

A NIGHT ALARM!

An Amusing Complete Story Written
by H. Vernon-Smith, of the Remove
Form at Greyfriars

I.

"GREAT jumping crackers!"

It was Bob Cherry who uttered the exclamation.

We—that is to say, the members of the Remove footer eleven—had just finished wiping up the ground with Highcliffe. We were passing through the hall, on our way to the bath-rooms, when an announcement on the notice-board arrested our attention.

Bob Cherry was the first to spot it, and we crowded round and looked over his shoulder.

This is what we saw:

"NOTICE!"

"In order that Greyfriars may be prepared, in the event of a fire, it has been considered necessary to introduce fire drill into the school routine.

"In the event of the fire-alarm sounding at any time during the day—a gong will be employed for this purpose—the prefects, with the exception of the captain of Greyfriars, will arm themselves with fire-buckets, and with the necessary hose-pipe, and report immediately to Mr. Prout, who will be in charge of the proceedings.

"The remainder of the boys, under the supervision of the captain of the school, will assemble at once in the Close.

"Although the "fire" will be an imaginary one, the same promptitude must be shown as if it were a genuine outbreak.

"Should the fire-alarm sound at any time during the night, the same instructions will apply.

"Chutes will be affixed in each



Someone was ringing a bell out of a study window, and Gosling the porter, collided violently with a pillow which an excited fag threw out of a dormitory before making an exit

dormitory, and by means of these chutes everyone will descend into the Close.

"It must be clearly understood that there is to be no horseplay or practical joking. Any boy who disregards this warning will be severely dealt with.

"(Signed) H. H. LOCKE, Headmaster."

No wonder Bob Cherry had exclaimed "Great jumping crackers!" I made an equally lively remark myself.

Fire drill at Greyfriars! And we were liable to be called out at any hour of the day or night!

"My only aunt!" gasped Wharton. "This is a jolly queer whim of the Head's, and no mistake!"

"I can't quite tumble to his little game," said Nugent.

"I think I know what's happened," said Johnny Bull. "There was a report in the newspapers this morning about a big fire that broke out at Burchester College. The place was practically gutted. I expect the Head saw the report, and he's in a blue funk about it. Thinks the same thing will happen to Greyfriars."

"That's about it," said Squiff. "And he's decided that prevention is better than cure. But won't it be beastly if we have to turn out in the middle of the night?"

"It's jolly chilly these nights, too!" said Tom Brown, with a shiver. "I don't mind so much if the blessed gong sounds in the middle of morning lessons, when Quelchy's on the warpath; but if it goes off in the middle of the night I shall say 'Bother it!' or words to that effect."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The notice-board was soon besieged by a perfect horde of fellows from all Forms.

It was rather amusing to hear the various comments.

Loder of the Sixth was furious.

"Of all the silly rot!" he snarled. "The Head's got bats in his belfry, I should think. Fancy having to rush around with fire-buckets and things in the middle of the night!"

We quite understood why Loder was waxy. It was a little habit of his to pay nightly visits to the Cross Keys; and these little excursions

would now have to stop. For if the fire-alarm sounded one fine night, and Loder was discovered to be absent, there would be ructions.

"The whole thing's absurd!" declared Walker, who was with Loder. "We're going to have our beauty sleep spoilt just to suit a whim of the Head's!"

"It's the absolute limit!" growled Loder.

And the two Sixth-formers strode away in high dudgeon.

Coker and Co. of the Fifth, were equally furious when they saw the Head's notice.

"What awful rot!" said Coker. "The Head's fairly up the pole!"

"Fire-drill!" gasped Potter.

"At any hour of the day or night!" murmured Greene.

"I don't believe the Head wrote that notice at all, on second thoughts," said Coker.

"What makes you think that, old man?" asked Potter.

"Because the spelling's so awful! The word 'considered,' for instance, starts with a 'c,' when it really ought to be a 'k.' And then there's 'imaginary.' Surely there's a 'j' in 'maginary'?"

"Only an imaginary one!" chuckled Greene.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This fire-drill stunt may be all right for the cheeky Remove fags," said Coker. "But it ought not to apply to us. I sha'n't believe that the Head wrote that notice until I hear the alarm go."

The Fifth-formers strolled away from the notice-board, and their places were taken by Temple and Co., of the Fourth.

Cecil Reginald Temple and his followers took the same view as the Fifth and Sixth.

The majority of the Remove fellows, too, were indignant at the Head's announcement; but it was hailed with great glee by the fags in the Second and Third. They anticipated getting quite a lot of fun out of the fire-drills. There was great excitement at Greyfriars that evening; and it was a common sight to see a fellow suddenly prick up his ears, as if expecting the fire-alarm to sound.

But nothing happened. We did our prep. as usual, and retired to the Remove dorm. at the allotted hour.

"Wonder if the first alarm will be given to-night?" said Wharton.

"Shouldn't be surprised," said Bob Cherry.

"It's a beastly cold night, and it will be just our luck to be routed out in the middle of it!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I don't think there will be anything doing to-night," said Mark Linley. "The chutes haven't been fitted yet. The workmen are going to do the job to-morrow morning."

"It will be rather ripping to whizz down a fire-chute!" said Dick Russell. "I'm quite looking forward to it."

"Dashed if I am!" said Peter Todd. "I don't think I shall enjoy the experience a bit—especially if Billy Bunter happens to be whizzing down on top of me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Most of us slept with one eye open that night, but there were no developments.

Once I imagined I heard the gong sound; but it was only the school clock striking midnight.

Next morning we saw the workmen fixing up the canvas chutes, and we guessed that the first alarm would not be long now.

In the middle of morning lessons there was what the newspaper reporters would call "an unusual incident."

Billy Bunter suddenly rose from his seat and dashed to the door.

We all sat spellbound; and as for Quelchy, I thought he was going to choke.

"Bunter!" he roared. "Come back, sir!"

Billy Bunter halted, and blinked at Quelchy through his big spectacles.

"Get a move on, sir!" he said.

"What!"

"Put a jerk in it!"

Quelchy nearly fell down.

"Bunter!" he gasped. "Do you realise whom you are addressing?"

"Yes, sir! The fire-alarm's gone, and we've all got to parade in the Close at once!"

Quelchy fairly exploded.

"How dare you?" he exclaimed. "Your effrontery in rushing out of the Form-room without permission almost leaves me speechless! No alarm of any sort has been given. This is a ruse on your part, Bunter, to escape

from morning school. Come here, sir, and hold out your hand!"

Very reluctantly Billy Bunter obeyed.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now go to your place, Bunter, and do not venture on such impertinence again!"

Grunting and gasping, Billy Bunter rolled back to his place, and he was careful not to dash to the door again until the word of dismissal came.

II.

BOOM!

It was the first stroke of midnight, sounding from the old clock-tower.

But there was another booming sound, too, and it was nearer and louder.

The fellows in the Remove dorm. stirred uneasily in their beds and awoke.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry drowsily. "There goes the merry old gong!"

Boom! Boom!

Whoever was beating the gong—probably Gosling, the porter—was putting his beef into it.

Harry Wharton was out of bed in a twinkling, and I was a good second.

"Tumble out everybody!" said Wharton. "It's the fire-alarm!"

"Oh, help!"

"It's come at last!"

"And it's a perishingly cold night!"

With two exceptions the fellows turned out of bed, grumbling and grunting.

The exceptions were Mauly and Billy Bunter.

Bunter was awake, but he did not stir. As for Mauly, he had not even heard the gong. Once Mauly is in the arms of Morpheus it takes more than a gong to rouse him.

"Out you get, Bunter!" said Wharton sharply.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"If it were a real fire, you ass, and you stayed in bed, you'd be slightly scorched!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Listen!" said Squiff suddenly.

The gong had ceased, and we could hear the fellows from the other dormitories clat-

tering down the stairs. They were muttering excitedly as they went. Someone was ringing a bell out of a study window, and Gosling, the porter, collided with a pillow which an excited fag threw out of a window before making an exit.

We heard Temple of the Upper Fourth remark that the chute which had been fixed up in his dormitory wouldn't operate properly. As a result the Fourth-formers were obliged to descend via the stairs.

"Those fellows seem in a frantic hurry," said Nugent. "My hat! Supposing it's a real fire?"

These words had a magical effect upon Billy Bunter. He fairly leapt out of bed, and he was absolutely panic-stricken.

"I say, you fellows, won't it be awful if the place is burnt to the ground?" he said, with a shiver.

"What I want to know is," growled Bolsover major, "have we got to put our togs on or not? The Head said nothing about it in his announcement."

"Well, we're not going down to the Close in our pyjamas!" said Ogilvy. "I'm not, anyway!"

We were struggling into our togs when Wingate of the Sixth looked in.

"Get a move on, you kids!" he exclaimed. "Everyone else is down!"

"Do we descend by the chute or the stairs, Wingate?" inquired Wharton.

"By the chute, if you can manage to lower it properly.

Wingate, who was looking rather flurried, took his departure, and shortly afterwards I assisted the Famous Five to lower the chute.

This done, Bob Cherry clambered up on to the window-sill to make investigations.

"There are scores of fellows down in the Close," he said. "And half a dozen of 'em are holding the end of our chute, waiting for us to come down."

"I—I say, Cherry," faltered Billy Bunter, "what else can you see?"

"Huge columns of smoke," replied Bob, pulling Bunter's leg, "and a forest of sparks——"

"Ow!"

"And a couple of ambulances, and a dozen stretchers."

"Groo! Whereabouts is the fire?"

"The smoke seems to be coming from the Head's study," said Bob.

Billy Bunter shuddered.

"Do you think there's any chance of the flames spreading to this dorm.?" he inquired anxiously.

"Well, I dare say we shall be smoked out in a few minutes," said Bob cheerfully.

Billy Bunter's complexion turned a sickly yellow. He rushed frantically towards the chute.

The prospect of whizzing down to the Close at express speed was far from pleasant to the fat junior. But anything was better, Bunter reflected, than being burned alive.

Billy Bunter put his feet through the cavity, but his body refused to follow, and he got hopelessly stuck.

"Help! Get me out of this!" he panted.

And half a dozen of us rushed to the spot.

"Do you want us to push or pull?" inquired Peter Todd.

"Yow—pull, you fatheads!"

We laid violent hands on Bunter's huge bulk, and tugged for all we were worth.

With a wild yell of anguish Billy Bunter shot back into the dormitory. Then, scrambling to his feet, he dashed out of the room and down the stairs, yelling "Fire!" as he went.

We were almost helpless with laughter, but, on hearing impatient shouts from below, we slid down the chute one by one.

It was quite a novel experience, and most of us enjoyed it. We shot out at the other end without mishap, and lined up with the rest of the fellows in the Close.

Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was dashing along the corridors, still shouting "Fire!"

Suddenly the fat junior was brought up short, and a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"You silly young ass!" muttered Coker of the Fifth; for he was the owner of the heavy hand. "What are you yelling 'Fire!' for?"

"Because there is one, of course."

"Where?"

"In the Head's study!"

"What rot!" said Coker incredulously.

"It isn't rot—it's a fact! I've seen the blaze with my own eyes."

Coker saw that Billy Bunter was genuinely alarmed, and, hearing the shouts from the Close, he concluded that the fat junior's statement was correct.

"Come along," he said briskly.

"Where to?" asked Bunter.

"To put the fire out, of course. We must get hold of the hose-pipe, and buzz along to the Head's study."

At that moment there was a commotion near at hand, and a party of prefects rushed past Coker and Bunter. They were carrying a hose-pipe between them.

"Those fellows have forestalled us," said Coker. "Never mind. We'll bag a fire-extinguisher apiece."

There were some fire-extinguishers, of the approved pattern, hanging in the hall.

Coker remembered this, and he dashed off pell-mell in that direction. Billy Bunter—owing to circumstances over which he had no control—accompanied him.

It was dark, but not too dark to discern the extinguishers. Coker snatched one down from the bracket on which it had hung, and pressed it into Bunter's unwilling hands. Then the great Horace armed himself in a similar manner.

"This way!" he panted breathlessly. "We want to get to the Head's study before those bounders with the hose-pipe."

Away went Coker, with Billy Bunter hard on his heels.

The fat junior was beginning to feel less funky and more confident. What a triumph it would be, he reflected, if he assisted in quenching the flames.

In the Head's study were many valuable documents, and, thanks to the promptitude of Coker and Bunter, they would be saved from destruction. Perhaps!

"Do you know how to use that extinguisher?" panted Coker as he ran.

"Yes, you bash the knob on the floor, and the water shoots out," replied Bunter.

"That's right. You've got more savvy than I gave you credit for."

The corridor leading to the Head's study was deserted. Evidently the prefects had not yet arrived on the scene with the hose-pipe.

"Now's our chance," muttered Coker. Pile in."

The two would-be heroes dashed their extinguishers on to the floor of the corridor. Then Coker threw open the door of the Head's study, and two jets of water shot into that celebrated apartment.

Swish! Swish!

There was a startled exclamation from within, and the Head, who had been writing at his desk, leapt to his feet. As he did so, a powerful stream of water from Coker's extinguisher smote him in the chest, and he staggered back, utterly dumbfounded.

Coker realised that a terrible mistake had been made, but he was too paralysed to move. He continued to point his extinguisher at the Head, and that bewildered gentleman soon presented a very drenched and sodden appearance.

The Head fared badly enough, but the private papers and documents on his desk fared even worse. Billy Bunter had soaked and swamped them very thoroughly.

The contents of the two fire-extinguishers were exhausted at length, and Coker and Billy Bunter stood goggling stupidly at each other.

Presently the Head found his voice, and a very terrifying voice it was!

"Coker! Boy! What does this mean? How dare you? How dare you, I repeat? For this unseemly and disgraceful practical joke, you will be expelled from the school!"

"I—I—" stuttered Coker.

"We—we—" stammered Billy Bunter.

"Do not stand there mumbling incoherently!" thundered the Head, shaking some of the water from his gown. "You have had the audacity, the brazen effrontery, to attack your Headmaster with fire-extinguishers! Such an outrage is almost without parallel in the history of Greyfriars!"

Clutching the empty fire-extinguisher in his hand, Billy Bunter stood blinking at the infuriated Head through his big spectacles.

"We—we were pip-pip-pip—" he stut-tered.

"You were what, boy?"

"We were pip-pip-putting the fire out, sir," said the fat junior, in desperation.

"But there is no fire, you absurd boy!"

"We—we thought there was, sir," explained Coker. "We were quite under that impression, sir. We understood that your study was on fire, and we hurried along to save all your papers and things, sir!"

"Instead of saving them, you have destroyed them, Coker—or, at any rate, rendered them useless!" snapped the Head. "However, it is patent to me that you acted under a misapprehension, and I shall not punish you with expulsion, as I threatened to do a few moments ago. But I cannot overlook what has occurred. You and Bunter will report to me after breakfast in the morning, when I hope to impart a severe castigation to each of you!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You will replace those extinguishers in the hall, and return to your dormitories!"

Coker and Bunter quitted the study which they had wrecked in their impulsiveness. And when they were out in the corridor, Coker had a few words to say to his companion. The "few words" terminated with Billy Bunter lying on his back, wondering if an earthquake had struck him.

When we heard of the amazing scene in the Head's study we simply roared. And we were still roaring long after we had returned to the Remove dorm.

"Oh, dear!" sobbed Bob Cherry. "It's rough luck on poor old Bunter. Perhaps I ought not to have pulled his leg, but I simply can't help laughing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Laughter, loud and long, rang through the dorm, and it was long, long before any of us got to sleep that night.

Next morning Coker and Billy Bunter went through the mill. And the Head made a public announcement to the effect that there would be no more fire-drills.

Probably he objected to having sudden shower-baths in the middle of the night.

Anyway, we were jolly pleased with his decision, and it was refreshing to know that in future we should be able to sleep sound o' nights

THE END.

THE SIGHTS OF GREYFRIARS

THE GYM.



AMONG the sights of Greyfriars, this
Deserves a high position;
For here, in eager, boyish bliss
We view each exhibition
Of fistic prowess with the gloves
(In fact, without them sometimes),
And every British schoolboy loves
A friendly scrap in glum times!

Some bouts, however, are not meant
To be devoid of vigour;
Each boxer slogs with grim intent
And cuts a fearsome figure.
The claret flows from many a nose,
And ribs are swiftly pounded;
And many a victim dizzy grows
Before the gong is sounded!

When Nugent minor cheeks his chum
The latter promptly mutters,
"You rotter! To the gym, we'll come
And I'll put up your shutters!"
Then blows are given and returned
With promptness and precision;
And many a youthful fag has yearned
To force a swift decision!

Although its sights are sometimes grim
And hardly nice to witness,
We gaze with pride upon our gym.
Inspiring skill and fitness.
If any chap should criticise
My muse, he'll live to rue it;
For I will promptly black his eyes,
And in the gym, I'll do it!