim, elegant, handsome dandy of the Fifth. He was standing in the middle of the path, with his back towards the quad, and his whole attention was concentrated on a letter he was reading.

From the expression of concentrated thought on Cedric Hilton's face, and the deep wrinkle in his brow, it seemed that the letter contained matters of urgent import.

Perhaps he had retired to that quiet spot to read it without danger of interruption. If so, he was rather unlucky. For he was interrupted, suddenly, unexpectedly, and violently.

Crash!

Before they knew he was there, the running juniors crashed into his back. Hilton of the Fifth gave a startled yell, and pitched forward on his hands and knees.

The letter flew from his hand.

The winter wind caught it, and blew it a dozen feet away before it dropped into the snow.

But Hilton was not thinking of the letter.

He sprawled face down in the snow, with five startled and breathless Remove fellows sprawling over him.

"What the thump—" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Who the dickens—" gurgled Johnny Bull.

"What the terrific thump—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He, he, he!" came from Billy Bunter. The fat Owl, from a distance, beheld the sprawling heap, and chuckled. "He, he, he! I say, you fellows— He, he, he!"

Bunter seemed amused.

Hilton of the Fifth was not amused. He turned a red and furious face on the juniors, as he struggled in their midst.

"You young rotters! You—you—grooogh! I'll—ooogh!" he spluttered. "I'll smash the lot of you! Gerroff! Oooogh!"

The breathless five scrambled up. Hilton dragged himself to his feet more slowly. He was breathless, smothered with snow, and seemed in a bad temper.

"Sorry!" gasped Wharton. "Didn't see you—"

"The sorrowfulness is terrific—"
"What the thump did you stick in the way for?" demanded Johnny Bull. "Your own fault!"

Hilton did not answer. Having recovered a little of his breath, he made a jump at the juniors.

"Hook it!" chuckled Bob.
"Stop!" roared Hilton furiously, as the five scudded on up the path. He rushed in fierce pursuit.

Evidently Hilton of the Fifth wanted vengeance, and wanted it badly. He had had a nasty jar, there was no doubt about that. He was bumped and shaken, and in a towering rage. He fairly raced after the Removites.

"They flew!"
Really it was rather kind of them to run for it. The five sturdy Removites could have handled Hilton, and handled him quite easily, had they chosen so to do. But, having already barged him over, they did not want to damage him any more. So they stamped on the gas, so to speak.

"Beasts!" gasped Bunter.
At that rate of speed, the fat Owl of the Remove had no chance of overtaking the fellows with whom he was so anxious to discuss the important question of the Christmas holidays.

They vanished through the elms, with Hilton of the Fifth in hot and fierce pursuit. Bunter could only hope that he would catch them, and whop them all round. That would be some consolation.

Meanwhile, he picked up the letter Hilton had dropped. The December wind had landed it within a couple of yards of him.

Bunter's idea in picking up the letter, was simply that which any fellow might have had—of returning it to the owner.

But it was like Bunter to look at it, and read it—which, it was to be hoped at least, other fellows would not have done!

As he blinked at Hilton's letter through his big spectacles, Bunter's little round eyes almost bulged through those big spectacles.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped.

Had Hilton of the Fifth returned at that moment, no doubt Billy Bunter would have handed over the letter. But Hilton did not appear. And the Owl of the Remove shoved it into his pocket, and rolled back to the quad, with quite an extraordinary expression on his fat face.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Just Like Coker!

"STOP them!" said Coker of the Fifth.

"Oh, who?" gasped Potter.
"Look!" said Coker, and he pointed.

Five juniors of the Remove, rather red, and a little breathless, but apparently in cheery spirits, had burst from the leafless old elms, and were sprinting along the gravel path, where Coker and his friends walked in state.

After them, snow-smothered, his hat

gone, and his eyes gleaming with wrath, sprinted Hilton of the Fifth.

Potter and Greene stared at him. It was very unusual for Hilton, the elegant dandy of the Fifth, to be seen in an excited state. Generally, he was cool and calm, and, in Coker's opinion, lackadaisical! Now he was neither cool nor calm, and anything but lackadaisical. Something, evidently, had happened to excite his wrath.

"My hat! Hilton's got his rag out!" said Greene. "Looks as if he's been rolling in the snow."

"Stop them!" repeated Coker.
That was Coker all over!

He strode into the way of the Famous Five, to stop them!

Horace Coker did not think much of Hilton. He considered him a drawling, lazy dandy and slacker, and had, indeed, more than once told him so. Still, he was a Fifth Form man—and so was Coker. If cheery juniors had been ragging a Fifth Form man, Coker was the fellow to step in and see him righted. Coker was, in fact, the fellow to step into any trouble that came his way.

"I say—" began Potter.
"Don't jaw, do as I tell you!" snapped Coker, over his shoulder. Coker did not like argument.

Potter and Greene, of the Fifth, did not jaw. But they did not do as Coker told them! They right-wheeled and

Many and varied have been Billy Bunter's schemes for "fixing up" for the Christmas Holidays. But the idea of hooking on to Hilton, the dandy of the Fifth Form, and getting an invitation to Hilton Hall, seems a hopeless proposition—yet Bunter does it!

marched off, leaving Coker on his own to deal with any trouble he might collect. It was nearly time for third school, with Mr. Prout, anyhow, and they headed for the House.

Coker, on his own, planted himself in the way of the running five.

"Stop!" he shouted, holding up his hand.

The Famous Five did not stop.

Hilton was close behind, on vengeance bent! They did not want to handle Hilton. But they had no objection to handling Coker, if he wanted them to. Apparently he did!

"Charge!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The chargefulness is terrific."

"Barge him over!"

If Coker thought that his lifted hand and his commanding voice would stop the running Removites, it was only one of Horace Coker's many mistakes.

Instead of stopping, the chums of the Remove rushed right at Coker. They charged in a bunch, and the burly Horace was swept fairly off his feet.

"Whoop!" roared Coker, as he went down.

He grabbed wildly at the juniors. His grasp closed on Bob Cherry, and Bob was dragged down with him.

"Ow! Leggo, you ass!" gasped Bob. Thump!

Holding Bob with one hand, Coker thumped with the other. There was a terrific roar from Bob Cherry. Coker's thump was hard and heavy.

"Yaroooh! Rescue!"

He rolled over in deadly combat with Coker. They mixed with gravel and snow as they rolled.

"Hold on! Rescue!" panted Wharton.

The Famous Five had intended to leave Coker for dead, as it were, and race on to the House. But Coker had got hold of one, and the other four turned back promptly to the rescue.

They hurled themselves on Horace Coker in a body.

Hilton was coming up fast. But they had a few moments. They put those few moments to the best use. Coker's grasp was dragged away from Bob. In the grip of five pairs of hands, he was rolled over on the path. Beside the path was a bank of snow, recently swept up by Mr. Mimble, the gardener. Coker's head was shoved into it! He gurgled horribly as his features were buried in snow.

Johnny Bull caught up a handful of gravel to shove down Coker's back. Frank Nugent grabbed a handful of snow to shove after it. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh crushed Coker's hat on the back of Coker's head, driving his face yet deeper into the snow. Coker, in his present position, was favourably placed for smacking. Bob Cherry administered a tremendous smack on Coker's trousers that rang like a pistol-shot. A gurgling roar came from Horace. Harry Wharton grabbed up snow, kneaded a rapid snowball, and met Hilton, as he tore up, with a missile that squashed all over his face.

The next moment Hilton was jumping at him.

Smack!
"Wow!" roared Wharton. "Collar him!"

Hilton had no time for another smack. The whole Co. turned on him as one man. Owing to Coker's intervention, he had caught them. But it was rather like catching Tartars! In a few seconds he wished that he hadn't.

He hardly knew what happened in those hectic seconds. The Famous Five did not want to damage him. They thought they had damaged him enough, barging him over under the elms. But he had to be stopped from smacking heads. They collared him, whirled him over, and up-ended him.

If the burly, beefy Coker had had little chance in the hands of the five, the slim and elegant Hilton had less! Crash! Bump!

He landed on Coker's back as Horace struggled up out of the snow bank, flattening Horace down again.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Coker, as Hilton crashed on him, and his rugged features were buried deep again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hook it!"

Harry Wharton & Co. resumed their sprint. They headed for the House, laughing breathlessly. Hilton, perhaps, might have pursued them farther, but he had no chance. Coker, twisting round in the snow, grabbed at him blindly, and thumped wildly. With his eyes, nose, and mouth full of a mixture of snow and gravel, Coker could see nothing for the moment—but he could feel, and he felt somebody bumping on him, and he grasped at that somebody and punched—blindly, but heftily!

"Wow!" yelled Hilton, as he got the punch. "Ow! You—"

"I'll smash you!" spluttered Coker. "You cheery fags—you young hooligans—I'll spifficate you—I'll pulverise you—take that—"

"Ow! You fool! Leggo—ow—"

"And that—"

"Yooop!"

"And that!" panted Coker, rolling over his adversary, and punching hard

and punching often. "And that! I'll teach you! I'll—"

"Ow! Oh! Yaroooh! You mad fool, leggo!" yelled Hilton, struggling frantically in the powerful grasp of the hefty Horace.

"And that—why—what—who—"

Coker blinked at Hilton, realising that it was not a cheeky fag that he had in his grasp.

"Let go, you dummy!" shrieked Hilton.

"Where are those fags?"

"You blithering idiot!"

Coker let go and stared round for the fags! They had vanished. Cedric Hilton staggered to his feet.

Coker, still in a state of bewilderment, stared blankly. He did not seem to expect what happened next—though really he might have expected it. Hilton, boiling with rage, hit out, and Coker went over as if a cannon-shot had hit him. Once more Horace plunged headlong in snow.

Cedric Hilton walked away to the House. He walked quickly. It had been a satisfaction to knock Coker down. It would not have been so satisfactory to wait for what would happen when Coker got up again. By the time Coker extracted himself from the snow and gathered his scattered wits once more, the dandy of the Fifth had gone.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Letter from Hilton Hall!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

Third school for the Remove that day was mathematics with Mr. Lascelles. Maths, as a rule, did not make Remove fellows grin. Maths, rather, made them frown, if not groan. But Bunter was grinning.

Bunter was not giving a lot of attention to Larry Lascelles. He was not thinking of maths. He was thinking of the letter in his pocket.

He had not seen Hilton of the Fifth since picking up that lost letter. That letter interested Billy Bunter—deeply. It was the cause of the grin that overspread his fat visage. Several fellows, observing that fat grin, grinned themselves, wondering whether it meant that the Owl of the Remove had succeeded at long last in "fixing up" for the Christmas holidays. If so, they did not envy the fellow he had fixed on.

Mr. Lascelles, having turned his back on his class to chalk a diagram on the blackboard, Billy Bunter drew the letter from his pocket. Under the cover of his desk, surreptitiously, he read it through again.

He wondered whether Cedric Hilton had missed that letter. Hilton, of course, was now in the Fifth Form with Prout. He could hardly have searched for the lost letter yet. When he searched for it he was not likely to find it—unless Billy Bunter chose. Bunter could imagine his feelings when he missed it, and failed to locate it. It was not such a letter as the dandy of the Fifth would have cared, or dared, to let anyone at Greyfriars see—if he could have helped it!

Serve him jolly well right, was Bunter's opinion. If a fellow chose to be a shady blackguard and play ducks and drakes with the rules of the school and run the risk of getting the sack, serve him jolly well right to have a scare.

Certainly, if that letter had fallen into the hands of Dr. Locke, it would have made the Head open his eyes wide. Certainly it would have been followed by Hilton of the Fifth being called into

the headmaster's study! And if the Head went into the matter, as doubtless he would, it could hardly fail to be followed by certain facts coming to light with regard to the Fifth Form sportsman's manners and customs.

Which, in turn, would be followed, almost certainly, by the "order of the boot" for Cedric Hilton. Undoubtedly it was a very remarkable and unusual letter for a Greyfriars fellow to receive. It ran:

"Hilton Hall,
"Blackmoor,
"Devon."

"Dear Master Cedric,—I regret to say that it is not in my power to accede to your request for a further loan of fifteen pounds. I doubt whether Sir Gilbert would ever forgive me if he became aware that I have advanced any sums to his son. He would, I am assured, be greatly incensed at an action which he would regard, and rightly, as unbecoming in his butler. I am bound to say that it has weighed on my mind.

"I suggest, sir, that you write direct to your father, and explain to him your difficulties. Surely, sir, your debts are of such a nature that you can explain them to your father.

"Yours respectfully,
"FRANCIS WALSHINGHAM."

It was a dignified letter; with a sort of staid, respectable, upper-servant dignity. Billy Bunter could picture the butler of Hilton Hall: solid, portly, probably with a port wine complexion. He grinned.

Then he gave a jump as Peter Todd rapped him on a fat shoulder. He crumpled the letter hastily in his hand.

"Invitation for Christmas, old fat bean?" asked Toddy.

"Eh! Oh, yes! No!" stammered Bunter.

"Yes, and no?" asked Peter.

"I—I—I mean yes! One of my many invitations," said Bunter. "I've been fairly snowed under with 'em, Toddy, as you know."

"I don't know!" pointed out Toddy

"Why, I've told you."

"That's why I don't know."

"Beast!"

"Well, if somebody's asked you for the hols, perhaps you'll give us a rest in the 'Remove!" grinned Peter. "Mauleverer's looking quite weary and worn."

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"And Smithy's sworn to brain you with a golf club if you put your head into his study again to speak about Christmas—"

"Beast!"

"Who's the happy man?" asked Toddy. "One of those St. Jim's fellows who are so fond of you—I don't think!"

"Exactly," said Bunter. "You know how pally I am with D'Arcy of St. Jim's. He's written to ask me for Christmas, and—and this is his letter. I'm not sure I shall go, though! The fact is, Toddy, that humble as your home is, compared with D'Arcy's, I'd rather come home with an old pal."

Mr. Lascelles glanced round from the blackboard.

"Are you talking in class, Bunter?"

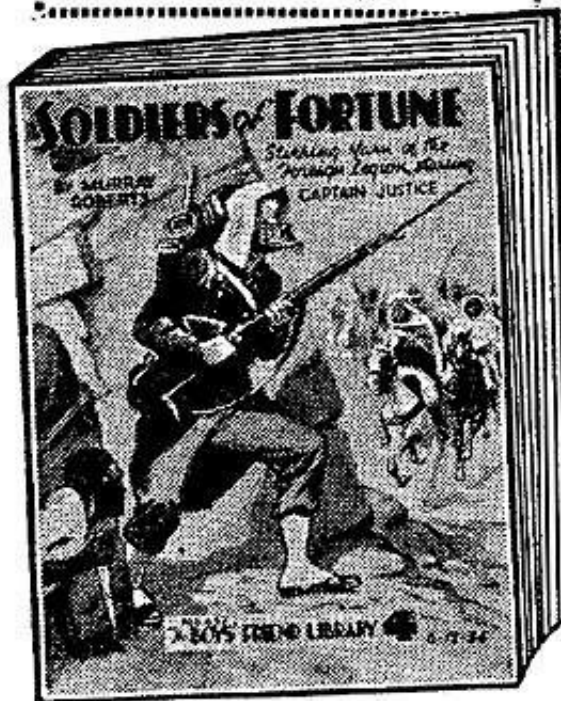
"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I never opened my lips, sir! I was only telling Toddy about a letter I've had from Tom Merry—"

"Silence!"

Billy Bunter was silent. Mr. Lascelles turned to the blackboard again. Bob Cherry, who had caught Tom Merry's name, leaned over and tapped Bunter,

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Crash! Bump! Many hands grasped the slim and elegant Hilton, and he was hurled through the air. He landed on Coker's back, as Horace struggled out of the snow-bank. "Urrrgh!" gurgled Coker, as Hilton crashed on him, and his rugged features were buried deep in snow again. "Ha, ha, ha!" Harry Wharton & Co. laughed merrily, and then resumed their sprint round the snowy quad.

"You've heard from Tom Merry, at St. Jim's?" he asked.

"Yes—invitation for Christmas, you know!" said Bunter, blinking at him. "We're rather pally, of course!"

"It was D'Arcy a minute ago!" murmured Peter Todd.

Billy Bunter started.

"I—I mean D'Arcy," he stammered. "It's from Tom D'Arcy—I mean Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—my old pal at St. Jim's, you know. He's fearfully keen for me to come for Christmas. But I'm not going, Bob—I'm coming with you to Wharton Lodge—"

"There'll be a fat porpoise found dead there, if you do!" remarked Bob.

"Beast!"

Mr. Lascelles glanced round again.

"If there is any more talking, the class will be detained half an hour!" he remarked.

There was no more talking!

Third school was over at last, and the Remove were dismissed. Several fellows, as they went out, had a wary eye on Bunter—especially Lord Mauleverer, who was leading quite a hunted life now that break-up was so near at hand.

But Bunter, for once, did not seem keen on discussing the important and urgent question of the Christmas hols, in the Remove. He rolled away towards the Fifth Form Room. Mr. Prout was a few minutes later dismissing the Fifth, and Bunter waited for them to come out.

When they came he made a grab at Cedric Hilton's sleeve, as the dandy of the Fifth passed him.

"I say, Hilton!" he squeaked.

"Don't bother!" snapped Hilton. He was not looking in a good temper,

Bunter could guess why. That letter from the butler of Hilton Hall was not calculated to make its recipient good-tempered.

"But I say—"

"Take your grubby paw off my sleeve, you sticky little cheeky tick!" exclaimed Hilton angrily.

"But, I say—look here—"

Without waiting to hear what Bunter had to say, Hilton jerked his arm loose, grabbed Bunter by the collar, twirled him round, and planted a foot behind him.

"Yarooooh!" roared Bunter, as he flew.

Hilton, with an angry grunt, walked on, and left him to roar.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

STEPHEN PRICE of the Fifth Form, followed Hilton into the quadrangle.

There had been another fall of snow during third school, and the whole quad was a sheet of white. A number of juniors, with cheery shouts, were disporting themselves there, and snowballs were whizzing—a crowd of the Remove doing battle with Temple, Dabney, & Co. of the Fourth.

Hilton frowned, and dodged whizzing snowballs, as he walked quickly across towards the old elms. Price, following him, had to hurry. He caught Hilton by the arm, as the dandy of the Fifth turned into the Elm Walk.

"Hold on," said Price, "what's the hurry, Cedric?"

"I've dropped something along here—don't delay me now!" muttered Hilton.

"Well, I'll help you look for it!" said Price. "Look here, you haven't told me yet whether you've raised the wind!"

Hilton gave an angry laugh.

"No!" he answered.

"We're both rather in a hole, then!" said Price.

"And we've got to stay in it!" said Hilton, shrugging his shoulders. "I've tried my last resource, and failed."

"The butler at home?"

"Yes." Hilton compressed his lips. "The stodgy old ass! I've borrowed off him a dozen times at home in the holidays; and I thought—well, he sprung a fever when I wrote a week or two ago, and I suppose it fed him up. I owe him some money, of course."

"Look here," muttered Price. "Walsingham must get a good salary from your father; and there's pickings, too, in such a place as Hilton Hall—one of the wealthiest country houses in Devonshire. I'd bet a good deal that your father's butler has a nice little pile stacked away in the bank. I've seen him—and he looks a quiet saving sort of man."

Hilton shrugged his shoulders again impatiently.

"Well, he won't shell it out to me," he said. "I asked him to lend me fifteen quids—that would have seen both of us through—and he's coughed up nothing but advice. He says it's on his mind that he's lent me money at all, without my father's knowledge."

Price sneered.

"Bit late in the day for him to begin that," he said. "He's done it, and a

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good many times, too. Look here, Cedric, he can do it again."

"He's refused!" said Hilton curtly. "Do you think I'm going to ask a servant a favour twice?"

"Make him!" said Price.

"How can I make him, you ass?"

"Sir Gilbert Hilton would sack him, ten to one, if he knew he'd been lending you money."

"I shouldn't wonder! I fancy that's what's worryin' poor old Walsingham a little!"

"Well, his place is worth fifteen pounds to him!" said Price coolly. "Give him a hint that Sir Gilbert will hear about it if he doesn't squeeze out the loan you want."

Hilton stopped and stared at his friend. He was deeply under Price's influence; indeed, but for that precious pal probably Hilton never would have dabbled in blackguardism at all. But though Hilton could be led into reckless follies, for which he would have been expelled if found out, there was a limit. He stared at Price, at first as if unable to believe that he was in earnest; then, as he realised that the cad of the Fifth meant what he said, Hilton's brows darkened blackly.

"You rotter, Price!" he muttered.

"Look here—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Hilton tramped on through the carpet of snow towards the spot under the elms where the Famous Five had barged him over more than an hour ago. Price, scowling, followed him.

"Look here, let me see the butler's letter," he muttered. "It mayn't be so final as you think—"

"You can see it when we find it," said Hilton. "Help me to look for it. It's about here somewhere."

Price gave a jump.

"Is that what you've lost?"

"Yes."

"Why, you utter ass!" said Price, aghast. "Suppose it was found—and seen— Is there anything in it to put a beak on the track?"

"Lots! A lot about debts and—"

"Well, my hat! You must be a fool to let a thing like that lie about where anybody could pick it up!"

"How could I help it?" snapped Hilton. "I was reading it here—I came here to be quiet—when a mob of Remove kids rushed me over, and I must have dropped it. I forgot it for a minute while I cut after the young ruffians. Then that fool Coker had to barge in—and then it was the bell, and I had to go in to third school. But the letter must be here—we're the first out of the House to come across in this direction—"

"For goodness' sake look for it! The wind may have blown it anywhere."

"Oh, rot! It's about here somewhere."

The two Fifth Formers searched up and down the walk for the lost letter. More snow having fallen, it was rather difficult to trace the exact spot where Hilton had been barged over. But he found it at last, and they searched up and down and round about.

The December wind, blowing up from the sea, was whistling among the old frosty trunks. Certainly so light an object as a letter might have been blown almost anywhere. At the same time, it might have been covered from sight by the fresh snowflakes.

Hilton began to realise that finding that letter was not so simple a matter as he had supposed.

Nothing being found on the path, they

extended the search among the trees. But it was in vain, and after a quarter of an hour of vain stooping and peering and groping they met on the Elm Walk again, tired and peevish.

"Gone!" said Price.

"Covered up by the snow most likely," said Hilton. His face was pale and troubled. "By gad, if that letter is seen—"

"Tell me what's in it so near as you remember."

"I remember it pretty well—I'd read it three or four times," growled Hilton; and he explained the contents of the letter from Francis Walsingham almost word for word.

Price whistled.

"If that gets to the Head, Cedric, you're as good as bunked!" he said. "How are you going to explain debts that you can't mention to your father? The Head will want to know every single detail. You'll be up before him, and he'll get it all out of you from start to finish."

"Do you think I don't know that?" asked Hilton savagely. "Don't tell me what I know better than you do. The letter's got to be found."

"If it had been in the envelope it would have been different," muttered Price. "Most fellows, pickin' it up and seein' your name on the envelope, would bring it to you without lookin' into it. But an open letter—"

"Oh, rot! Most fellows wouldn't read

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it—some inquisitive fag might, perhaps! But a master—I wonder—"

"This is the spot where Prout takes his trot every day as regular as clock-work! If Prout found it—"

"We've got to get hold of it!" muttered Hilton. "It must be here somewhere—right under our noses very likely—"

"You say some fags barged you over. Did one of them—"

"No; they ran on, and I ran after them. They couldn't even have seen that I had a letter at all."

"Who were they?"

"Wharton and his gang in the Remove."

"Oh! They're cheeky young scoundrels, but they're not the sort to bag a fellow's letter—certainly not to read it! That's all right! Was anyone else near?"

Hilton made an effort to remember.

"No! I don't think so! Oh, yes—there was some fag cackling when they were rolling over me—that fat young ass Bunter, I think—"

"Bunter!" repeated Price. "Bunter of the Remove? Sneaking little beast—I know he's been kicked a hundred times for spying into fellows' letters. If he spotted it you can bet he's read it. Still, I don't see why he should walk off with it."

Hilton uttered a startled exclamation.

"Oh gad! Bunter spoke to me when Prout let us out—grabbed at my arm when I came out of the Form-room. He wanted to speak to me! I—I wonder if he had the letter and was going to give it to me—"

"If so, why didn't he?"

"Well, how was I to know? I kicked him—sticking his grubby paw on my sleeve—"

"Well, some fellows do hunt for all the trouble they can find, and no mistake!" said Price, in disgust. "Ten to one he picked up the letter and had it in his pocket for you. You can bet he's read it—he's that sort!—but it looks as if he wanted to give it back to you. You'd better hunt up Bunter and—"

Hilton did not need telling that. Without waiting for Stephen Price to finish, he ran down the path through the elms and cut across the quad towards the House.

"Here, look out!" roared a dozen voices.

"Gerrout of the way!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Give that Fifth Form tick a few!" shouted Johnny Bull.

Hilton, in his hurry, rushed through the crowd of juniors who were snowballing in the quad. Two or three of them staggered as he rushed by and barged them. Harry Wharton slipped in the snow and fell, and Temple of the Fourth pitched over, with a roar.

"Give him a few!" yelled Frank Nugent.

"Cheeky tick!"

"Fifth Form swanking ass! Pelt him!"

Removees and Fourth Formers, who had been pelting one another, with one accord ceased to do so and devoted all their attention to Hilton of the Fifth!

A volley of snowballs crashed and smashed on him from all sides.

"Give him beans!" shouted Harry Wharton, scrambling up.

"Give him jip!" gasped Temple of the Fourth.

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hilton staggered as he received the volleying. He slipped and sat down, and there was a roar of laughter.

Snowballs pelted on him from all sides as he sat.

Crash! Smash! Squash!

"Oh gad! You young ruffians! I—I—I'll—" gasped Hilton.

"Give him some more!"

"Go it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hilton scrambled up, red with fury. The juniors, roaring with laughter, crowded round him, whizzing snowballs. Herbert Vernon-Smith landed one on his chin; Peter Todd one in his eye. All over him snowballs smashed and squashed. He gave the merry juniors a fierce glare and cut away to the House. "After him!" shouted the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And laughing juniors and whizzing snowballs followed Hilton of the Fifth till he dodged into the House and escaped. He was rather glad to get inside.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Back Up!

"**C**CHEEKY cad!" said Billy Bunter in tones of deep and intense indignation.

"Say, what's biting you?" inquired Fisher T. Fish.

They were the only fellows in the Rag. Cold and frosty as it was, most of the Remove preferred the open spaces after class.

But there was a big fire in the Rag; and Billy Bunter gravitated to the fire-side, as a matter of course. Frowsting over a fire appealed to the Owl of the

Remove much more than snowballing in the quad.

Fisher T. Fish, the junior from New York, had also sought the warmth of the fireside in the Rag. He was seated at the table, with a sheet of paper covered with figures before him, a stump of pencil in his bony fingers and a thoughtful wrinkle in his bony brow.

Fishy was making up his term's accounts—a process that Fishy generally enjoyed.

On this occasion, however, the joy of that happy occupation was rather dashed. The sum of threepence seemed to be missing somehow! Fisher T. Fish prided himself on knowing where his money went and on being able to account for all his expenditure to the last halfpenny.

So it was quite a worry to find that gap in his accounts. He must have spent that threepence, but he could not recall when and why. He could not, of course, have given it away—giving anything away was against Fishy's nature and training. Tracking down that elusive threepence Fisher T. Fish was very busy, and he had not even observed Bunter till that fat and fatuous youth broke the silence.

"Swanking cad!" went on Bunter.

"Aw, can it!" grunted Fisher T. Fish. As he was the only person present, he supposed that Bunter was addressing him. "What's biting you, you pie-faced geck?"

"Kicking a fellow!" said Bunter. "Rotten cad!"

"I ain't kicked you yet, that I know of, but I guess I soon will if you don't pack it up!" grunted Fishy.

"Eh! I wasn't talking to you, Fishy!" said Bunter, blinking at the American junior through his big spectacles. "I say, Fishy, what do you think of a fellow kicking a fellow, when a fellow had taken the trouble to pick up a fellow's letter, and was going to give it back to a fellow?"

Fishy did not answer that question. He bent his bony brows over his accounts again.

"Cheeky cad!" said Bunter. "Swanking ass, you know! Well, he jolly well won't get it in a hurry now! He can whistle for it, see?"

"Can't you quit chewing the rag when a guy's doing figures?" asked Fisher T. Fish.

Hilton of the Fifth looked into the Rag. He was in search of William George Bunter.

As he spotted the fat figure in the armchair by the fire he came into the room, crossing over quickly to Bunter.

Bunter sat upright in the armchair and blinked at him with a cold, disdainful blink.

Bunter was wrathful.

Really, he had some cause to be indignant. It was true that he had read Hilton's letter, which he had no business to do; but Hilton did not know that—

did not know that he had the letter at all.

Hilton had kicked him for grabbing his spotless sleeve with a grubby, sticky paw, as, no doubt, any other Fifth Form senior might have done! Still, considering why Bunter had stopped him coming away from the Fifth Form room, it was rather unfortunate.

Bunter had been going to return that letter! Now he wasn't going to! He would, as he elegantly expressed it to himself, see Hilton blowed first!

"Oh, here you are, Bunter!" said Hilton. "I've been looking for you! Did you pick up a letter of mine in the quad this morning?"

Bunter did not answer.

He blinked at Hilton through his spectacles, first at his feet, then at his face, then at his feet again, then once more at his astonished face.

This was what Bunter called looking a fellow up and down. It expressed withering contempt and disdain.

"Deaf?" snapped Hilton.

Hilton, who was about to grasp at the fat junior, dropped his hand suddenly.

"Then you've got the letter?" he breathed.

"Find out!"

"You've read it?"

"I hope I'm not the fellow to read a fellow's letter!" said Bunter, with dignity. "That's an insult, Hilton! If you've come here to insult me, you'd better go! I'm not going to be insulted by a fellow who borrows money from his father's butler."

Hilton panted.

Those words, of course, were a proof that Bunter had picked up the letter and that he had read it. Hilton had no farther to seek. Obviously, Bunter had the letter.

"Give me my letter!" he breathed.

"What letter?" asked Bunter calmly.

"You know you picked up my letter in the quad—"

"A fellow may have picked up a letter, and a fellow may not!" said Bunter cheerfully. "A fellow may have come to give it to you, and you may have kicked him, like a cheeky, swanking Fifth Form cad! Well, if a fellow kicks a fellow, he can't expect a fellow to do him favours, finding letters for him, and all that. If you've lost a letter, you'd better go and look for it! I'm jolly well not going to bother about it for you!"

"You've got it!" roared Hilton.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

"Will you give me my letter?" hissed Hilton.

"If a fellow found a letter, a fellow would want to make sure whose letter it was before he gave it to anybody," said Bunter. "Well, suppose I found a letter about

a fellow borrowing money from his father's butler! Is that the sort of letter you mean?"

"Waal, I swow!" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish, looking on and listening with the keenest interest.

His interest in this extraordinary interview was so keen that Fishy even forgot the threepence he had been trailing down through his accounts!

Hilton glared round at him.

"Get out!" he snapped.

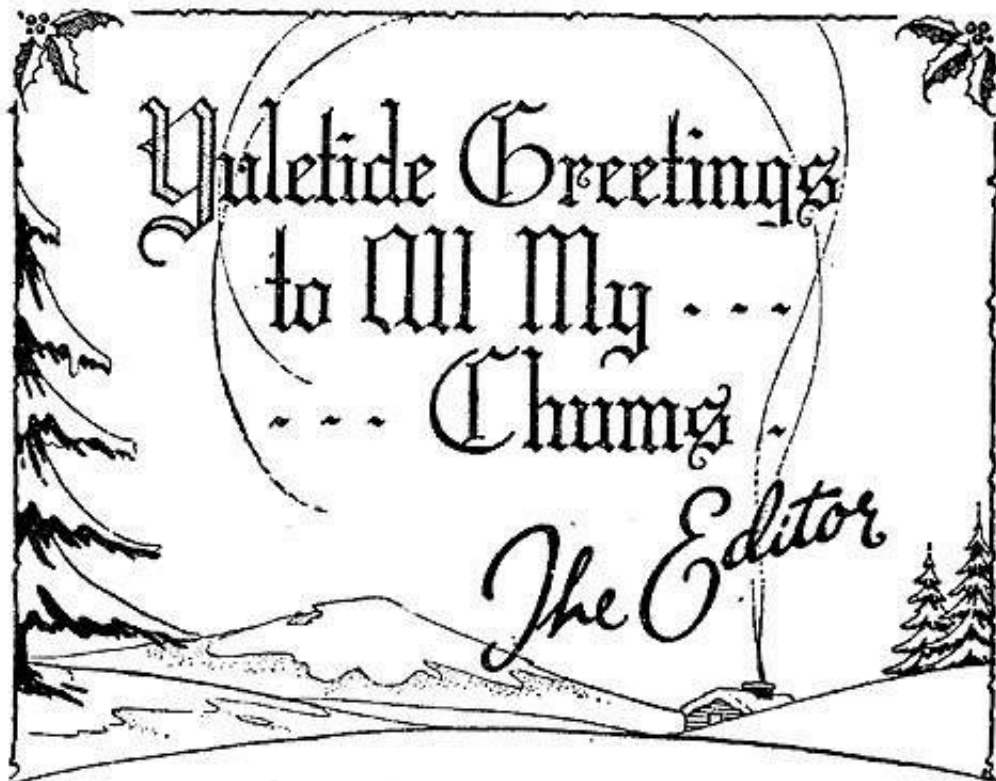
He did not want Fishy's long, keen ears to lap up this sort of information.

"Eh—what?" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish. "This here is our room, ain't it? I guess I ain't vamoosing the ranch! Nunk!"

Fishy was indignant. Really, it was hardly reasonable for a senior to butt into the junior room and order a junior to get out of it!

But Hilton of the Fifth was angry, excited, apprehensive, and in no mood to be reasonable. He turned on Fisher T. Fish and grabbed him by the collar.

"Here, you let up!" yelled the indignant Fishy. "Wake snakes! I'll say this is the limit! I'll say it's the bee's knee! I'll say—Yaroooop!"



"You needn't speak to me!" said Bunter.

"What do you mean, you young ass?" exclaimed Hilton angrily.

"I mean exactly what I say!" answered Bunter coolly. "You can go and eat coke, Hilton! If you've lost a letter, go and look for it! I suppose you don't expect Remove fellows to pick up your letters for you?"

"I asked you if you picked it up!" snapped Hilton. "Did you?"

"Find out!" answered Bunter.

"What?" roared Hilton.

Billy Bunter heaved himself out of the armchair. He stood prepared to dodge round that chair if Hilton proceeded to active measures.

"I said find out!" he answered.

"If you're asking for a thrashing, Bunter—"

"All right!" said Bunter. "You lay a finger on me, that's all! You've kicked me! Well, you kick me again!"

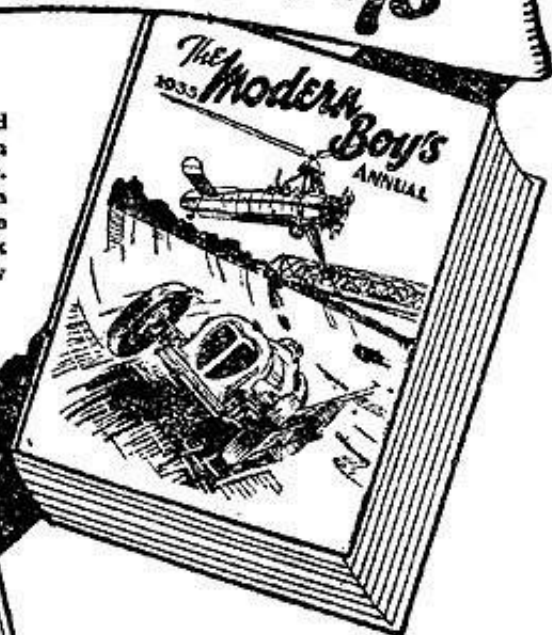
"I'll kick you all round the room!"

"Do!" said Bunter defiantly, but at the same time preparing to dodge.

"Do, you rotter! I dare say you'd like your Form-master to see that letter. He, he, he! Prout would be interested!"

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Fisher T. Fish roared as he spun out of the Rag and sat down with a bump in the passage outside. Hilton slammed the door on him, and then strode back to Bunter, with clenched fists and gleaming eyes.

"You've got my letter! You've read it!" he panted. "Give it to me at once—at once, or I'll smash you!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Wrathy!

BILLY BUNTER quaked.

He was scared. Hilton of the Fifth was generally good-tempered and easy-going—too lazy and careless, in fact, to get into violent tempers. But, like most weak and irresolute characters, he was capable of sudden bursts of passionate anger. At the present moment his face was pale with rage, his eyes glinting.

The fear of that tell-tale letter falling into Dr. Locke's hands and causing an inquiry into his debts and difficulties was bad enough. But to a proud fellow like Hilton, it was even worse for his discreditable transactions to be known to the school, especially to the juniors. He could imagine the surprise, the mockery, the derision if it became known that he had been borrowing money of his father's butler!

And Bunter, the tattler and chatter-box of Greymfriars, had read the letter, and knew it all! And he was keeping the letter!

Hilton was in a mood and a temper to give the fat Owl of the Remove such a handling as he had never had before in all his fat career. His look was so terrifying that Bunter squeaked with alarm, and bolted round the long table in the Rag.

The Fifth Form man rushed after him.

As a rule Bunter would have had no more chance in a footrace with the slim, agile Hilton than a tortoise in a race with a hare. But fear lent Bunter wings, so to speak.

He fairly flew!

Hilton pursued him fiercely round one end of the table. Bunter raced round the other end.

Such speed did the terrified fat Owl put on that he kept his distance; and Hilton halted, panting, with the long oaken table still between them.

He glared at Bunter across it.

"I—I say, keep off, you beast!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I haven't got that letter! I never picked it up in the quad! I wasn't on the spot at all when I was there—I mean, when I wasn't there. And I came to give you the beastly letter back—you know I did—Keep off, you beast!"

"Give it me now!"

Hilton leaned over the table. He could not reach Bunter, but he was preparing to clamber across and bag him. It was a fearfully undignified proceeding for a Fifth Form man—especially so proud and haughty a Fifth Form man as Cedric Hilton.

But he had forgotten all about dignity now. At any moment a crowd of juniors might come swarming into the Rag. It was unusual for the room to be deserted—only the snowball battle was keeping all the fellows out of the House. Hilton was wild with impatience to get hold of the lost letter while he had Bunter to himself.

Bunter watched him warily.

He dared not bolt for the door—Hilton would have overtaken him before he reached it. But he was ready to dodge.

"Well, you beast, you kicked me!" he gasped. "I was going to give you the letter, wasn't I? I spoke to you—and—Beast!"

Hilton came sprawling across the table.

Billy Bunter popped down, dodged under, and shot through under the table with wonderful activity.

By the time Hilton landed on one side Bunter popped up on the other, spluttering for breath and crimson with exertion.

The long oak table was still between them.

"I—I—I'll—" panted Hilton.

"Beast! You keep off!" gasped Bunter.

"You young scoundrel!" roared Hilton. "I'll take you to your Form-master for keeping my letter!"

"Yes, you'd like a beak to see it, wouldn't you?" grinned Bunter. "I don't think! Let's go to the Head about it, what? He, he, he!"

The door of the Rag opened. The angry, bony face of Fisher T. Fish glared in.

"Say, you mugwump!" yelled Fisher T. Fish. "You figure that you can boost a guy out of his own quarters, what? You figure— Oh, jumping Jehosaphat!"

Fishy backed out and slammed the door hastily, as Hilton made a stride at him, with a furious face.

The Fifth Former turned back, panting, to Bunter. That fat youth retreated along the farther side of the long table, watching him warily through his big spectacles.

"Will you give me that letter?" panted Hilton.

"No, I won't!" said Bunter, watchful and wary. "In the first place, I haven't got it! I don't know anything about it! What should I know about your rotten letters from men-servants?"

"You blithering fat idiot, you've admitted that you've got it! You said you came to give it back to me!"

"So I did," said Bunter, "and what thanks did I get? You kicked me—"

"I never knew you had the letter! If you'd given it to me—"

"Well, I was going to give it to you, wasn't I?" said Bunter. "I was going to speak to you first, that's all. One good turn deserves another!"

Hilton made a move to circumnavigate the table. Bunter made a corresponding move. Never had the fat Owl been so wary. The Fifth Form man paused again. So did Bunter.

"You couldn't let a fellow speak!" went on Bunter. "Kicking a fellow before he could open his mouth!"

"I—I'm sorry I kicked you! Now give me the letter! Throw it across the table."

"That's all very well!" said Bunter. "But I've got a pain! You kicked me—you wouldn't let a fellow speak! You won't let a fellow speak now!"

"What do you mean, you fat idiot?"

"Well, one good turn deserves another," said Bunter. "I pick up letters for you—letters that would get you sacked if the Head saw them, as you know jolly well. I do it out of sheer good-nature. This is the thanks I get! Suppose the Head had bagged it, or your beak, Prout! Where would you be? Well, I think one good turn deserves another. I've been disappointed about a postal order—"

"What?"

"Postal order. I was expecting it

from one of my titled relations," explained Bunter. "It hasn't come—"

"Will you give me that letter?"

"Do let a fellow speak! The postal order was for five shillings!" said Bunter. "I think you might lend me the five shillings. One good turn deserves another, as I said! That's what I was going to say to you when you came out of the Form-room; and instead of letting a chap speak you kicked me!"

"You—you—you young scoundrel!"

gasped Hilton. He understood now. "You want me to tip you five bob for picking up my letter?"

"Oh, really, Hilton! I hope I'm not a fellow to be tipped!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "If that's the rotten way you're going to put it, you may as well drop the subject."

"You—you—you—"

"I don't see why a fellow shouldn't

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lend a fellow five bob, when a fellow does a fellow a favour—finding lost letters for him, and all that!" said Bunter. "I shall hand you the postal order as soon as it comes! That's understood. If you think I'd take money—"

Bunter broke off, with a gasp of alarm, as Hilton made a fierce rush round the table. Bunter went round the opposite end like lightning.

After him raced Hilton of the Fifth. Twice round the long table they went, like a game of the mulberry-bush! The speed that the fat Owl of the Remove put up was amazing, considering the weight he had to carry.

But the active Fifth Form man gained. His outstretched fingers were almost touching Bunter's fat shoulder, when the Owl of the Remove, in sheer desperation, made a bolt for the door.

The door flew open again as Bunter rushed for it. Fisher T. Fish's indignant howl was heard.

"I'm telling you, he slung me out—slung me out on my neck! A Fifth

Form guy slinging a galoot out on his neck! I'll say—"

"Rescue!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, help!"

Hilton was fairly on him. But there was help at hand now. Fisher T. Fish had gathered the clans, so to speak. Six or seven Remove fellows had arrived, all in a state of wrath and indignation at the bare idea of a Fifth Form man throwing his weight about in the junior quarters.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter as Hilton grabbed him. "Help!"

"Pilo in!" shouted the Bounder.

"Collar him!" shouted Squiff.

"Down with the Fifth!"

"Kick him out!"

The Removites did not stay to ask questions. They collared Hilton of the Fifth right and left. He was dragged away from Bunter, and bundled head-long out of the Rag.

Billy Bunter leaned on the table and gasped. But he grinned as he gasped.

Hilton, perhaps, was not anxious to explain how matters stood, considering what was in that letter! But if he had wanted to explain, he had no chance. The Removites handled him promptly, effectively, and thoroughly.

He went rolling along the passage, in a dishevelled heap, panting and gasping, gurgling and spluttering, his collar torn, his tie streaming, his hair a tousled mop!

If any man in the Fifth fancied that he could throw his weight about in the Rag, the Remove were quite keen to demonstrate to him that he couldn't! They made it abundantly clear to Cedric Hilton.

He was deposited at the end of the passage in a gurgling heap. There was an elephantine tread, as Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, rolled up.

"What—what—what—" boomed Prout.

With a rapid pattering of feet, the juniors bolted back to the Rag. Hilton was in no state to bolt. He rolled at Prout's feet, gurgling.

Prout stared down at him.

"Hilton!"

"Gurrgrggh!"

"This is disgraceful, Hilton! Unparalleled! A Fifth Form boy indulging in horseplay in the passages, with a crowd of Lower boys! I am shocked—I am ashamed! Hilton, are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Wurrgrggh!"

"Rise!" hooted Prout. "Take two hundred lines of Virgil, Hilton! Go, sir—go and make yourself more presentable! You are in a disgraceful state! Upon my word! A boy of my Form—a senior Form! Go!"

And Hilton, gasping, went!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

What About Christmas?

CHRISTMAS—

Billy Bunter paused as he heard that.

Bunter was coming along the Remove passage, heading for the stairs, at tea-time. The door of Study No. 1 was half open, and the voice from within came clearly to Bunter's fat ears.

Bunter was interested—deeply interested—in any discussion in that study referring to Christmas. And he had

The Magnet Library

no objection—none whatever—to hearing what was not intended for his fat ears.

So he paused, and listened.

The Famous Five were all there. They generally tea'd together in that study. Apparently they were discussing the "hols"—a very interesting question, indeed, to Billy Bunter.

Bunter was still unfixed for the hols.

Lord Mauleverer, driven to plain English, had told him that if he mentioned Christmas to him again he would kick him from one end of the Remove passage to the other. Regretfully, Bunter had had to give up the idea of passing the festive season at Mauleverer Towers.

It was doubtful whether even Peter Todd's humbler abode in Bloomsbury would be open to him. According to Toddy, it wouldn't be.

Bunter had told Ogilvy that he rather liked the idea of a Christmas up in Scotland. He had told Morgan that he rather liked the idea of a Christmas in Wales. But the answers of Ogilvy and Morgan had been far from encouraging. In fact, those answers had decided Bunter not to honour either Scotland or Wales.

It was all the more annoying, because everybody else seemed to share that extraordinary lack of enthusiasm for Bunter's company.

Bunter knew that his presence was enough to make any Christmas party a success. But nobody shared that knowledge with him.

It really looked as if it would have to be Bunter Court or nothing.

Bunter Court, of course, would have been all right—as right as rain—if it had been anything like Bunter's descriptions of it. Unfortunately, on close inspection, Bunter Court dwindled into Bunter Villa. Bunter did not yearn for home, sweet home.

Harry Wharton & Co. were his last resource. And these beasts, after all Bunter had done for them, did not seem keen—in fact, they would rush off if Bunter rolled up and mentioned Christmas.

"It's rather rotten, you men," went on Wharton's voice. "My uncle and aunt fully intended to be home for Christmas. But Aunt Amy isn't so well, and my uncle's written that he doesn't think she'd better travel in winter, and so that's that!"

"Oh lor'!" murmured Bunter, in the passage.

He was aware that Wharton's aunt had been abroad for her health, and that her brother, the old colonel, was with her. If they were not returning to Wharton Lodge before Christmas, evidently the usual festivities would not take place there—and Bunter was dished.

"The rottenfulness is terrific, my esteemed Wharton!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"A d Bob's father, being away over the air race business—" said Nugent.

"He won't be back for weeks," said Bob Cherry. "And the mater's going to stay with her people. Otherwise, it—"

"Oh lor'!" murmured Bunter again.

Cherry Place, it seemed, was no more available than Wharton Lodge.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We're rather at a loose end," he said. "Of course, I thought it was all clear when I asked you fellows to Wharton Lodge. We could all land on

Johnny, if his uncle wasn't laid up, but—"

"I'd be glad, of course," said Johnny Bull; "but it would be a bit dismal, with illness in the house."

"Well, there's little me left," said Frank Nugent. "The only thing is, you'll have to come to me. I'll make Dicky behave himself, somehow."

"Your people have a crowd, anyhow, and they don't want to be landed with such a mob," said Harry doubtfully. "It's too thick."

"It's all right," said Frank.

"Oh crikey!" murmured Bunter.

Bunter knew that it was close quarters at Nugent's home at Christmas, with his brothers and his sisters, his uncles and his aunts. No doubt his hospitable parents would squeeze in his school friends, if he asked them. But it was pretty certain that Bunter would never be squeezed in. Billy Bunter saw his last chance vanishing.

"Look here! All you fellows will have to come home with me," declared Frank. "I can fix it all right. I don't say it won't be a crush—it will. But the more the merrier."

Billy Bunter blinked in at the door.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! How did Bunter know we had mince pies?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Where will you have it?" asked Bob, picking up a mince pie and taking aim. "You say the word Christmas, and you get it in the eye!"

Bunter gave a disdainful sniff. After what he had heard outside the door, he had no further desire to discuss the Christmas holidays with the Famous Five. Evidently there was nothing doing.

"I've just looked in to tell you that I can't come with you for Christmas, Wharton, that's all," he said loftily.

"Thanks!" said Harry, laughing.

"Sorry, and all that; but it can't be done," said Bunter. "I'd stretch a point and give you some of my time, if I could. But, dash it all, you can't expect it from a fellow who's simply rushed with invitations! If you've been counting on me, I'm sorry, but you'll have to wash it out."

Harry Wharton & Co. stared blankly at the fat Owl of the Remove.

This was quite unexpected.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh chuckled.

"The esteemed Bunter has been eavesdropping dooffully, and knows that the absurd festivities are off," he remarked.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton, as he understood. "You fat, frabjous fat-head—"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I never heard a word you fellows were saying in the study," said Bunter. "I hope I'm not the fellow to listen at a door. I merely want you to understand, quite clearly, that you can't have me for Christmas. I was thinking of it; but it won't do. You can cram in at Nugent's little place, if you like," added Bunter, with a sneer. "Hardly good enough for me."

"Kick him, somebody!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Beast! I'd ask you to Bunter Court," went on the Owl of the Remove thoughtfully; "but it would hardly do. We shall have some rather distinguished company there—a lot of titled people, and probably one or two of the

princes. I could hardly ask you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "I say, those mince pies look all right!"

"I've got one for you," said Bob. "Stand steady!"

Bunter kept a wary eye on the mince pie in Bob's hand.

"I haven't come to tea," he said, with dignity. "As it happens, I'm going to tea in the Fifth. Some fellows can go to tea in senior studies. Still, I'll have one of those mince pies."

"Here you are!" said Bob.

Whiz!

Bunter was wary, but not quite wary enough. A fat and flaky mince pie squashed on his fat little nose.

"Yooop!" roared Bunter.

"Goal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beast! Wow! Gurrgrgh!"

"Have another?" asked Bob.

Billy Bunter made a backward jump out of the study. Apparently he did not want another.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "You come out here, Bob Cherry, and I'll jolly well mop up the passage with you!"

"Coming!"

Bob rose from his chair. There was a patter of retreating feet in the Remove passage. By the time Bob reached the door, Bunter had reached the stairs—having, apparently, changed his mind about mopping up the passage with Bob.

Bob grinned, and kicked the door shut. Tea was resumed in Study No 1, and the discussion of the question of the Christmas holidays—a question that was rather a problem, and that was to be solved in a way of which the Famous Five, as yet, had not the remotest idea. It was the unexpected—the very unexpected—that was going to happen that Christmas.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Case of Conscience!

"B E'S coming!" muttered Price of the Fifth.

Stephen Price glanced out of his study doorway along the Fifth Form passage.

Coming along by the games study was a fat figure.

Price stepped back.

"It's all serene!" he said, with a half-contemptuous glance at Cedric Hilton's clouded face. "He'll be here in a minute! We'll have that letter off him in a few ticks after he's in the study!"

"I'm dashed if I like the idea of asking a sneaking fag to tea, to grab him when he gets into the study!" grunted Hilton.

Price sneered.

"Well, you didn't ask him to tea—I did! The fat scoundrel would go anywhere for a feed! I don't think we need be very particular in dealing with a young rotter who reads other fellows' letters and pinches them!"

"Well, no; that's so," agreed Hilton. "Anyhow, we've got to have it! If he shows that letter about among the other fags I shall be cackled to death! Borrowin' money of a butler, by gad! It would be a standin' joke all over the school!"

"Rather worse than a joke if Prout or the Head got hold of it!" said Price. "You'd be bunked so quick, it would make your head swim!"

There was a fat grunt outside the study.

Billy Bunter had arrived. Price opened the door wide, and the fat junior rolled in. Stephen Price closed the door as soon as he was in the study and put his back to it.

Hilton grinned faintly. If Bunter meant to keep that letter—as it seemed that he did—his obtuseness in accepting an invitation to tea in Hilton's study was rather remarkable. It was true that, as Price said, Bunter would go anywhere for a feed. Still, even the fat Owl might have realised that Hilton's study was a dangerous quarter for him, in the circumstances.

He seemed quite assured and at ease, however. Taking no notice of Price's action in backing against the door, he nodded cheerily to the Fifth Formers.

"Not late—what?" asked Bunter.

"That's all right!" said Price grimly.

"I can't really get away at tea-time, you know," said Bunter. "Fellows want me to tea with them. The men in Study No. 1 were pressing me to stay and help them with a lot of mince pies they've got. But I told them I couldn't stop, as I was teaing in the Fifth. I say, like me to help to get it? I'm rather a dab at cooking and all that!"

He blinked at the study table. There was no sign of tea.

"That will do!" said Price gruffly. "I've asked you here—"

"To tea!" said Bunter. "For Hilton's letter! Hand it over!"

"What letter?" "No good beating about the bush! You've got Hilton's letter, and you're going to hand it over, here and now, or I'm going to whop you with a fives bat till you do!" said Price coolly.

He picked up a fives bat from the bookcase. His expression showed that he was quite ready to suit the action to the word.

Somewhat to the surprise of the Fifth Form men, Billy Bunter did not seem alarmed. He kept a wary eye on the fives bat, but a wide grin overspread his fat face.

"Think I've got the letter on me?" he asked.

"What!" ejaculated Price and Hilton together.

"He, ho, he!"

Bunter chuckled. He was an ass—more fool than rogue. But he was not quite ass enough to bring that letter into Hilton's study when he did not intend to hand it over to its owner.

Bunter, to do him justice, had fully intended to give Hilton back the letter. He had considered that Hilton might lend him five bob in return for that service. Little enough, too, Bunter thought,

when that letter was enough to get the fellow sacked from Greyfriars and into a fearful row with his pater at home if it came to light.

But Billy Bunter's ideas and views had changed since then. Hilton had kicked him—and he was hurt. And Hilton's almost frantic anxiety to regain possession of that dangerous letter had made it more and more clear to Bunter's fat mind now how very dangerous that letter was.

Bunter was not going to be kicked

for nothing—if he could help it. And he was not going to be in a hurry to part with the power that chance had placed in his hands.

If Hilton didn't like it, he could lump it. He shouldn't be in such a hurry to kick a chap who was doing him a good turn! That was how Bunter argued it out.

He grinned cheerfully as the two Fifth Formers glared at him as if they could have eaten him.

It dawned upon them that Bunter, fool as he undoubtedly was, was not such a fool as he looked.

Price had asked him to tea in the study, without a doubt that the letter would be in his pocket. Evidently he had taken too much for granted.

"Oh gad!" muttered Hilton.

"You young rascal!" Price's grip closed almost convulsively on the handle of the fives bat. "Where's that letter?"

"If Hilton's lost a letter," said Bunter calmly, "all he's got to do is to put a notice on the board! That's what a fellow does when he loses anything. If he thinks I've got it, he can take me to the Head! I'm willing to go!"

Hilton drew a deep breath. "I'll give you five shillings for that letter, Bunter!" he said.

"Keep it!" said Bunter. "You told me in the Rag—"

"I told you nothing of the sort! I said that I should be willing to accept a loan of five shillings, as I'd been disappointed about a postal order. That's quite different."

Hilton breathed hard. "Well, put it like that," he said. "Bring me the letter, and I'll lend you five shillings."

"After kicking a chap!" sneered Bunter. "You're too jolly handy with your boot, Hilton! If you think you can kick a chap just as you like because you're in the Fifth, you're jolly well mistaken—see?"

Price made a movement. "You can keep that fives bat to yourself, Price!" said Bunter coolly. "You won't get the letter! You touch me with that fives bat, and that letter goes straight to Dr. Locke!"

Price looked as if he were going to touch Bunter with the fives bat, and touch him hard, all the same. But Hilton hastily interposed.

"Chuck it, Pricey! That's no good! Look here, Bunter, don't be a dishonourable little beast!"

"Well, I like that!" said Bunter derisively. "I haven't borrowed money of a butler, anyhow! I don't owe a lot of money I can't pay, and chance it! If I owe a few little amounts here and there, I shouldn't mind the Head knowing. Would you like him



From the Headmaster, DR. LOCKE.

*May Christmas cheer be yours this year
And all your joys increase,
By passing on from friend to friend
In all the happy hours you spend,
"Good will to men and peace!"
It rings and chimes from ancient times,
A song that shall not cease,
Through ages gone the notes have rolled,
And shall go on to years untold,
"Good will to men and peace!"*

From the Master of the Fifth, PAUL PROUT.

*Your readers all desire, no doubt,
A Christmas wish from me, Paul Prout;
Well, well! I'm not much good at rhyme,
But still, as this is Christmas time,
I'll do my best to make a verse,
And doubtless much is written worse,
When I was young—some time ago,
But not so very long, you know—
When Plancus, as it's oft expressed,
Was consul—pardon me the jest—
When I was young, as I repeat,
I once was at a Christmas treat
(46 pages omitted here.)
I wish you, and my poem's done,
A Happy Christmas, everyone.*

From the Master of the Upper Fourth Form, MR. CAPPER. (Particularly to the boys of his Form.)

*I wish you the best of enjoyment
In all that each one of you asks;
To give you some sort of employment
I've set you some holiday tasks.
If you are so busy this season
That you do not do them, I fear
That you, for a very good reason,
Will not have a Happy New Year.*

From MR. LARRY LASCELLES, Mathematics and Games Master.

*It gives me greatest happiness
To send this little greeting:
May fellowship and friendship bless
Each festive Christmas meeting;
Although, as I myself confess,
A Christmas feast wants beating,
Don't eat, like Bunter, to excess,
Or else you'll pay for eating!*

From the School Porter, WILLIAM GOSLING.

*Now, ower think a man like me
Can rite his thorts in poetry?
(I think Gossy means "poetry."—ED.)
I'm bizzzy all the live-long day,
And don't get much by way of pay,
'Cept when young gents is fond of tipping—
(Should be "tipping," no doubt.—ED.)
I ain't no Skeats or Rudyard Kipling.
And all I got to say's this 'ere—
A Merry Crissmas and a 'Appy Noo Yere,*

to know what you owe—and where you owe it? He, he, he!"

"I'll smash him!" breathed Price.

"Do!" jurred Bunter. "You'll be up before the Head along with Hilton! You're pretty well known to be hand-in-glove—you and Hilton, and Walker and Carne, of the Sixth, and Loder, too! Once the Head gets on the track, I dare say he'll root out the whole gang! He, he, he!"

"Don't touch him!" muttered Hilton.

Price laid down the five bat. His face was bitter and vicious; but, in point of fact, he dared not touch the fat and fatuous junior who held the whip-hand. That fatal letter spelled danger for Price, as well as his comrade. What might come out if Hilton was once up before the Beak, grinning and closely questioned about those mysterious debts that he could not tell his father about?

In his mind's eye, Price saw the whole story of dingy blackguardism coming to light—the sack for Hilton, probably for himself, perhaps for their friends in the Sixth!

Billy Bunter chuckled.

The mere fact that he was not thrashed on the spot, as he richly deserved, showed him how strong was the power in his hands. He was not the fellow to part with it, now that he realised it clearly.

"What do you want, Bunter?" asked Hilton at last.

"I've come here to tea!" answered Bunter calmly. "Naturally, I want tea! I've refused a lot of fellows in the Remove to come here to tea with you. I suppose you're going to stand a fellow tea after asking him?"

Price clenched his hands almost wildly. Hilton gave him a bitter, sarcastic look.

"This is what's come of your precious cleverness!" he said. "We're as far as ever from gettin' the letter! That young scoundrel means to stick to it if he can! Where is it, Bunter?"

"In my study!" answered Bunter coolly. "Parked in a safe place, too! I'm not sure what I'm going to do with that letter! I've got my conscience to consider!"

"What?"

"Some fellows are conscientious!" said Bunter. "Not in the Fifth, I dare say! I've always been a bit particular in such things! The Head would bunk you if he knew! You can't expect an honourable chap to stand between you and what you've asked for! It's practically making me as bad as yourself!"

Hilton gazed at him.

Certainly it had not occurred to him that Bunter was acting "conscientiously" in this matter. He was unaware of the mysterious way in which Bunter's fat intellect moved, its wonders to perform.

"A fellow has to have his duty clear before he can decide!" went on the conscientious Bunter. "What worries me is, that I think it's my duty to place that letter before the Head, and let him judge for himself. At the same time, I want to be as easy as I can with you, Hilton! You're not a bad chap, and I've heard the fellows say that it's Price who's led you into being a rotter like himself. I shall have to think the matter over. I can say, at least, that I'll go as easy with you as I can."

Hilton almost choked.

The look on his face warned the conscientious Bunter that he had better not pile it on further.

"But never mind that now," said Bunter briskly. "I've come here to

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,401.

tea! Let's have tea, and talk it over like—like pals! What?"

The expressions on the faces of Hilton and Price indicated exactly how pally they felt. But there was no help for it—and they had tea.

Bunter, at least, enjoyed the tea.

It was quite a nice tea, and Bunter disposed of the lion's share, and enjoyed it. He chattered cheerily over tea. The fact that his hosts had little or nothing to say did not worry Bunter. He talked enough for three.

After tea, however, the chilly atmosphere of the study did not tempt Bunter to linger.

Having cast a final blink over the table, and ascertained that there was nothing more to eat, he rose to go.

"Thanks for the feed!" he said airily. "I'll drop in again to tea, Hilton, if I can find an opportunity. I'll try to find one to-morrow. Ta-ta, old beans!"

Bunter rolled away, happy and sticky and grinning.

Hilton kicked the door shut after him, and looked at Price.

"What are we goin' to do?" he muttered.

Stephon Price shrugged his shoulders. He did not see that there was anything that could be done.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Makes Up His Mind!

"HILTON HALL!"

"Eh?"

"Decent sort of show!" said Bunter. "Hardly up to Bunter Court, I dare say. But fairly decent."

Peter Todd looked at him.

"A fellow might do worse!" argued Bunter.

It was the following day. With break-up so close at hand, all the fellows were thinking of the Christmas holidays, and Billy Bunter's fat thoughts were concentrated on that subject more than any other fellows. For Billy Bunter was still unfixed.

What he had heard in Study No. 1 had rendered him more unfixed than ever. For that resource was quite cut off now.

When he joined Peter in the quad after morning classes, Peter was quite prepared to hear that Bunter had decided on Bloomsbury. He was also prepared to disabuse Bunter's mind of that idea in the plainest of plain English.

But other thoughts, it seemed, were in Bunter's mind.

"Ever been to Devonshire, Peter?" he asked. "Ever seen Blackmoor?"

"Yes, I've seen it!" answered Peter. "Got friends there?"

"Well, yes," said Bunter.

"What are they in for?"

"Eh?" Bunter blinked at him.

"What do you mean, you ass?"

"I suppose they're in for something, or they wouldn't be in Blackmoor," said Peter. "It's a prison, isn't it?"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "I don't mean Blackmoor Prison! I say, is Hilton Hall near the convict prison at Blackmoor?"

"Blessed if I know! It can't be many miles from it, if it's at Blackmoor," answered Peter. "If you've got friends there, can't you tell a fellow what they're in for?"

"Oh, don't be a goat!" grunted Bunter. "I was speaking of Hilton Hall, at Blackmoor. I believe it's a decent sort of show. Hilton's father is a baronet, and keeps up some style. I've heard fellows say they have a big time there at Christmas. Hilton's one

of the wealthiest fellows in the Fifth, though he happens to be hard up just now—"

"How do you know?"

"Oh, we've got rather pally!" said Bunter. "I think a fellow might have a decent time at Hilton Hall for the hols. What do you think, Toddy?"

Toddy could only stare.

"You don't mean that you're trying to stick Hilton of the Fifth for Christmas!" he ejaculated.

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Hilton's a bit of an ass!" said Toddy. "He lets that worm, Price, sponge on him and land him in scrapes. But he's not ass enough to let you hook on to him for the hols, old fat man! Forget it!"

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

He rolled away, leaving Peter chuckling.

Bunter's idea was that he had, at long last, solved his difficult problem.

He blinked round the quadrangle, and spotted Hilton of the Fifth, walking by himself near the elms.

Hilton's handsome face was clouded.

It was not money troubles that worried him now. That morning he had received a handsome Christmas "tip" by post from one of his many wealthy relatives.

That tip had relieved the dandy of the Fifth from financial pressure. He was able to clear up his little accounts at the Three Fishers, and lend Price a helping hand in doing the same.

But there was a more troublesome trouble on his mind—the missing letter! How to get that letter back from Bunter, was a problem which the sportsman of Greyfriars had not been able to solve.

His face lighted a little as he saw the fat junior rolling up to him. He had a momentary hope that the young rascal had decided to let him have the letter.

He restrained his intense desire to kick Bunter across the quad, and gave him a nod.

Bunter nodded and grinned cheerily. "Break-up soon, now, Hilton!" he remarked breezily.

"Eh? Yes!"

"Taking anybody home with you for the hols?"

"What the dooce has that to do with you?" snapped Hilton. "I—I mean, yes. Price is comin' with me."

"Price?" repeated Bunter, frowning a little. "Can't say I like the fellow. Still, I dare say I could stand him, if you make a point of it."

Hilton stared at him.

"What on earth do you mean?" he grunted irritably. "Look here, Bunter! I want you to give me that letter—be a decent chap—"

"I hope I'm a decent chap," said Bunter, with dignity. "A bit more decent than a fellow who owes money at pubs, and—"

"Will you give me that letter?" breathed Hilton.

"I was thinking of giving it to you for—a Christmas present!" said Bunter. "What about that?"

"Don't be a silly ass! I shan't be seeing you till next term!" said Hilton. "Give me the letter now!"

"The fact is, old chap—"

Hilton made a convulsive movement, and Bunter hastily backed away. "Old chap" from the fat Owl of the Remove was a little too much for the dandy of the Fifth Form.

"The fact is, old chap," repeated Bunter, watching him warily. "I'm rather at a loose end for the hols. I've decided not to go with Mauly—he bores a fellow so! Smithy's urged me to go with him—but he's a bit of a



Two or three of the juniors staggered as Hilton barged into them. "Cheeky tick!" "Fifth Form swanking ass!" "Pelt him!" Removites and Fourth Formers, who had been pelting one another, devoted all their attention to Hilton. A volley of snowballs crashed and smashed on the Fifth Former from all sides. "Give him beans!" shouted Wharton. "Give him jip!" gasped Temple.

Bounder—not my class, really! Wharton's people have let him down, so that's washed out. I've got a lot of other invitations, of course. Still, I could give you a few days, if you were keen on it."

"You fat fool!"

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter. "If you don't want me, I'd rather you said so. All right!"

He turned away.

"Look here, Bunter, you born idiot, I—"

"Sorry I can't stop to talk! I've got to go and see the Head!"

"Hold on! Look here! I can't ask you home for Christmas—of course I can't!" muttered Hilton. "Don't be a silly ass! A Remove fag! Don't be a silly idiot! Look here! I'm in funds again, and I'll give you a pound for that letter!"

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. Even Bunter had his limit, and he was not coming down to that!

"That's enough!" said Bunter cuttingly. "I suppose a shady blackguard like you, Hilton, doesn't understand a decent chap! Keep your putrid money! Think I'd touch it?"

"Will you give me that letter?" gasped Hilton.

"No, I won't! I've thought the matter out, and I think that the Head ought to see it. Now leave a fellow alone."

And Bunter turned his back on Hilton of the Fifth and started towards the House, with his fat little nose in the air.

Hilton stood staring after him. Then, his temper suddenly failing him, he

made a rush after the fat junior and grasped him by the collar.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Leggo!"

Bang!

Bunter's fat head banged on the trunk of the nearest elm. It was quite a hard bang. It did not damage the elm, but to judge by Bunter's fearful roar, it damaged Bunter.

"Yaroooh!"

Bang!

"Oh crikey!"

"There, you young rascal!" panted Hilton. "Take that! And that!"

Bang!

"Whooop! Yow-ow-woooooop! I say—yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Leggo! Oh lor! Oh crikey! Yoooooop!"

"And that—"

Bang!

"Yawp! Yoooop! Ow! Wow! Wow!"

With a swing of his arm Hilton sent the fat junior rolling under the elms. He stalked away with a black brow, and went into the House.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Fixed Up!

BARRY WHARTON started, and glanced round.

"You fool!"

Wharton was coming down the staircase when he heard that remark, in low, concentrated tones.

It was not a customary mode of address at Greyfriars. The captain of the Remove glanced round in surprise.

Two Fifth Form men were standing by the stairs—Hilton and Price. Hilton was scowling; Price looked angry and

vicious. It was Price who was speaking.

"You fool! You've done it now! You—"

"Hem!" said Wharton loudly.

Price started, stared up, and broke off suddenly. Wharton laughed and went on his way. He had given Price the hint that there were other ears, as well as Hilton's, to hear him.

"You silly ass!" muttered Hilton. "Do you want to tell all Greyfriars?"

"All Greyfriars will know soon enough, at this rate!" said Price, but in a very subdued voice now. "You can't afford to row with that fat freak, and you know it!"

"I can't stand his cheek! I tell you he's had the neck to ask me to take him home for Christmas—"

"What the thump does it matter? If he takes the letter with him, and he's sure to, you can get it off him at home."

"Yes, but—"

"Don't you want to come back to Greyfriars next term?" hissed Price. "I can tell you, it depends on that fat freak now, whether you do or not. Me, too, very likely! I'm as deep in the mud as you are in the mire, if there's a row."

Hilton's lip curled sarcastically. His pal, no doubt, was concerned for him; but was more deeply concerned for himself.

"You've got to hold a candle to the devil!" went on Price. "I tell you, you can't afford to quarrel with the fat little beast. He's got you in the hollow of his hand, and he knows it. Where is he now?"

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,401.

CHRISTMAS AT HILTON HALL!



(Continued from page 13.)

"I left him in the quad—"
"Look for him coming in, then! Catch him before he goes to the Head! If the Beak sees that letter—"

"Here he comes!"
Billy Bunter rolled in as Harry Wharton was going out. His fat face was crimson with wrath, and he was rubbing his head.

Wharton stopped, staring at him. "What's the trouble, old fat man?" he asked. "Banged your napper?"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "I've had it banged! Wow! But I'll make that beast sit up! I'll make him squirm! I'll make him sorry for himself! Banging a fellow's napper! Wow! What do you think of a fellow who borrows money of his father's butler to pay betting men at a pub? What?"

"Eh, what? What the dickens are you burbling about?" asked Harry Wharton blankly.

"I can jolly well tell you—I'll jolly well tell all Greyfriars—"

"Bunter!" called out Price of the Fifth, almost in an agony of apprehension. "I say, Bunter!"

Bunter blinked round through his spectacles.

"Go and eat, coke!" he yapped. "Who cares for you, I'd like to know? You can jolly well tell Hilton—"

"Hilton wants to speak to you."
"He can wait!" sneered Bunter. "I don't want to speak to him! I—"

"About Christmas!" said Price.
"Oh!" said Bunter.

Price gave his comrade a look. It was a very expressive look. But Cedric Hilton did not need it. He realised what he had to do if he was to save his skin.

"I—I wanted to ask you, Bunter—" he stammered.

"Well, what?" said Bunter disdainfully.

"I—I—I was thinkin' you might like to come to my place for Christmas," gasped Hilton. "I—I—I'd be glad if you would!"

Bunter was still rubbing his head. But the wrath faded out of his fat face. This was what he wanted.

"Well, I don't know, Hilton," he said. "I might come! I've got rather a lot of engagements for the hols. Still, I'll come!"

Harry Wharton stared blankly. Of all the Greyfriars fellows, Hilton of the Fifth would have seemed, to him, the least likely to be landed with William George Bunter for the holidays.

But it was no business of his, of course, though he could not help wondering as he went out into the quad.

Bunter rubbed his head tenderly. He had an ache there. Hilton had smitten the elm with that fat head, not wisely but too well.

But the fat Owl was grinning now. "All serene, Hilton!" he said. "I'll

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,401

come! I can't promise you the whole of the vac—I'm rather rushed with engagements for Christmas. But I'll give you all the time I can."

Hilton seemed on the point of suffocating.

"That's settled, then," said Price, his eyes gleaming at the fat junior.

"Oh, quite!" said Bunter. "I'll let you know exactly when I can come, and how long I can stay, Hilton. We'll talk it over at tea if you like. Shall I come to tea in your study?"

Hilton seemed hardly able to speak. But he nodded assent, and walked away with Price.

Bunter grinned and rolled into the Rag.

That lingering pain in his napper was a matter of small moment now. He was, at long last, fixed up for Christmas!

Certainly, plenty of fellows would rather have remained unfixed, than have fixed themselves up by such very unusual methods. But William George Bunter did not worry about that.

Hilton Hall was rather a "catch" for Christmas. Sir Gilbert Hilton was a wealthy gentleman, and Bunter had heard a good deal about Hilton's expensive home on the moors of Devonshire.

There was no doubt that a fellow could have a good time there!

By ordinary methods, Billy Bunter certainly never could have secured an invitation to Hilton Hall! So he had to be satisfied with securing it by extraordinary methods.

Anyway, he had it! That was that!

"Look here, you fellows!" called out Skinner, as Bunter rolled into the Rag. "Here comes Bunter! Who wants Bunter for the hols?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at the juniors in the Rag with a disdainful blink. Bunter's unfixed state for the hols was a standing joke in the Remove by this time.

But that unfixed state was a thing of the past now. Bunter, at last, was fixed!

"You can cackle, Skinner!" he sneered. "I fancy you'd be jolly glad to get invited to Hilton Hall."

"Jolly glad!" agreed Skinner, with a chuckle. "As glad as you would be, old fat freak."

"Well, Hilton's asked me—"

"Tell us another!" suggested the Bounder.

"Wharton heard him ask me, if you don't believe it," said Bunter, with a contemptuous sniff. "I rather think I shall go."

"I rather think you will, if you get half a chance, or a quarter of one!" said the Bounder, staring at him. "But what's the good of telling us that! That swanking Fifth Form man wouldn't ask a junior—and you least of all."

"Well, he's asked me."
"Gammon!" said Skinner.

Bunter gave another sniff. "You can ask Hilton!" he remarked.

"I'm going home with him when we break up! I'm not specially keen on it—I've got a whole lot of invitations. But Hilton seemed keen, so I said I'd go."

"How on earth did you wangle it?" asked the Bounder, in wonder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Hilton's rather soft," said Skinner. "He lets Price stick on him like a limpet. But Bunter—how the thump did you work it, Bunter, if it's true?"

"We're rather pally!" explained Bunter.

"Bow-wow!"
"Yah!" said Bunter elegantly.

When Harry Wharton came into the Rag a little later, two or three fellows called to him. They wanted to know.

"Bunter says you heard Hilton of the Fifth ask him home for the hols," said Skinner. "Did you?"

Harry Wharton laughed. "I did!" he answered.

"Well, my hat! That swanking ass—asking Bunter!" said Skinner.

"What on earth has he asked him for?"

"Because he wants him, I suppose."
"How could anyone want Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ask me another!" said Wharton, laughing. "Anyhow, he's welcome to him!"

It caused a good deal of surprise in the Remove—and some envy among some of the fellows. There was no doubt that it was rather a "catch" to be asked to Sir Gilbert Hilton's magnificent abode for Christmas. Plenty of fellows in the Fifth and in the Sixth, would have been pleased by such an invitation. And Bunter—Billy Bunter of the Remove—was the lucky man!

Skinner & Co. could only wonder how Bunter had "wangled" it! They were sure that he had wangled it somehow.

But how, they were certainly not likely to guess!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Pressing Invitation!

"SAY, you fellows!"
"Don't bother, Bunter!"

It was the next day in break.

Snow was falling in the quad, and the Famous Five were in the Rag, discussing break-up. It was not yet finally decided what the Co. were going to do about Christmas; and with that unsolved problem on their minds, they did not want to be bothered by Bunter. So, with the plain language that was customary in the Lower Fourth, they told him so.

"But, I say—" persisted Bunter.

"Buzz!" said Johnny Bull.

"I've been looking for you fellows—"

"What rotten luck for us that you've found us!" sighed Bob Cherry.

"The rottenfulness of the luck is terrific."

"If that's how you thank a fellow for taking the trouble to fix you up for Christmas—" said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"What?"

The Famous Five stared at Bunter. He had succeeded in astonishing them.

"I mean it," said Bunter. "You're at a loose end for the hols, the lot of you. Well, we're pals, ain't we?"

"Hem!"

"I'm asked to a splendid place," went on Bunter. "Hilton Hall, you know, on Blackmoor in Devonshire. Hunting, shooting, fishing, motoring, all sorts of things. Hilton's pater is fearfully rich. Magnificent butler—man named Walsingham. He, he, he! Well, I'm going, you know! Hilton's so keen on it, that I could hardly refuse. But—"

"Is there a 'but'?" asked Harry, smiling.

"Well, you see, Hilton's a senior, and so is Price," said Bunter. "I'd like to have some friends of my own there. I thought of you fellows."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'd like you to come!" said Bunter.

"I can ask anybody I like—that's all right! You'd enjoy yourselves no end. I hear there's going to be big doings—fancy dress ball, and all that. You can

go for rides on the moor, too—Hilton's pater keeps a lot of horses in his stables. Ripping time all round! Will you come?"

The chums of the Remove could only stare.

Seldom, or never, had they been so taken by surprise.

"I'm not pulling your leg!" said Bunter reassuringly. "I really mean it, old chaps!"

"I fancy Hilton would have something to say about it!" said Nugent, laughing. "I can see him filling his pater's house with Remove fellows."

"I don't think!" grinned Bob Cherry. "My dear chaps—"

"Bosh!" said Harry Wharton. "Run away and play, Bunter!"

"But I mean it—"

"Does Hilton mean it?" asked Bob, laughing.

"Oh, he'll be pleased—frightfully pleased—"

"Rot!" granted Johnny Bull.

"Look here, will you come?" hooted Bunter.

"No! Cut!"

Billy Bunter did not cut.

He stood and blinked at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles, with a wrathful blink.

"Look here, you're not fixed up for the hols!" he exclaimed. "And you'd jolly well like it at Hilton Hall."

"We'd like it all right," said Harry, "but—"

"Well, come, then!" said Bunter. "Look here, I want you to come."

"Why?"

"Well, we're pals," said Bunter.

"I've had some hols with you fellows. Why shouldn't you have one with me?"

"Um!"

"The fact is, I shouldn't care to be there without some friends of my own," said Bunter. "I don't know what that cad Price might be getting up to! I don't trust Price!"

"What the thump—"

"Well, he's an awful rotter, you know," said Bunter, shaking his head. "With Price there, I should feel safer with some friends round me."

"Safer!" repeated Wharton blankly.

"Well, yes, in the circumstances, you know."

"What circumstances?"

"Oh, nothing! I mean—that is, nothing! I'm not afraid of Price pinching anything, of course—"

(Continued on next page.)



Post your Soccer queries to "Linesman," c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. It's his job and his pleasure to answer knotty problems from readers.

THAT NEVER-SAY-DIE SPIRIT!

A FOOTBALL match isn't lost until it is won! I don't suppose for a moment that this is the first time you have heard that sort of expression. But although the sentiment is perhaps as old as football itself, there are very good reasons for reminding ourselves of it from time to time. It simply drives home, of course, the necessity for keeping on trying until the final whistle sounds. Don't give up!

In League football there is an extra inducement to keep on trying. Goal average often counts when the final reckoning comes, so it is up to every player, and every team, to keep going to the end in order to get as many goals as possible, or alternatively, to keep the other fellows' score down to the minimum.

Quite often a big effort may be the means of saving or even winning a match which at one period seems hopelessly lost. This present football season has been remarkable, so far as the first-class games are concerned, for the number of amazing rallies by which teams have saved points.

One of my Middlesbrough readers has written me a most enthusiastic letter about the way in which his pet team, Middlesbrough, saved a match the other day. They were playing Preston North End, and if the truth must be told, Middlesbrough were being considerably overplayed.

They were two goals down. Then they made a forward line switch, bringing a young outside-right to centre-forward. And in this new position Fenton scored three goals, and Middlesbrough were saved from defeat.

Texts for quite a lot of sermons on football could be got from this experience. It showed the value of a change of position, for instance, when a game is in a desperate state. It also shows the possibilities for a lad full of dash and enthusiasm. Fenton

is only twenty years of age, and was discovered by Manager Peter McWilliam when playing football on a spare piece of ground. I want to wish the lad further successes in the goal-scoring line, but, of course, he can't hope to go on getting three per match. Once a forward begins to get goals the opponents set a special watch on him. To put the same thought in another way, it is ever so much easier to get a reputation as a goal-scorer than it is to live up to that reputation.

CORNER KICKS!

WHILE I am talking about the value of the never-say-die spirit, I might as well refer to the amazing performance of Sydney Gibbons, the centre half-back of Fulham. On the same day that Fenton scored his three goals to save Middlesbrough from defeat, Gibbons also scored three for Fulham in the last twenty-three minutes to enable the side to draw against Southampton after being three goals down. I do not recall a previous occasion in first-class football when a centre-half has scored three goals in succession as Gibbons did in this match. As the forwards of Fulham couldn't score that day, Gibbons took it upon himself to go through.

It pays in this game to spring a surprise on your opponents.

Another of my readers tells me that somehow or other the team for which he plays scarcely ever manages to score a goal from a corner-kick. "We have had hundreds of these this season," he says, "but we haven't scored more than two goals. How is it?" I am afraid that, as I have had no opportunity of watching the team for which this chum plays, I can't tell him why they don't score more goals from corner-kicks. But I can tell him why there aren't more goals scored, following corner-kicks, in a general sense. This is because there is too much of the orthodox about the taking of corners.

The player whose job it is to put the ball over from the corner-flag just tries to drop it somewhere into goal and hopes for the best. The best very seldom materialises.

It is high time some new methods were employed in the taking of corner-kicks, and I was very pleased to see, when watching Grimsby Town the other day, that the players of the team have been thinking out ways and means of using corner-kicks to fuller advantage.

THE "STAND-OFF" FORWARD!

THE Grimsby scheme, which I should recommend other clubs to try, is this.

When a corner-kick is granted to Grimsby, one of the forwards takes up a position only a few yards away from the corner-flag, and instead of the ball being swung into the middle, it is passed back along the ground to this other forward.

Not for one moment would I suggest that this idea will work every time, because it is obvious if it was done every time the opposition would send a player to watch what I might call the "stand-off" forward. But this new idea is worth while from two points of view. It sets the opponents wondering what is going to happen, and in the second place, means that one opponent has to be drawn from the goal area to watch the "stand-off" forward. Variety is the spice of life in football, and I am all for trying new ideas.

This reader who is specially interested in corner-kicks asks me if it is permissible for a player taking a corner to dribble the ball himself towards goal. The answer is in the negative.

A player taking a corner-kick must not play the ball a second time until it has been played by some other player.

It was not always so. One year, by mistake, the rule-makers did not include corner-kicks among those in which a player is debarred from playing the ball twice in succession. Sam Chedzoy, who was then outside-right for Everton, spotted the omission. So one day, when taking a corner-kick, he dribbled the ball inwards. The referee stopped him: there was an argument, and Chedzoy proved to the referee that this action was in accord with the rule. Alas for Chedzoy's ideas of adding a spice of variety to the game; a special meeting of the law-makers was called forthwith, and a clause inserted which made it illegal for the taker of a corner to kick the ball twice successively.

"LINESMAN."

"Pinching anything?"

"Well, a letter, for instance, or—anything, you know! It's not that at all. The fact is, I want my friends with me. I—I've been looking forward to Christmas with my old pals!" said Bunter reproachfully. "I want you to come! Skinner would jump at it, if I asked him."

"Ask Skinner, then!"

"I don't want Skinner! Catch Skinner lending a fellow ten bob if he happened to be short of money—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I say, you fellows, you'll have a ripping time at Hilton Hall! And you'll be doing me a favour by coming! There!"

"You fat duffer!" said Harry. "You can't ask us to Hilton's place. And we're not keen on Hilton, anyhow, even if he wanted us."

"Oh, he's all right," said Bunter. "A bit of an ass, but not a bad chap at all, when Price leaves him alone."

"Yes, I believe that's so. But—"

"Look here. I really want you to come!" said Bunter. "I'll speak to Hilton, and ask him to speak to you, if you like. You'll find that he's fearfully keen on it."

"What rot!"

"The rotfulness is terrific."

"Look here, will you come?" hooted Bunter.

"Thank's; no!"

"Beasts!"

Billy Bunter, with a snort of indignation, rolled away. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another. They were puzzled and mystified; and a little compunctious. Having made up their minds that they could not possibly stand Billy Bunter for the holidays, they could not help feeling a little remorseful on finding the Owl of the Remove so keen to share his invitation to so magnificent an abode as Hilton Hall.

No doubt, Bunter wanted fellows with him whom he could "touch" for small loans; they were well acquainted with his manners and customs. But they realised that there was more in it than that.

That, no doubt, was a powerful consideration. But that was not all!

"Blessed if I can quite make the fat duffer out!" said Bob Cherry. "If he really wants us, I'm sorry—but we can't go, of course."

"Of course we can't," said Harry. "I can't imagine why Hilton's asked him at all—but he certainly can't want a crowd of the Remove."

"Hardly!" said Nugent.

"If Hilton came and asked us nicely, we might go!" said Bob, with a chuckle. "But I can't see Hilton doing it!"

"Not quite!" said Harry, laughing.

And the chums of the Remove dismissed the matter—quite unaware that, as matters were going to turn out, they were booked for Christmas at Hilton Hall!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Left in the Lurch!

BILLY BUNTER blinked into Hilton's study in the Fifth the following afternoon with a surprised and startled blink.

He had come to tea!

He had not been asked so to do; but that, of course, was a trifle light as air to William George Bunter. In the peculiar circumstances of the case he counted on a welcome—not a hearty one, perhaps! But anything short of being booted out was good enough for Bunter.

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But he met with a surprise.

The study was empty! Not only was it empty, but it had a dismantled and deserted appearance. It looked like a study that was done with for the term—like a study looked when a fellow was gone at break-up. There were no books or personal belongings about—no fire in the grate—no sign of occupation at all! Which was strange, as the term still had a couple of days to run.

"Well, my hat!" said Bunter blankly.

Fellows sometimes, by special leave, got away a day or two before the end of term. It looked as if Hilton and Price had!

Bunter, after a long and indignant blink into the deserted study, looked along the passage. Coker of the Fifth was in his doorway, regarding him with a grin. Every day since he had been so pally with Hilton, Bunter had come to tea in that study; and Coker, observing it, had wondered why on earth Hilton was doing it. It was, in Coker's opinion, letting down the Fifth to have a Remove fag to tea every day.

So Coker was rather amused now! It was clear that Bunter had come to tea once more—only to find the cupboard, like Mrs. Hubbard's, bare!

"I say, Coker, where's Hilton?" called out Bunter.

Coker chuckled.

"Didn't you know he was gone?" he asked.

"Gone!" repeated Bunter.

"He got leave from the Head to get off to-day—Hilton and Price."

"The beast!" gasped Bunter. "He never told me!"

"Why the thump should he tell you, you fat ass?" grunted Coker.

"The rotter!" gasped Bunter. "The cheeky rotter! Sneaking off and leaving a fellow in the lurch."

Coker stared at him.

But Bunter gave no further heed to Coker. He rolled out of the Fifth Form passage in a state of great wrath.

Hilton was gone! Price was gone! Price did not matter; but Hilton mattered a lot!

Bunter breathed wrath.

The rotter, of course, had got off early for the hols to dodge Bunter! The fat Owl had no doubt about that!

And he had never said a word! Only that morning, in break, Bunter had spoken to him in the quad and mentioned that he would drop in at tea-time! He had mentioned it as a hint to Hilton to have something decent for tea. And the fellow had not let on—never given Bunter a hint that he would be clearing off while the fellows were in class.

Bunter was left in the lurch!

Hilton, probably, did not want his company on the long railway journey from Kent to Devonshire. Possibly he fancied that this little trick would relieve him of Bunter altogether! If he fancied that, he was mistaken!

"The awful cad!" breathed Bunter.

There were reasons—strong reasons—why Bunter had wanted to travel in company with Hilton down to Devonshire. There was the railway fare, which was rather steep.

Bunter would have his journey-money on break-up day, but that was only sufficient to see him as far as Surrey, where his home was. Devonshire was quite another proposition.

Even third-class, the fare was beyond Bunter's financial resources. And he did not want to travel third. He wanted to travel first-class! And he wanted a lunch-basket on the train. He wanted all sorts of things that a wealthy fellow could afford and that Bunter couldn't afford!

No wonder Bunter was wrathful!

Obviously, he was not going to travel with Hilton now. Hilton was home by that time. The short-sighted Owl of the Remove had not noticed that he was absent from the school dinner. But he remembered now that he had not seen him since morning break. He had cleared off with Price while the fellows were in third school—and never said a word to Bunter, never given him a hint! Now he was at home!

"The beast!" gasped Bunter.

One thing was certain now—if Bunter was going to Hilton Hall for Christmas he had to have at least one travelling-companion. Somebody had to stand his fare!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the trouble, old fat man?"

Bunter blinked round at Bob Cherry.

"I say, Hilton's gone!" he gasped.

"Yes, I heard a fellow say he went this morning," said Bob. "What about it?"

"Oh! Nothing! But, I say—I—I mean, of—of course, I knew; I had a chat with him this morning! I say, you're coming with me for Christmas, ain't you, Bob, old chap?"

Bob chuckled.

"Hilton forgot to ask me!" he answered.

"Oh, that's all right! I'm going, you see, and I can take any friends with me that I like. See?"

"Not quite!"

"Look here, you beast, will you come?"

"Look here, you beast, I won't!" grinned Bob, and he walked away.

Bunter breathed hard.

Hilton Hall was a very attractive place for the hols. The Co. were at a loose end. They ought to have jumped at the chance!

Apparently they weren't going to jump! In fact, they required something a little more definite in the way of an invitation before they barged in anywhere. That, in Bunter's opinion, was rot—utter rot! Still, there it was! He had to take fellows as he found them, idiots as they were!

This matter required some thinking out.

Bunter thought it out.

Writing to Hilton was no good. It was not exactly a matter that it was judicious to put into black and white, for one thing. And Devonshire was a long way off, and with the Christmas posts in the usual state of delay and confusion very likely an answer would not arrive before break-up! But that wonderful invention, the telephone, was a resource. Bunter had to borrow a telephone for a trunk call.

It was impossible to telephone from the post office. Trunk calls had to be paid for at that establishment.

In these circumstances, therefore, it was fortunate that Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, had gone down to the vicarage at Friardale for tea with Mr. Lambe. Having ascertained that fact, Billy Bunter rolled away to masters' studies and dodged into Prout's study.

Obviously Hilton Hall would be on the phone. Bunter did not know the number, but the exchange could get it. That was all right; they got it.

Bunter had rather a long wait. But he was through at last, and a rather rich, port-winey sort of voice came to his fat ears.

"Hallo! This is Hilton Hall!"

"Is that Walsingham?" asked Bunter, guessing it.

"Speaking!"

It was the butler.

"Tell Hilton that Bunter wants him!"

(Continued at bottom of next page.)



The following is all Billy Bunter's own work,
especially the spelling and grammar.

A is for *ALMONDS*, delishus to crunch—
I often eat 2 or 3 gross be4 lunch.
B is for *BREAKFUST* on Crissmus Day morn,
I take just a bite at the ham and it's gorn.
C is for *CHESSNUTS* and *COBNUTS* in barrels,
And also for *CAKES*, *CRACKERS*, *CHOCKLITS* and
CARROLS.
D is for *DINNER*. Ah me! Oh, my hat!
I simply can't write annything about that.
E is *ENJOYMENT* and *EATING*. Great game!
The two things to me are eggsackly the same.
F is the *FIRESIDE*. I luv it, you lno,
Compleet with a 100 baked chessnuts or so.
G is for *GOOSE*, which I'm free to admit
I'd eat till I rold on the floor in a fitt.
H is for *HOLLY*. Sum fathedded clown
Is sure to leave some in the place I sitt down.
I is for *ICING* on topp of the cake,
The thort of it makes me tut-tremble and shake.
J is for *JOKES*, and no fathedd, I hope,

XX
on the phone! Speaking from Greyfriars School!"

"Perhaps I can take a message, sir! Master Cedric is playing billiards at the moment with his friend Mr. Price."

"Tell him it's about a letter."

"Very well, sir!"

Bunter grinned over the phone. He had no doubt that that message would bring Hilton to the other end without delay.

He was right! A voice came through very quickly.

"Is that Bunter?" snapped the voice of Hilton of the Fifth. "What do you want?"

"Just rung you up for a little chat, old chap!" answered Bunter affably.

"You fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Hilton—"

"If you've got anything to say—"

"Lots! I shall be coming along when we break up—"

"I know that—"

"I shall be bringing a few friends with me—"

"What?"

"Can't you hear?"

"Look here, Bunter—"

"I'll repeat it! I shall be bringing a few friends with me."

"You fat rascal!"

"If you're going to call a fellow names, Hilton, you may as well ring off. If you're not going to be civil I shall have to change my mind about coming to you for the vac. Unless you really want me—"

"You—you—you—"

"Do you want me or not?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Right-ho! Like me to bring a few friends?"

There was a pause.

"Look here, Bunter, you can't crowd the place with fags! Don't be a silly young idiot!"

"I can hardly come without my friends. You see, I've asked them—"

"You cheeky little scoundrel!"

"Oh, all right! If that's the way you're going to talk—"

"I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"Look here, what sort of a crew do you want to bring? If they're all decent—"

"Wharton's lot—"

"Oh, that lot!" Hilton's tone sounded relieved. "I shouldn't mind that very much—they're a decent crowd.

Will trubble this yeer to present me with soap!
K is for *KITCHEN*. I'd stay there for good
And spend all my time in the playce if I could.
L is the *LIQUID* that's called *LEMONADE*—
I'd drown myself in it and not be afrade.
M is *MINCE PIES*, what a glawrtious treat!
Not *MISTLETOE*—that is a thing you can't eat.
N is for *NUTS*. They're topp-hole, that's a fact!
I'd eat 'em by cartloads, provided they're crackd.
O is for *ORANGE*—just eaten a skore,
And now I feel sorry—I wish I'd ate more.
P is for *PUDDING*. We burst into cheers
Direckly its luvly round figger appeers.
Q is for *QUEER*, and I'm taken that way
About three o'clock in the morning neckst day.
R is for *RAISINS*. You stone 'em all first,
Then steddily eat till you suddenly burst.
S is for *SUGARPLUMS*, also for *SPICE*;
Both very nurrishing, both very nice.
T is for *TURKEY*. O, creecher divine!
Roll on the glad day that will make you all mine.
U is for *UNCLES*, such jolley old chapps
Who give hansum presents to nevvies—perraps!
V is the *VAC*, which we welcome with shrieks!
No prep and no master for several weeks!
W's the letter for *WALNUTS* and *WINE*;
The foace of the jinjer's eggseedingly fine.
X stands for *XMAS* that cums wounce a yeer,
Shout Hip-pip-hooray! The glad seeson is here!
Y is the *YULE-LOG* that splutters and burns
And keeps us in kumfort till skooltime returns.
Z is for *ZEAL*, and it's generally so,
For there dussen't seem annything else that will go.

XX
My father would like them, I dare say. You haven't told them—"

There was a note of anxiety in Hilton's voice.

Bunter chuckled.

"I've only told them I want them to come."

"I shouldn't have thought they'd barge in on that. But you can bring them if you like."

"That's not quite good enough," said Bunter calmly. "They seem to make out that they can't come on my invitation—"

"Well, you fat idiot, of course they do! They're not the fellows to barge in where they're not wanted. Wash it out!"

"I'm bringing them! But the trouble is—they won't come on my invitation. I want you to ask them."

"Oh, rot!"

"You can please yourself, of course, Hilton! I shan't come unless they do. If you don't want me—"

"Look here—"

"There's lots of time for you to write to Wharton. He will come if you put it really decently."

"I—I—I don't mind if they come. But—"

"If Wharton gets a letter from you to-morrow, putting it really nice, it will be all right. Otherwise it won't! They're rather fussy."

Bunter heard a laugh along the wires.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" he snapped.

"What are you laughing at, Hilton?"

"Fussy, are they?" said Hilton. "You mean, they won't barge into a place unless they're decently invited. Is that what you call fussy?"

"Oh, don't jaw! I can tell you this—if they're not satisfied, and won't come, I won't come! That's that!"

"I'll write!"

"Mind you catch the post. If anything goes wrong, you won't see me over Christmas! Got that?"

"You fat scoundrel—"

"What?"

"I mean, it's all right. Leave it to me. The pater likes young people about the place at Christmas, and I dare say he'll be pleased. He knows Colonel Wharton. It's all right. I'll see that it's all right."

(Continued on next page.)

When Choosing Your Christmas Present . . .
Make It

The "HOBBY ANNUAL"

Price 6/- On Sale Everywhere.

"Will you have another three minutes?" came a voice.

Bunter generously decided not to let Prout be charged for another three minutes. He rang off.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Invitation to Hilton Hall!

HARRY WHARTON took down a letter in the rack, in break the following morning, looking at it in some surprise.

The postmark was Blackmoor, and he certainly was not expecting any correspondence from Devonshire. The handwriting on the envelope was not familiar, though he thought he had seen it before.

He slit the envelope and took out the letter.

If he had been surprised before, he was doubly surprised now. He stared at the letter blankly.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! No bad news?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, no! Something jolly surprising, though!" said the captain of the Remove. "Look at it, you men! It concerns you as well as me."

Wharton passed the letter to Bob. Standing in a little group by the window, the Famous Five read it together.

Undoubtedly it was surprising. At the same time it was rather agreeable. It ran:

"Hilton Hall,
Blackmoor.

"Dear Wharton,—If you and your friends are not otherwise booked for the hols, I should be very glad if you'd come down here for Christmas—the five of you.

"The pater, of course, seconds this. He knows your uncle, Colonel Wharton, and would be glad to make your acquaintance.

"The pater is rather a jolly old bean, and likes young people at Christmas, and there will be some others for you to meet. There's going to be some stunts—a fancy dress dance and a treasure hunt on the moors, and so on. I think you'd be able to have a good time.

"I'd be really glad if you'd come. We don't see a lot of one another at school, being in different Forms; but, of course, it's different at home. I'll do my best to make it jolly for you.

"Wire reply; no time for letters now. Make it yes!

"Yours sincerely,
CEDRIC HILTON."

Harry Wharton & Co. read that unexpected letter through, read it through again, and looked at one another.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob.

"Decent sort of letter!" said Nugent.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"Blessed if I quite make it out!" said Harry. "Hilton's a Fifth Form man, and a bit swanky at that, and only the other day we were snow-balling him. But he seems to want us."

"Well, re wouldn't say he did if he didn't!" remarked Johnny Bull. "I suppose he knows what he's talking about."

"I suppose so!"

"His pater knows my uncle," remarked Wharton. "They were in the War together, though they don't see much of one another now, living so far away. If the jolly old bean would like to make my acquaintance, I don't see why he shouldn't."

"Hear, hear!"

"It's a jolly decent letter, anyhow."

"That's so."

The letter, as a matter of fact, was quite cordial in tone, and its cordiality was genuine. Hilton, undoubtedly, did not want Bunter, and he had been dismayed to hear that Bunter was bringing friends with him; but, on the other hand, he had been greatly relieved to hear who those friends were! Probably he was thankful that matters were no worse!

And, though the juniors did not know it, when Hilton had mentioned the matter to his father, he had found Sir Gilbert very pleased to hear that Colonel Wharton's nephew was coming. Hilton, with all his faults, had a strong affection for his father, and was glad to please the old gentleman. So, little as Billy Bunter supposed it, he had written that letter with sincere cordiality, and really did mean what he said in it.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter rolled up, with a fat grin on his fat face. He had spotted that letter in the rack, and knew.

The chums of the Remove looked round at him. They had forgotten Bunter and the fact that he also was going to be at Hilton Hall for the holidays.

"That from Hilton?" grinned Bunter.

"Yes."

"What does he say?"

"He's asked us for Christmas."

"He, he, he!"

"Well, where does the cackle come in, you fat ass?" asked Johnny Bull gruffly.

"I say, you fellows, you're coming?"

"Well, we haven't decided yet—"

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter. "Of course you'll come! We'll travel down together. I shall be glad of your company."

"More than we shall be of yours!" grunted Johnny.

"Oh, really, Bull! If you can't jolly well be civil, I may change my mind about taking you!" said Bunter warmly.

"You're not taking us, you fat idiot! If we go, we go on Hilton's invitation, not yours. You've got nothing to do with it."

"Oh, haven't I?" hooted Bunter.

"Nothing at all!"

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Well, what have you got to do with it?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Oh! Nothing! Nothing of course!" said Bunter hastily.

"Shut up, then!"

"Beast! I can jolly well tell you that Hilton's only asked you as friends of mine!" hooted Bunter.

"What utter rot!"

"Are we friends of yours?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"First I've heard of it!"

"Beast!"

"Bunter can't have anything to do with this," said Harry Wharton, staring at the fat junior. "He's wangled an invitation for himself somehow—"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"But he can't have wangled one for us! Hilton's letter is genuine enough. But if I thought—" Wharton paused.

"It—it's all right!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "I had nothing to do with it—not a thing! How—how could I? I say, you fellows, I— Don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you, you beasts!"

But the chums of the Remove did walk away.

They discussed the matter without the assistance of William George Bunter.

That fat youth was rather anxious.

That the Famous Five would not go if they even dreamed how matters stood was certain. They were rather more "fussy" in such matters than Bunter!

Still, it was quite impossible for them to guess how matters stood!

Hilton's letter had a genuine ring. That was not to be doubted! And that kind invitation for the Christmas holidays came at an opportune time. There was no doubt of that, either.

Except on the grounds of a previous engagement, it would have been rather ungracious to refuse. And there was no other engagement.

After third school that morning Billy Bunter's doubts were set at rest when Harry Wharton went down to the post office to send a telegram.

The die was cast!

Bunter was going to have his friends round him at Hilton Hall! He was going to be safe from Price's knavish tricks! He was going to be able to borrow anything he needed in the way of clothes, and collars, and shirts! He was going to travel first-class—and he was going to have his fare paid! And all—so far as Bunter was concerned—was calm and bright!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Blackmoor!

"**D**ARK!"

"Cold!"

"Windy!"

"Snowy!"

"But jolly!" said Bob Cherry.

That was Bob all over! Bob looked

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A stocky figure in uniform, armed with a rifle, loomed up before Harry Wharton & Co. Then a sudden light flashed out on their faces, dazzling them. "What are you doing here?" came a sharp, harsh voice. "We're trying to find Hilton Hall!" answered Wharton. "Is that building yonder Hilton Hall?" "No, it's Blackmoor Prison!" said the man, with a curt laugh.

on the bright side of things. He could see something jolly in a cold, dark, windy, snowy night on a wild, bleak moor.

"The jolliffulness does not seem to be terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shivering as he put up the collar of his overcoat and tucked a warm scarf round his dusky neck.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Jolly, ain't it, old fat bean?" roared Bob Cherry. "Enjoying life—what?"

"Urrgh! It's k-k-kick-cold!" granted Bunter. "Beastly! I say, you fellows, can't you see the car?"

"What car?"

"I suppose Hilton's sent a car."

"Looks as if he hasn't!"

"The cheeky cad!"

"Dash it all, they might have sent something," said Johnny Bull, peering into the December gloom. "Not the night for a walk."

But there was no car—not the ghost of one.

Harry Wharton & Co. stood looking out of the little country station at Blackmoor.

The station was outside the village—a little distance from the nearest houses or cottages. Through the gloom of December, twinkling lights could be seen here and there from windows.

It had been rather a long run on the Great Western, and then a short run on a local line to Blackmoor.

Night had fallen long before the Greyfriars fellows were at the end of their journey.

It was a dark, bitter night, with snowflakes whirling on the wind that swept over the moor. There was no sign of a vehicle of any sort outside the station.

Bunter had taken it for granted that there would be a car from Hilton Hall. The other fellows had expected that there would be something—or, at all events, that they could get a conveyance of some kind.

There was nothing!

Inquiry of the stationmaster had elicited the information that Hilton Hall was a mile away by the lane across the moor. The baggage could be sent on by a local carrier's cart; that was all right. But a boy had to be sent to carry word to the carrier in the village. It meant a long wait, if the juniors travelled in the cart along with their bags—even if there was room for so many, which was doubtful, and even if they cared to arrive at a place like Hilton Hall in a carrier's cart—which was not an attractive idea.

So the chums of the Remove looked into the wintry night dubiously. A walk of a mile would not hurt any of them—except Bunter! Bunter did not want to walk a mile. Of the 1,760 yards in a mile, there were 1,759 too many for Bunter.

He grumbled loud and he grumbled long!

"The check!" he snorted. "The neck! I'll jolly well talk to Hilton about this! Leaving us in the lurch like this! Look here, you let him know the train, didn't you, Wharton?"

"Yes."

"Then what does he mean?"

Wharton could not answer that question. Probably there was more than one car at an establishment like Hilton Hall; very likely three or four, or half a dozen. Really, Hilton might have sent something.

"After all, we can walk!" said Nugent.

"I don't want to walk!" hooted Bunter.

"Well, you can crawl on your hands and knees, if you like that better," suggested Bob Cherry.

"Beast!"

"I dare say there's some mistake in the matter," said Harry. "Hilton can't mean to treat us uncivilly after asking us here. Somebody's forgotten, perhaps."

"Very likely!" agreed Bob.

Billy Bunter gave a snort. He was not so sure that Hilton did not mean to be uncivil, considering the peculiar circumstances. Certainly he was not likely to waste civility on Bunter, if he could help it.

"Well, we can walk," said Harry, at last; "the carrier will bring on our bags, and a mile won't kill us, even in the dark and the wind. Let's get going."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on, Bunter!"

"I'll jolly well talk to him when I see him!" growled Bunter. "The cheeky ass! More likely Price, though! This is just one of Price's tricks! That cad would dis' us if he could."

The Famous Five made no reply to that. They started, and Billy Bunter rolled after them, grunting and snorting.

The twinkling lights of the village disappeared behind as they tramped along the dusky lane across the moor.

All was darkness, with a ghostly glimmer of snow in the gloom.

The lane, like many Devonshire lanes, was rather sunken. There were high banks on either side, with patches of leafless thicket along the summit sprinkled with snow.

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On either hand the wild, rugged moor stretched away—bleak and silent and desolate.

The wind came almost like a knife. In the sunken lane the darkness was like the inside of a hat. Here and there a wintry star sparkled in a heavy sky.

Cheery as the chums of the Remove were, the darkness and silence and solitude of the wild moor affected them a little. They tramped on almost in silence for the first half-mile—even Bunter's grousing dying away as his breath grew shorter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's a cross-road!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, coming to a stop.

They peered about them. The faint glimmer of the stars showed that the road forked in front of them, dividing into two.

"There's a signboard here!" said Harry.

"See what's on it?" grinned Bob.

"H'm!"

At the parting of the ways was a finger-post. The projecting arms were well above the level of a head. No doubt they bore information for wayfarers. But in the darkness they might as well have been blank.

"Try a match," said Nugent.

"Not much use in this wind. But I'll try."

Match after match was struck. But it was useless; the rough wind blew them instantly out. A matchbox having been half-emptied, they gave it up.

Bunter, leaning on the post to rest his weary, fat limbs, groaned.

"I say, you fellows, can't you find the way?"

"Looks as if we shall have to chance it."

"Haven't you got an electric torch?"

"In my bag," said Harry.

"You silly ass, haven't you got one in your pocket?"

"No!"

"I think you might have thought of it!"

"Have you got one?"

"Oh, don't jaw! Look here, what are we going to do?" howled Bunter. "I'm cold and tired and hungry—especially hungry!"

"We can't stick here," said Bob.

"No chance of anybody coming by; we might be in a jolly old desert for all the inhabitants we're likely to see! Hilton's place seems to be rather off the map."

"Let's get on!" said Johnny Bull.

"Take the right—it's as good as the other, as we don't know which."

"Look here, let's take the left!" said Billy Bunter. "I fancy it's the left!"

That remark from Bunter was dictated by sheer irritable crossness of temper. He had no more idea than the other fellows which way led to Hilton Hall.

"You silly ass——" began Johnny Bull.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter. "Look here, take the left! I'm not going to walk all over this beastly moor all night to please you—see?"

"Oh, take the left!" said Harry. "It doesn't matter a straw which, as we don't know which to take."

And the juniors followed the lane that parted on the left. Certainly, it seemed a matter of little moment, as they had not the faintest idea which was the correct one.

They tramped on through the windy darkness. Black against the dark sky, a mass of buildings rose dimly at length.

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Not a light was to be seen, but it was unmistakably a building, and a very large one.

"I say, you fellows, there it is!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, in great relief. "I jolly well knew that left was right!"

"Blessed if that looks like a country mansion!" said Bob.

"You silly ass, what do you think it is? I say——"

GREYFRIARS CARTOONS

By Harold Skinner.

No. 26.—JOHNNY BULLDOG!

(Johnny Bull—the blunt, outspoken member of the Famous Five.)



Why wasn't Johnny born a bulldog?
It evidently suits him, as you see!
For he's an honest, blunt, courageous,
cool dog,
His growl is what a bulldog's growl
should be.

He acts and speaks and hits straight
from the shoulder.
One day perhaps I'll fight him, but
before
I do so he must grow a little older—
Say when he's just turned ninety-three
or four!

"Halt!" came a sharp voice from the darkness.

"Wha-a-t?"

"Halt! Stand where you are!"

In utter amazement, the juniors halted. Billy Bunter gave a squeak of startled alarm. A stocky figure in uniform loomed up, and, to their further amazement, the juniors caught the gleam of a rifle. A sudden light flashed out on their faces, dazzling them.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" came the sharp, harsh voice from behind the dazzling light.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter! We're trying to find Hilton Hall!" answered Wharton.

"Is that building yonder Hilton Hall?"

There was a curt laugh.

"Hardly!"

"Then what——"

"It's Blackmoor Prison!"

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Man in the Dark!

"BLACKMOOR PRISON!"

The schoolboys repeated the words.

They peered through the darkness at the great, wall-encircled building, black against the dark sky.

Blackmoor Prison!

They had, of course, heard of the great convict prison on the moors. They had not been thinking of it, however, and it was startling to find themselves almost under its massive walls.

They could guess now who had challenged them. It was a warder, on his round outside the prison.

The light which shone in their faces, dazzling them, hid him from their sight. But they knew that he was scanning them keenly.

His scrutiny, however, satisfied him. He could hardly have taken the party of schoolboys for friends or confederates of the desperate men imprisoned behind those high walls.

"If you're looking for Hilton Hall——"

The voice was less sharp now, and the light, suddenly shut off, left the juniors in the darkness again.

"Yes," answered Harry. "You can tell us?"

"You've taken the wrong road if you came up from the station. Go back to the cross-roads, and take the road on the right."

"Thanks!"

The Greyfriars party turned to retrace their footsteps. Billy Bunter groaned dismally. By insisting on taking the left instead of the right, he had put in an extra quarter of a mile for nothing. That quarter of a mile had to be negotiated again, back to the corner.

Blackmoor Prison vanished in the darkness behind. The wind blew more sharply than ever, and the flakes were falling thicker.

"Oh, the beast!" groaned Bunter, as they reached the signpost at last. "I'll make him sit up for this!"

"Fathead!" said Bob.

"Beast!"

"Come on!" said Harry. "We know where we are now, and it's only half a mile from here."

"Only!" groaned Bunter.

On the right road at last, the Greyfriars fellows tramped on. They were all rather tired, and not in their usual cheery temper. This, really, was not how they had expected to reach Hilton Hall. If Hilton had carelessly landed them in a dark and dismal tramp like this, it was not the sort of hospitality they had looked for. Bunter was not surprised; but the Famous Five were surprised, and not pleased.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly. "Who——"

"What——" began Harry.

"There was somebody——" Bob stared round in the thick gloom. "I saw somebody—— He's gone!"

"I saw nothing!" said Johnny Bull. "Listen!"
Through the howl of the bitter wind a faint sound came from the dark lane ahead. It sounded like the pattering of running feet.

"Somebody else walking to Hilton Hall in the dark!" said Bob. "We startled him. Blessed if I can see why he should bolt like that, though! I suppose he didn't take us for a mob of escaped convicts!"

"Might have, in the dark!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Anyhow, he's hooked it! Let's get on!"

The pattering of hurried feet had died away in a moment or two. The juniors tramped on, keeping their eyes about them as they went. Somebody was ahead of them on the dark road, though he seemed anxious to keep his distance.

In so solitary a place, it was perhaps natural that a single wayfarer should not desire to run into a party of strangers in the dark. Still, the incident startled them a little.

But nothing more was seen or heard of the dark figure that Bob had glimpsed for a second before it fled.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's a light!" exclaimed Bob, lifting his hand to point.

"Hilton Hall at last!" said Nugent, in great relief.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter. "My legs are nearly dropping off! I'm fearfully hungry! Oh crikey!"

"Not far now, old fat bean, as we can see a light!" said Wharton encouragingly. "Ten minutes, and we'll be in!"

"Ten minutes!" groaned Bunter. "Oh lor!"

"Here's the place!"

The road ran by a high park wall. A great gateway appeared in the wall, the gates standing wide open. Over the stone arch of the gateway burned a light. Now that they were close at hand, the juniors could see a glimmer of lights also from the blinded windows of the lodge within. Past the lodge a great drive curved between lines of ancient oaks and beeches in the direction of the still unseen mansion.

"Better make sure we're at the right shop!" said Bob. "It looks like a bit of a walk to the house from here."

Harry Wharton nodded, and knocked at the lodge door. It was opened by a plump, red-faced man, evidently the lodge-keeper. He stared at the school-boys in surprise.

"This is Hilton Hall, I suppose?" asked Harry.

"Yes, sir. You'll be the young gentlemen from the school that Master Cedric's expecting?"

"I suppose we are," said Harry, with a smile. "We're from Greyfriars, anyhow."

"You haven't walked from Blackmoor Station, sir?"

"Yes," answered Harry. "We had to."

"Didn't you find the car there, sir?"

"There wasn't any car there," answered Bunter. "And I'll jolly well tell Hilton what I think of him, too!"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Yah!"

The Hilton Hall lodge-keeper blinked at Bunter. Then he addressed Wharton again:

"The car went, sir. Mr. Price drove it."

"Price!" repeated Harry.

"Yes, sir. He stopped to ask me about the short cut to the station as he

was going. Can't understand how you didn't find the car there," said the lodge-keeper, scratching a puzzled head.

"Oh, the beast!" gasped Bunter. "I know this was one of Price's tricks. He missed us on purpose, of course."

"Let's get on!" said Harry abruptly.

The juniors looked rather grim as they went on up the long drive. Price of the Fifth, apparently, had offered to drive to the station for them, and had somehow missed them. Hilton might want them at the Hall; but it was very probable that his pal, Price, didn't. Bunter was not the only one of the party who suspected that Price of the Fifth had deliberately missed them at the station, and given them that long and weary walk.

"I suppose a fellow couldn't punch a fellow's head, when a fellow is a fellow's guest," remarked Johnny Bull thoughtfully, "and the other fellow's a guest, too?"

"Hardly," said Harry. "It may have been a mistake, too—"

"Fat lot of mistake about it! Catch Pricey offering to fetch us from the station, if he didn't mean to play some dirty trick."

"Well, we can't say anything—"

"Can't we!" hooted Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you—"

"Oh, dry up, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

Glimmering windows, in a long facade of an extensive mansion, loomed through the gloom—a welcome sight to the weary juniors. They tramped on up the drive, their feet making no sound on the carpet of snow. Billy Bunter, weary and worn, rolled on behind the other fellows.

The glimmer from the distance only made the darkness denser under the leafless branches. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Bob Cherry bumped into an unseen figure in the blackness ahead of him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What—" ejaculated Bob.

For the moment he fancied that one of his comrades had passed him in the dark, and that he had bumped into him.

The next moment he staggered back, with a loud cry.

He had an instant's glimpse of a dim, white face, and a pair of glittering eyes in the gloom, and then a savage fist crashed fairly into his face, sending him spinning back.

Crash!

Bob Cherry went down heavily on his back in the snow.

He yelled as he went down.

"What the thump is—" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Ow!"

Bob sat up, dazed and dizzy. His hand went to his nose, which oozed red. His comrades ran up with startled

exclamations. But his assailant was gone. The instant that savage blow had been struck, the half-seen figure had darted away, and was swallowed up in the darkness.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER. Guests at Hilton Hall!

"BOB—" "What the thump—" "Run into a tree?" "Ow! No!" gasped Bob Cherry, staggering to his feet, with a helping hand from Wharton. "Oh crumbs! Somebody hit me!" "Wha-a-t?"

"I ran into somebody, and he hit me—knocked me over!" gasped Bob. He glared round in the thick gloom, pulled out his handkerchief, and dabbed his nose. "Ow! My boko's nearly busted! Wow!"

"I say, you fellows, let's get on!" came Bunter's peevish voice. "I'm fearfully hungry. You shouldn't run into a tree, Cherry!"

"I didn't run into a tree!" roared Bob.

"Well, you must have, if you've banged your nose. There's nobody here. Look here, come on!" yapped Bunter impatiently. "I'm going on, anyhow."

And the fat Owl rolled on towards the glimmering windows.

Bob dabbed his nose, breathing hard. His comrades blinked at him in the gloom with rather doubtful looks. It was clear that Bob had had rather a bang on his nose. But there was no sign or sound of anyone but themselves on the oak avenue. And it was amazing, inexplicable, that if anyone was there, he had knocked one of the Greyfriars fellows down, and bolted.

(Continued on next page.)

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"You—you're sure, Bob?" said Harry dubiously.

Bob gave an angry snort. He knew that he had seen a pair of startled eyes glittering at him, and he knew that he had been hit, and hit hard. And that hard knock had rather ruffled his temper.

"You silly ass, of course I'm sure!" he snapped. "Look at my nose!"

"You might have barged into a tree in this darkness—"

"I tell you he bit me right in the face, whoever he was!" roared Bob. "I'd jolly well like to lay hands on him, too! I dare say it's the fellow we came on in the lane—ahead of us all the time. And I ran into him again here."

"Must be going to Hilton Hall, in that case, same as we are," said Frank Nugent. "I don't see why he should biff you."

"I don't, either. But he did."

"Well, he's gone, anyhow," said Johnny Bull.

"I'd jolly well smash him, if he wasn't!" growled Bob. "Who the thump can it have been—and why did he punch me, blow him?"

The other fellows made no answer to that. If it had happened, they could not explain it; and they were not quite sure that it had happened. Really it seemed more probable that Bob had barged into a tree-trunk, or a trailing branch in the dark, and fancied the rest.

"Oh, let's get on!" said Bob gruffly.

He restored a rather stained handkerchief to his pocket, and they got on.

Ahead of them now light streamed out into the night from a great doorway, wide open.

Bunter had arrived first. He was already in the spacious old oak hall of Sir Gilbert Hilton's mansion, when the Famous Five resumed their way.

Bright and hospitable that old oak hall looked, with its bright lights, and leaping, blazing log-fire, when the cold and weary juniors reached it.

Cedric Hilton, looking very handsome and elegant in evening clothes, was regarding the fat Owl of the Remove with a faint smile.

He had his hands in the pockets of his trousers, which was perhaps the reason why he did not shake hands with that distinguished guest.

"Walked from the station—" Bunter was saying, in tones of deep and thrilling indignation as the Famous Five came up to the doorway. "Tramping through the snow and wind—"

"Why didn't you hop into the car?"

"There wasn't any car!" roared Bunter. "That cad Price let us down on purpose—see?"

"Dear me!" said Hilton, with a yawn. "So you've walked."

"Yes; and I can jolly well tell you that—"

"Help Mr. Bunter off with his coat, Walsingham."

A portly man, with plump cheeks, and a complexion like rich old port wine, eyed Bunter with as much disapproval as a well-trained butler could permit himself to reveal.

He helped Bunter off with his coat.

The fat junior proceeded to warm himself at the blazing log-fire. It was grateful and comforting, after that long walk in December cold and darkness.

Hilton turned to the open doorway as the chums of the Remove arrived there.

His greeting of Billy Bunter had been

far from cordial or flattering. But his manner changed as he met the Famous Five.

His hands came out of his trousers pockets at once, and a pleasant smile came over his face.

"Oh, here you are, young 'uns!" he said. "Bunter says that you've had to walk. I'm awfully sorry. Price took the car for you, but he must have missed you, somehow. It's a rotten night for a drive, and I fancy he's missed his way. He hasn't got back yet, anyhow."

Snort from Bunter.

Bunter was quite sure that the cad of the Fifth had intentionally let the party down at the station. The other fellows had very little doubt about it, either; but they were not disposed to say so.

Hilton, at all events, was not to blame for what Price might have done, and his greeting of the chums of the Remove left nothing to be desired.

He shook hands with them very cordially, and made them very welcome, and seemed, in fact, genuinely glad to see them.

Aware that they knew nothing, and suspected nothing, of Billy Bunter's knavish tricks, and that they had accepted his invitation in good faith, the dandy of the Fifth made himself as agreeable as he could—and Cedric Hilton could be very agreeable when he liked.

Walsingham, who had eyed Bunter very dubiously, had quite a different expression as he gave his stately attention to the Famous Five.

Apparently Walsingham was pleased to approve of them.

"That man Price is an ass," said Hilton as the juniors warmed their hands at the fire. "I told him to let a chauffeur take the car, but he wanted to go. Where's the pater, Walsingham?"

"In the library, Master Cedric."

"Come in and see the pater, you men," said Hilton.

"I'm hungry!" said Bunter.

"Eh!"

"I'm hungry!"

"Walsingham, will you see that Mr. Bunter has some supper immediately," said Hilton gravely. "You men come with me."

Harry Wharton & Co. were taken into the library to make the acquaintance of Hilton's father; whom they found to be a hospitable, stout gentleman with a red face and white whiskers. Billy Bunter gave his attention to the more important matter of supper.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Face at the Window!

BOOM!

Boom! Boom!

It was a deep, clanging note of a bell wafted on the wild December wind across the snowy moor.

It rang and echoed over banks of snow, frosty thickets, and frozen streams, through darkness and gloom; and penetrated into the brightly lighted and cheery apartment where the Greyfriars party sat at supper.

Harry Wharton & Co. were looking very merry and bright.

Hilton Hall was a magnificent place, and its hospitality seemed unbounded. They liked the place; they liked old Sir Gilbert and his lady; they liked and were secretly amused by the stately Walsingham, and they liked Hilton himself more than they had ever supposed at Greyfriars that they would like the

dandified sportsman of the Fifth Form.

The only fly in the ointment was Stephen Price, Hilton's Fifth Form pal, who hardly made a secret of the fact that he regarded the junior party as quite superfluous at the Hall.

Price had come in with the car, and explained that he had lost his way on the short cut the lodge-keeper had told him about.

The juniors had their own opinion about that, which they kept to themselves.

Price was not present now. Hilton was. Dinner was over long ago at Hilton Hall; and Hilton had dined; but he graced the supper-board with his elegant presence.

Walsingham waited on the supper-party.

Billy Bunter blinked at him several times through his big spectacles and grinned.

This was the butler who had lent Hilton money, and whose dignified communication on the subject had fallen into Bunter's fat hands.

Bunter wondered what the stately Walsingham would have thought if he had known what Bunter knew!

Boom, boom, boom! came suddenly the deep, echoing note of the heavy bell in the distance, and the cheery buzz of voices died away as the juniors started and listened.

Boom, boom!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, what the thump—" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"By gad!" said Hilton. "That's the alarm bell at Blackmoor!" He started to his feet and listened.

The juniors all rose—except Bunter! Bunter was dealing with mince pies, which were going down like oysters.

"The alarm bell!" repeated Wharton.

"Listen!"

"What does it mean?" asked Nugent.

"I fancy it means that one of the convicts has got loose!" answered Hilton. "They ring it to give the alarm if a prisoner gets away. I suppose they've found that a man is missing."

Boom, boom! came the deep echoing note.

The juniors felt a thrill.

"An escaped convict!" breathed Bob Cherry. He remembered the running man in the lane and the blow that had been struck when in the dark avenue. He gave his comrades a startled look.

"You kids haven't seen anything of a man about the moor?" exclaimed Hilton, in surprise.

"We jolly well have!" answered Bob, and he related what had happened on the avenue.

Hilton whistled.

"By gum!" said Johnny Bull. "It looks—"

"It does!" said Harry.

"You'd better let the servants know, Walsingham," said Hilton. "They've only just missed him and started the alarm-bell; but he may have got away hours ago."

"Certainly, Master Cedric!"

"I say, you fellows, is that window fastened? I say, lock the door—"

"Fathead!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "If you think I'm going to be murdered in my bed by escaping convicts—"

"Ass! Shut up!"

Hilton crossed to the tall windows and pulled aside the curtains. Outside was black darkness with a glimmer of snowflakes whirling on the wind. From the distance came the steady, unceasing booming clang of the alarm-bell at Blackmoor Prison.

The Greyfriars fellows looked out into the December night.

Somewhere out on the wild moor a hunted man was desperately skulking and dodging, with pursuit hot on his track.

Whoever he was and whatever he had done, they could not help feeling an impulse of compassion for him. They turned away from the window.

"Poor beggar!" muttered Johnny Bull. "What a Christmas for him!"

"I say, you fellows—"
"Oh, dry up, Bunter!"

But was the escaped convict skulking out on the wild moor? Who was it that had struck Bob Cherry down under the leafless oaks on the avenue? Bob remembered the glittering eyes that had flashed from the darkness for a split second, and he had no doubts. Likely enough the desperate man was lurking

the white, desperate face pressed to the window.

Harry Wharton found his voice.

"The convict!"

Hilton rushed to the window.

The face vanished.

In an instant it was lost in the December darkness. They might almost have believed that it had been a vision of fancy.

Crash!

Clatter!

Tinkle!

"What—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "The butler—"

"Walsingham!" gasped Hilton.

They ran to him. The butler of Hilton Hall had fallen to the floor in a faint. The tray had fallen to the ground, and every glass was smashed—and Walsingham lay unconscious on the

The butler gazed at him for a moment. Then, remembering, he staggered to his feet, his face flooded with crimson.

"I—I am sorry, sir," he stammered. "I—I regret—I—I— If you will excuse me, sir, I—I will go to my room."

"You'd better, I think," said Hilton dryly.

Walsingham almost tottered from the room. There was a howl from under the table. Billy Bunter had taken refuge there.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off! I say—" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, lock all the doors! Bar all the windows! Oh dear, I wish I hadn't come here for Christmas! Oh lor! I say, you fellows—"



(Some of the leading lights at Greyfriars recall their jolliest holidays.)

DR. LOCKE (The Headmaster):

Christmas is the Festival of Youth. It is, therefore, natural that my happiest Christmas, although I have seen over sixty of them, should be in my boyhood days. The Christmas of 1879 is still spoken of as "the gloomy Christmas," owing to internal trouble and conflict in the country. To me it was the happiest. On Christmas Eve my train was snowed up in Kent, and the passengers were compelled to remain at a little country inn near by. Between us we made up a splendid party, and I think that gathering, most of us strangers to each other, was the happiest I have ever seen. It was late on Boxing Day before the line was clear, and I can only say that I boarded the train again with great regret.

MR. PROUT (Master of the Fifth):

My happiest Christmas was spent on board ship coming home from

Canada. Practically all the passengers were prostrate with mal-de-mer, and it was very enjoyable to me to find myself well and healthy in the midst of so much suffering. I comforted the sick by telling them of the good things they were missing in the dining saloon.

HARRY WHARTON:

My happiest Christmas was spent at Wharton Lodge. Strangely enough, it was Bunter who made it so happy—he stayed away!

BILLY BUNTER:

The best Crissmus I remember was at Bunter Court, where we had a big party with 10 princes, 22 dukes, 48 erls, and about 100 viscounts. My pater gave a free feed to sum. of the lower classes, such as barons, and nights, and it was good to see the poor fellows enjoying it. I'm not a snobb, I hope, so I was glad to look in for a few minnits to see the poor being fedd, and I even let a mere lord cash a postle order for me.

LORD MAULEVERER:

Too much jag to remember. Sorry!

HORACE COKER (of the Fifth):

My happyest Crissmas was when I ran across Loder of the 6th in the Vack. "Nothing verry luckey about that," you say? Wasn't there! I was on my moter-byke when I ran across

him. Serves him wright for not looking where I'm going!

BOB CHERRY:

My happiest Christmas was when I skated through a hole in the ice at Johnny Bull's place. I didn't feel very happy when I went in, but I felt mighty happy when I got out again, you bet!

FISHER T. FISH:

Last year I found ten cents in the quad. after the fellows had all gone home.

BOLSOVER MAJOR:

My worst Christmas was two years ago when a fellow named Binks gave me a black eye. My happiest Christmas was last year when I gave the fellow named Binks a black eye.

WUN LUNG:

My happiest Christmas was spent in China—what you think? I happy because I am 7,000 miles away from fat Bunter. Happier still if I had been 10,000.

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH:

My absurd Christmases are mostly spentfully employed in the care of the esteemed Colonel Wharton, who is somewhatfully like a guardian to me whilst I stayfully remain in England. All Christmases with the esteemed and ridiculous colonel are nonsensically happy.

round the nearest inhabited spot in the hope of laying his hands on food, a change of clothes, money—and he was likely to hesitate at little to obtain what he needed to help his escape.

Boom, boom, boom! came the hoarse clang of the bell across the moor.

Bob Cherry gave a sudden shout.

"Look!"

He pointed to the window.

Every eye turned on it again.

A face was pressed to the frosty pane. Spellbound, the schoolboys stared at it.

It was a white, haggard face with gaunt features and burning eyes that glittered into the room under the convict cap.

The Greyfriars fellows stood rooted to the floor, gazing. Walsingham, with a tray of refreshments in his plump hands, stood transfixed like the rest. His eyes almost bulged from his plump face at

polished floor.

"What the dooce!" gasped Hilton. "What—"

He lifted the butler's unconscious head on his knee. The juniors stared in amazement. They had been startled by the sudden face at the window—the white, desperate face of the hunted convict. No doubt Walsingham had been startled also. But why he should have fainted was another matter.

"Water!" said Hilton.

Harry Wharton snatched a carafe from the table. Hilton dashed the water on the unconscious face. Walsingham's eyes opened wildly.

"His face!" The juniors, in wonder, caught the muttered words that fell from his lips. "A convict—at Blackmoor!"

"Pull yourself together, Walsingham!" said Hilton rather gruffly. "It was a bit of a shock, but, dash it all, man—"

But nobody heeded Bunter. Hilton Hall was in a state of excitement now from end to end at the news that the escaped convict had been seen. Men with lanterns searched the grounds, keepers armed with guns hunted high and low, joined before long by warders from Blackmoor Prison. But no trace was found of Convict 33; and Harry Wharton & Co. wondered whether they would see or hear anything more of the hunted man during Christmas at Hilton Hall!

THE END.

(Now look out for more thrills and exciting adventures in: "HUNTED DOWN!" the next yarn in this grand Christmas series. Order next week's MAGNET to-day and avoid disappointment, chums!)

OUR POPULAR OLD-TIME TALE OF THRILLING ADVENTURE.

CAPTAIN CRIMSON!

By
Morton Pike.

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

In spite of the activities of Dan Hickerman, an Excise-officer, Tom Roke, the most daring smuggler in Widewater, succeeds in landing many a rich cargo. Determined not to be outdone, Hickerman informs the Press-gang that Roke is about to marry Nancy Jepp, daughter of the local innkeeper, and that the occasion offers a fine opportunity to rope in a hundred or more stout fellows as well as Roke himself. The plan fails, however, thanks to a timely warning from "Captain Crimson," a mysterious highwayman, and the able assistance of Billy Jepp and his chum, Jack Lennard. "Our birds have flown, then," says the Naval officer, on arriving at the church. "Plague on your cleverness, Hickerman. You haven't got the brains of a rabbit!"

(Now read on.)

A Ducking for Daniel!

THE bo'sun's loud guffaw rammed the insult home, and the exasperated Hickerman glared murder at the speaker.

"We must find them—they have scarce ten minutes start of us!" he gasped.

"Then you may find 'em yourself. I and my fellows have had enough of this wild-goose chase!" retorted the lieutenant. "Bo'sun, tell the party to fall in! We march now!"

Leaning far out through an embrasure, Jack and Billy saw the pig-tailed seamen pouring from the porch; the Marines already moving to the gate, and the lieutenant, turning a contemptuous back on the angry Hickerman, doff his laced hat to the pretty face at the chaise window.

"Clear the way there, lads, and give the bride a right good send off!" he cried gallantly.

The "tarpaulins" thereupon raised a hearty cheer, in which the crowd joined, as the crack of old Reuben's whip set the four greys into a brisk trot.

Between the brown roofs of the town, Jack and Billy watched the chaise cross the bridge, and the Press-gang swing down the steep hill in its wake; and since their point of vantage gave them a good view of the road, they waited until the column had passed in a cloud of dust beyond the distant mill.

"They've gone, Jack. And now we'll tell Tom that he can dance at his own wedding, after all," cried Billy, as the bells rang out again. "Come on!"

Several of the excited groups of townfolk, discussing that strange business in the street, and, knowing the two rascals were generally at the bottom of anything out of the common, tried to stay them. But not until old Smuggler Ben's youngest grandson, Roger Quy, darted from a side alley, did they stop.

"Hi! Hard a-starboard, you! Hold on!" he shouted. "Grandfather saw you on the tower-top through his spy-



Hickerman was seized, and flung into the muddy creek!

glass, and sends warning to Tom to lie low yet awhile, if by chance you know where he's hiding? Hickerman's dragoons are on guard at the Boar, so that none may come nigh the place, with six more at Tom's new cottage, and a party on the wall abreast of his lugger. They mean to take him!"

"Phew! There's spite for you!" exclaimed Jack. "Nice news for us to carry to the cellars under the abbey yonder."

Roger Quy checked them as they started to run again, and his eyes sparkled with a look of intelligence.

"We ran two loads of French brandy up there last night, and stowed the kegs in the waterside vault against the old monks' landing-place. The boats are hid among the reeds, and Tom and the rest are welcome to use 'em, if they're in the mind to slip downstream after dark."

Both looked quickly at Jack, who had laughed aloud in an odd way.

"Why should Tom wait for night-fall?" he demanded. "I've got a much better idea than that, and I'll tell it you as we go."

Overbearing bully though he was, Daniel Hickerman was brave enough, as men go, and with his dismounted dragoons clattering about in their clumsy jack-boots, he hoped against hope that the young smuggler would try to join Nancy as soon as word reached him of the Press-gang's departure.

Sooner or later, wherever he might be hiding, one of his many friends and

accomplices was certain to carry the news to him.

Hickerman had found, to his cost, that Tom was always warned in time, and the Excise-officer had begun to have strong suspicion that Billy and Jack were often his informants, which was perfectly true.

As the afternoon sun began to throw the shadow of Dr. Lennard's house across the road on to the front of the Black Boar, he suddenly remembered that the last time he had set eyes on the adventure-loving pair was on the church tower some hours ago.

"What has come to those infernal young scamps, I'd like to know?" he muttered savagely, glaring along the empty street towards the bridge.

A solitary figure, with a slight limp, was approaching. It was Mr. Falcon, the genial tenant of the Abbey Farm, coming for his evening draught, no doubt, and a little earlier than usual.

But for the fact that he himself had spoiled the wedding feast, the old gentleman would have been an honoured guest, Hickerman thought, with a feeling of grim satisfaction, curtly returning Mr. Falcon's nod. However, he could not resist an ill-natured shot as the East India merchant placed his hand on the door.

"Ye'll find but cold comfort, and no company inside to-night," he called. "Your honour's the first customer this three hours past."

"As for that, my friend, I have never quarrelled with my own company yet."

smiled Mr. Falcon dryly; and he went in, leaving Hickerman with the consciousness that some of the troopers grinned at the snub.

Then as another door opened somewhere in the house, and a burst of voices sounded for a moment, ceasing abruptly as the door closed again, Hickerman started.

"Remember my orders!" he said, to the picket of dragoons. "If Roke presents himself while I am away, you will seize him at all costs, even to firing, if needs be."

The next moment he turned quickly under the arch, and entered the stable-yard.

To the other group on guard at the side door there, the Excise-officer repeated his instructions as he passed, walking with a cautious step by the long row of barns and stabling to the gate at the far end.

"Impossible! Cunning as they are!" he was muttering, as he came out on to the river-bank there, and saw six men lolling on the grass abreast of the gaily decked craft in which the young smuggler had so often defied all efforts at capture.

Closer at hand, at the bottom of the deep tidal creek that ended below the walled-in garden of the Black Boar, two boats were drawn up on the mud, and Hickerman swore under his breath.

The door in the garden wall was ajar, and he went in, the fruit-trees hiding his approach as he crept cautiously towards the house.

Then, as he raised his bloodshot eyes, until they were level with the sill, he realised how thoroughly he had been outwitted, for he was now looking into the large club-room where, at a table groaning with good things, sat Tom Roke and his laughing bride, with all their chosen friends, including Jack and Billy and Mr. Falcon, who had just arrived, and was taking his seat next to the happy pair.

All was good humour, even if the merriment was restrained for obvious reasons, and there seemed to be one huge joke which they were all sharing in common, nor did it need old man Jepp's raised hand and warning words to tell the watcher what the joke was.

"Now, gentlemen," said the innkeeper, lifting his goblet, "another toast; but not so noisy this time, if you please, lest that black spoil-sport outside should chance to get wind of us, after all. Mr. Falcon has come just in time to wish what is in all our hearts—health, and long life to our unknown friend, 'Captain Crimson,' without whose help my girl here would be in tears to-day, and Tom wearing handcuffs!"

A crash of splintering glass made them all turn to the window with a cry, as the enraged bully smashed the pane with his loaded whip.

"The handcuffs shall he be wearing in a brace of shakes!" thundered Hickerman, racing down the garden, before even the active smugglers could make a movement.

Jack, who was nearest to the door opened it, thinking on the instant of the stairs, as the only way of escape. In so doing he let in another startling sound from the road outside.

A rider was pulling up his blowing horse, and the man's shout reached them.

"Mount, all of ye, and back to the regiment—on the spur!" he yelled. "The Pretender has landed, and the country is invaded! To your horses, men; and God save King George!"

A rousing cheer answered him as the men ran to the big barn where the horses were standing saddled by Hickerman's own orders. The Excise-officer found himself jostled most unceremoniously as he arrived.

"What are you fools about?" he roared. "Twenty men with fixed bayonets to follow me—the rest hold the other doors. At last we've got 'em!"

The men only laughed as they came clattering out, and Hickerman strode up to the captain.

"Do I understand, sir—" he began furiously.

But that gentleman cut him short. "If you do 'twill be the first time in your life, you precious bungler!" he laughed. "All mounted, sergeant? Good!"

Before he could find his voice Hickerman was left standing alone in the middle of the yard.

"Now, you miserable blubber-grudger!" said a voice in his ear, shortly afterwards. "You've done your best to spoil my wedding day, but 'tis our turn now!"

The next moment strong arms plucked the startled bully from his feet amid a roar of laughter, and carried him, bellowing vengeance, through the gate at the far end.

"All together, lads, with a heave-ho!" laughed Tom Roke, when they came to the river wall.

The last thing Mr. Daniel Hickerman saw as they flung him into the muddy creek with a mighty splash, were the two faces of Jack and Billy, who had done so much to bring his punishment about.

Later, when he floundered out and slunk away to his lodging a beaten man, the fiddler was adding insult to injury, and playing: "Haste to the Wedding" with might and main.

The Farm in the Hollow!

"WHAT do ye think of this, Jepp?" cried Dr. Lennard, the popular old army surgeon of Widewater, stalking into the yard of the Black Boar, where he found the worthy landlord scratching a very puzzled head. "That young scamp of a son of mine has bolted, leaving a letter behind him with the pleasing news that he has gone off to join the Dragoons!"

"Then we're both in the same boat, doctor, you and I," nodded old man Jepp, "for my boy Billy has gone with him! The pair always were as thick as thieves! The plague on the Pretender, says I. I was just coming over to you, doctor, to ask what we'd better do about it."

"Zounds, Jepp, there's nothing to be done. They've gone, that's all. And yet"—Dr. Lennard broke off, and into his eyes there crept an odd little twinkle among the glisten there that might have been tears—"had you and I been their age, with fighting in the air, I'm not sure we wouldn't have done the same thing!"

"I'm certain I should, doctor!" exclaimed the sturdy innkeeper, clenching a pair of huge fists.

The two irate fathers broke into a hearty laugh.

"Not but what 'tis a heavy blow to my missus and myself," continued Jepp senior. "Nancy, my daughter, married yesterday; now Billy gone this morning! The old house will be dead without 'em. But come you inside,

doctor! We'll drink good luck to our young fire-eaters, and confusion to the Pretender—eh?"

Time passed on, and news filtered slowly to Widewater. And what there was of it was none too good; for Prince Charles Edward, otherwise the Young Pretender, seemed to be having it all his own way.

True, he was still in Scotland, where he had taken Edinburgh, and beaten Sir John Cope at Preston Pans; but the latest intelligence said that he was about to lay siege to Carlisle, and would soon be on the march for London itself, which was really very disturbing, and getting far too close to be pleasant.

"Nothing from the boys yet!" said old man Jepp, seated in front of the fire in his snug parlour, and shaking his head sadly. "Nothing since the letter that told us the two boys had joined Cobham's Dragoons as gentlemen volunteers, which is four months ago!"

There was rumour in the air; also, there was snow, and the white flakes danced and whirled on the heels of that alarming whisper which had spread so mysteriously from village to village along the frozen road.

The Pretender was coming at last with his wild Highlanders, who were commonly reported to eat babies; no one knew when, nor exactly from which direction. But he was coming, and, unless something was done very soon, he would be in London before one could say "knife."

Not that anyone was particularly anxious to do so, when the better words would have been "Present your muskets! Fire!"—or, better still, "Draw swords and charge!" But the invaders had managed to slip past the army of Marshal Wade, which had fallen back on Newcastle. The rest of the King's forces were round about Lichfield, and it was very necessary to discover the rebels' line of march before steps could be taken to stop them.

A mounted man pulled up on the Derby road where a ratty cart-track joined it, and, bending low in his saddle, he searched the ground for signs of footmarks.

If there were any, the last flurry of snow had effectually covered them up. The fading light, however, showed him the outline of farm buildings nestling in a hollow a quarter of a mile off, and he walked his horse towards them.

There was something stealthy in the manner of the man's approach; the untied flap of his three-cornered hat threw a shadow over his face, and the dark blue mantle that hid his civilian garb from the tips of his ears to the brown tops of his spurred riding-boots made him little more than a blur against the band of murky yellow lingering in the west.

It was a large farm, but no sound came from it.

No dog barked; no cattle lowed in the barton; and the rider's keen eyes failed to catch any ray of light through the closed shutters.

He paused, listening, at the yard gate, and as he looked back along the cart lane the snow began to fall again.

"A bad night for the business!" he muttered.

Then, pushing the gate open with the toe of his boot, he rode in.

(Don't miss next week's chapters of this powerful old-time story, chums, whatever you do!)



Come Into The Office, Boys!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

WELL, chums, once more the most festive time of all the year is at hand. The time for mirth and jollity, happiness and good-fellowship, and last, but not least, the time for our

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

I feel confident that my reader chums will agree that it is a tip-top issue. By the time you have read these few lines you will no doubt have formed an opinion for yourselves, and I know that it will be an enthusiastically favourable one. Also I will take this opportunity of wishing every one of my readers

A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS.

At this time, a few tricks might help to while away the time at your Christmas party.

Can you tie a person up with three inches of string so that he cannot free himself? Sounds impossible, doesn't it? Yet it's perfectly easy when you know how to do it. First get your "victim" to lie face downwards on the carpet, then, with the string, tie the little finger of his right hand to the little finger of his left hand. Next bend his legs back and lock the joined hands over the toes. Try as he will, your "victim" will not be able to free himself.

Having got the necessary applause from your friends for this little stunt, ask them if they can put a sixpence into an empty matchbox without touching the sixpence with the hand. They'll think you're gone crackers until you show them how easily it can be done. Get someone to spin the

coin on the table, then, while it is spinning, bring down an empty matchbox sharply on top of it. The coin will pierce the box—and there you are!

Now for a few

THINGS YOU CANNOT DO!

You cannot stand rigidly still for five minutes if you are blindfolded.

You cannot stand with your back to the wall of a room with both your feet spread out fanwise touching the wainscoting.

You cannot crush an egg placed lengthwise between your hands—that is, if the egg is sound and has an ordinary shell.

Now we come to a simple card trick. An ordinary pack of playing-cards is required. Having persuaded your guests to seat themselves comfortably round the fire, ask one of them to select a card, saying that, without looking at the card yourself, you will tell them what it is. Holding the selected card in front of you, you then ask the rest of the company to bear the number and suit in mind—they will never twig the fact that you yourself can see the card in the looking-glass over the mantelpiece. You can keep the company mystified for some time this way.

NOW for a few conundrums by way of a change. The answers are printed with them, so that you can try them on your friends.

Why should a sailor be the best

authority as to what goes on in the moon? He has been to see (sea).

Why is life the greatest of riddles? Because we must give it up.

If the alphabet went out to dine, what time would U, V, W, X, Y and Z go? They would go after tea (T).

What is taken from you before you get it? Your portrait.

Now for

ANOTHER COIN TRICK!

In a soup-plate place a coin and beside the latter an inverted glass: you then pour sufficient water into the plate to cover the coin. Next inform your friends that you will pick the coin up from the plate without wetting your fingers. They will find it difficult to believe that you can do it. Cut a round piece off a cork, on the top of which place some pieces of paper and two or three matches. Set light to the paper and matches, and push the whole underneath the glass, and then wait. As soon as the combustion is over you will see the water leave the plate and enter the glass, wherein it rises, leaving the coin dry on the plate. You can then pick up the coin without wetting your fingers.

Of course, all tricks can be made more amusing if the trickster takes the trouble beforehand to learn a little light patter, so that the guests can be kept in a good humour in the event of a "trick" not being carried off successfully at first. However, the tricks described on this page should be practised beforehand so that there should be no risk of failure.

Space is running short, so here is next week's programme of good things. Don't on any account miss

"HUNTED DOWN!"

By Frank Richards.

You'll be sorry if you do, because it's a top-notch yarn that's absolutely crowded with interest, excitement, thrills, and fun. Take my tip and place your order for next week's **MAGNET** without any delay.

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YOUR EDITOR.



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 No 116 (New Series).
 EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.
 December 22nd, 1934.

GREAT CHRISTMAS INVENTION
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"The Headmaster takes the pleasure of your company at his end-of-term supper in hall to-morrow night at 7 p.m.—R.I.P."

THE GHOST OF ST. SAM'S!
 By Dicky Nugent

POTTER and GREENE Say—
Blow Old-Fashioned Christmas Parties

SOON EXPLAINED
 Some alarm was caused at the Fags' Christmas Beano when mysterious pellets started hitting diners in the face. The fags' first fears that a gunman was in their midst vanished when it was found that the "pellets" were only Sammy Bunter's waistcoat buttons, bursting under the strain!

These magic words were engraved on a card held in the somewhat grimy paw of Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth Form at St. Sam's. It was the note before Breaking-up Day at St. Sam's, and Mr. Lickham had looked into the Head's study before receiving the invitation.
 "You'll be in, Lickham, old bean," Dr. Birchmell called out generally, as he looked up and rekeynsated his visitor.
 "Get my invitation?"
 "Yes, rather, sir!" grunted Mr. Lickham. "And I'm delighted to accept. It will be simply ripping to finish up the term with a jolly good feed."
 "Blow-out, you mean!" corrected Dr. Birchmell. "You shouldn't say 'feed'! Lickham, it sounds undignified in a schoolmaster's mouth!"
 "Blow-out or feed, it's going to cost you a pretty penny, sir," said Mr. Lickham, looking rather serious. "I understand that you have issued invitations to the holy school. Why, it will run you into a quid at least!"
 "Two, I shouldn't be surprised if," stammered the Head. "But who cares? Christmas comes but once a year. Blow the eggshells!"
 Mr. Lickham rubbed his nose thoughtfully.
 "Well, that's all right as far as it goes, sir; but unless my memory plays me false, you told me yourself you were on the rox when you tried to borrow a bob this morning—and you can't spend what you haven't got, can you? What's more, if you are eggshelling to book it all up at the truck-shop, you can't rule that out too. The truckshop damo told me herself that she wouldn't trust you for a brass far-thing!"
 "You, Lickham—all very strictly out of his shilly green eyes. But there are weights and means!"
 "I hoop so, sir, I'm sure!" grunted Mr. Lickham. "The boys are very pleased about it, anyway. They really didn't expect it this year."
 "You leave it to me, Lickham," laughed Dr. Birchmell. "The truck will be finished, despite the state of my finances. And now, I want you to do me a favor. Would you mind looking round the dormitories before you turn in and warm everybody not to dream of ventering out of their beds to-night?"
 "Whatever for, sir?" asked Mr. Lickham in astonishment. "Dr. Birchmell dropped his voice to a whisper. "T-on-night, Lickham, is the time when the Ghost of St. Sam's haunts the halls and passages of the old-school!"



care to keep out of his way stinky. The (ghost of St. myself, I can assure you, Sam's—alias Dr. Birchmell—sir!" he remarked. "I'll see that the rest of the school hear about it, too. Thanks for the tip, sir!"
 "Don't mention it!" grinned the Head. "See that you have a good night's rest and sleep the sleep of the unjust!"
 For over an hour the Head sat reading until the chiming of the school clock brought him back to earth.
 "Then your education, my dear Lickham, has been sadly neglected," remarked the Head with a frown. "Know you not that on one nice every year a white spectral finger glides eerily round the school, uttering hair-raising groans and heart-rending moans—and that death from fright is the lot of any unhappy mortal who gets into his klutches?"
 "Nunno, sir, I never herd fall of it!" gasped Mr. Lickham, with a fearful look over his shoulder. "I isn't true, is it?"
 "As true as I'm standing here," declared the Head, sitting back in his chair and regarding the master of the Fourth with a fixed, hippopotamus look. "And this, Lickham, happens to be the particular time when this ghostly visitor makes his spectral rounds!"
 "Oh, crikey! Surely there's nothing in it!" gasped the dismayed Form-master.
 The Head laughed—a mirthless, sinister laugh.
 "There's nothing in the ghost, if that's what you mean—he's made of thin air! But if you think he's nothing to be scared of on that account, you're making a jolly big mistake!"
 Mr. Lickham shuddered. "I shall take jolly good care to keep out of his way myself. I can assure you, Sam's—alias Dr. Birchmell—sir!" he remarked. "I'll see that the rest of the school hear about it, too. Thanks for the tip, sir!"
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CONKER thought it would be a bright idea to have an old-fashioned Christmas party in the study. We fell in with the idea. If you don't fall in with Coker's ideas, Coker jolly soon falls out with you!
 The first step, Coker informed us, was to haul in the good old Yule log. We feebly suggested that it would be simpler and more sensible to fetch up a bucket of coals, but Coker wouldn't hear of it. "The Yule log, he said, was indispensable, and in any case he had gone to the trouble already of marking out an eminently suitable one in a wood about half a mile from the school gates.
 It was a dickens of a job, dragging that huge log back to the school, but we managed it somehow. What annoyed us was that all our labour turned out to be fruitless. The log was ten times as big as our firegrate—and as we didn't possess a chopper, we had no means of reducing it. So Coker broke up an old chair instead. Wood was essential, he said—coals would never do for an old-fashioned Christmas party!
 Having, with some diff-

to a cinder, some were still practically raw, and the whole of it reeked of the paraffin we had used to get the fire going. The same applied to the rest of the stuff we cooked. In brief, Coker's Christmas feast was unpalatable!
 By the light of candles (electric light, of course, wouldn't have fitted in with the old-fashioned idea!) we struggled through the "meal." An hilarious evening then concluded with the donning of masks and a few fireworks which ended in a riot owing to one of the candles setting fire to the whiskers of Coker's mask.
 We can say that we're glad we've still got an up-to-date Christmas to look forward to.
 If Coker's party was a genuine one, then blow old-fashioned Christmas parties!
OLD BOYS' CORNER.
 A recent meet of the Postgrave Hunt, Sir Gony Grumble swallowed a bottle of red ink under the mistaken impression that it was vintage port. We are told that this is quite true, though to us it sounds "ink-red"able.
 Percy Brayne, one-time chess champion of Greynriars, is suffering from a heart attack, due to excitement caused by pondering over a chessboard for two hours and THEN making a wrong move!

OUR CHRISTMAS PRESENTS
 THE staff of the "Greynriars Herald" are unhappily not in a position to give Christmas presents on the scale they'd like to. But just to let their friends know they haven't forgotten them, they give below a short list of some of the presents they'd like to dish out if they could. They can only hope that the "favoured" ones will take the will for the deed!
OLIVER KIPPS. An autograph album full of the signatures of the great, so that he'll have some names to "conjure" with.
DICKY NUGENT. An electric battery in the hope that it will help him to turn out still more "shooters."
PAUL PROUT, ESQ., M.A. A case of oranges to assist him in keeping his "fruity" voice in good condition.
BOLSOVER MAJOR. A "scrap" book in which to keep a record of his boxing "triumphs."
HAROLD SKINNER. A pocket torch with which to illuminate some of his "exploits."
BILLY BUNTER. A safety-razor to enable him to shave the whiskers off his celebrated postal order—when it arrives!

GREYRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!
 Bunter's record at a sitting is Fisher T. Fish had been trying to sell Remontes a new invention for Besse, and his "snowball machine-gun" was not put up at home, Mr. body has had any faith in Fisher's Samuel Bunter, believing in a machine-gun, since Bunter's machine-gun in a snow fight. The better than nothing, though!

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS
 BUNTER says he wants a Christmas pudding that will take the "edge" off his appetite.
 Nothing like being "blunt" about it!
 Three six-foot seniors had their offer to sing carols on the wireless turned down.
 We could have told them from the beginning that radio fans object to "long wails!"
 When Dutton turned up late at the School Christmas Supper and boisterously thumped Peter Todd on the back, he must have thumped far too boisterously!
 He simply knocked the stuffing out of Totor!
 To those who are going to Hilton's place this Christmas, we can confidentially say: some unexpected trusts of a particularly Christ-masny kind are in store for you.
 "Yule" be surprised!
 We have pleasure in issuing an official denial to the rumour that if you stick a pin in Bunter after his Christmas dinner, he'll burst.
 In our opinion, it's high time this fallacy "exploded!"

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?
 Many people like a "snore" after the plum pudding, but Lord Mantelever likes a "snore" before, and after, and often on one occasion he had to be awakened to decide whether he would like a second helping. Bunter's "snore" is not a sprig of holy!

at Christmas Billy Bunter makes a special effort to eat even more than usual. Follows the Famous Five encounter with Harry Foskroy & Co., of Highbury, until he actually saw it! The "stick" for the "hole," try with snowballs changed Pop-Cherry "in costume" failed to impress the Owl of the Remore—Bunter's "presence" is not a popular gift at Christmas! Heel—white with rage—and snow!

