

A hamper for W. G. Bunter! Who said the age of miracles was past? But when the Removites get over that shock, they receive the biggest surprise of their lives.

By
TOM BROWN
(of the
Greyfriars Remove.)

"It's time something was done!"
Peter Todd frowned.
"Hear, hear!"

The leader of Study No. 7 was standing in the Greyfriars "Rag," surrounded by quite a crowd of Removites. Tom Brown was there, and William Wibley, Ogilvy, and Morgan, and several others. Most of them were talking, and their remarks were addressed to Peter Todd. And, judging by the frown on Todd's face, the said remarks were not pleasing to him.

"You see, he owes me three-and-sixpence," explained Wibley.

"And me half-a-crown," said Squiff.

"And he's owed me two bob for a couple of terms, look you!" added Morgan.

Todd's frown deepened.

"Anyway, you ought to be able to do something, Toddy," said Tom Brown. "You're supposed to be the boss of the study, and it's up to you to see that the fat bounder squares up."

"Hear, hear!"

Todd scratched his chin reflectively.

"H'm! It's a bit awkward," he said.

"The worst of it is, Bunter never has any money. I can lam him with a cricket-stump, if you like!"

"What's the good of that? That won't give me back my half-crown!"

"Nor my three-and-six!"

"Nor my two bob!"

"Well, I'm blessed if I know what to do," confessed Todd. "Anyway, you chaps had better come along to my study, and we'll see what the fat fraud has to say about it!"

There was a general exodus from the Rag, and the fellows marched along with Todd to the Remove passage.

Trouble of this kind had been threatening for a long time. At one time or another, Bunter had borrowed money from practically everybody in the Remove, and he had never been known to pay anyone back. Of course, anybody who lends money to Bunter

is asking for trouble. But we all have our weak moments, and Bunter is quick at taking full advantage of them.

In the ordinary way, nobody would have worried much about trying to recover the small amounts due from our prize porpoise. At the time of the general appeal to Todd, however, the Remove was passing through one of those unaccountably lean periods likely to fall to the lot of any Form at different times. Just as it happened, there had been a falling-off in the number and size of remittances from home in all directions, and the fellows were feeling the pinch a little. Hence the sudden bringing to light of Bunter's many little long-standing loans.

Reaching the Remove passage, Bunter's creditors followed Peter Todd into Study No. 7, which Bunter also occupied.

Billy Bunter was standing by the study table when they entered. He seemed to be performing some mysterious operation on the label attached to a big hamper on the table, and when the crowd surged into the study, he wheeled round as if he had been caught committing a crime. His fat face fell, and he blinked at them through his big spectacles in considerable alarm.

"I—I say, you fellows, what's the game?"

Peter Todd pointed dramatically to the Removites.

"These chaps have come round for a settlement," he said sternly.

"A sus-settlement?" gasped Bunter nervously. "B-blessed if I understand you, Peter."

"Perhaps half a dozen with a cricket-stump will make you understand, then!" said Todd grimly. "Pass it over, Squiff, will you?"

"Here, keep off, you beast!" yelled Billy Bunter. "I understand all right! I suppose you've all come round for the paltry little amounts I owe you."

"That's better!" remarked Todd. "Well, what about it, Fatty? Are you going to square up, or shall I take it out of your hide?"

"Oh, really, Peter! I am going to square up, of course! I don't want to remain

under any obligation to these rotters any longer!"

"Good!" said Peter, very much surprised and gratified, while Bunter's creditors brightened up a little.

"There's only one difficulty," said Bunter thoughtfully.

"What's that?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've been disappointed about a postal-order I was expecting, and I haven't got any money."

The Removites stared at their fat debtor speechlessly.

Peter Todd glared.

"Then if you haven't got any money, you frabjous ass, how the dickens are you going to square up now?"

"I—I thought you wouldn't mind advancing the cash, perhaps, until my postal-order arrives, Peter!"

There was a roar from the Removites.

"Ass!"

"Idiot!"

"Slaughter the fat slug!"

Peter Todd made a rush at Bunter with his cricket-stump, but the porpoise of Greyfriars jumped out of the way, and Todd bumped against the table instead of hitting him.

It was then, for the first time, that his eye fell on the large hamper, whose label Bunter had been examining with such care when the Removites entered the study.

Todd stopped and looked at it, and as he read the label, he started.

"My hat! Hold on, you fellows! Who said the age of miracles had passed?"

"What's the matter, Toddy?" asked half a dozen fellows at once.

"Why, this thumping great hamper here——"

"What about it?"

"It's Bunter's!"

"Gammon!"

"It is Bunter's all right, anyway," said Peter Todd. "Come and have a look at it."

The Removites crowded round the study table. Sure enough, the label was addressed:

**"Mr. W. G. BUNTER,
Greyfriars School,
Via Friardale, Kent."**

"Well, I'm dashed!"

"A hamper for Bunter! Did you ever?"

The fellows were very much surprised. Hampers for William George Bunter were few and far between; so much so, in fact, that nobody there at that moment could remember the Owl of the Remove ever receiving one before.

Anyway, there was his name in black-and-white. They couldn't get away from it.

"Well, this is a find, anyway!" remarked Peter Todd. "A hamper—particularly a great hamper like this—is distinctly useful!"

"What's the idea, Toddy?"

"The idea," replied Peter Todd, with a grin, "is that, as Bunter can't pay you in cash, you'll have to take payment in kind. In other words, collar his tuck!"

Bunter's creditors smiled.

If Bunter had been in a position to settle up with them, no doubt most of them would have expended the cash in the school tuck-shop. Consequently, accepting payment in kind from Bunter would amount to very much the same thing.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Peter genially.

"I think it's a top-hole idea!"

"So do I!"

"Same here!"

"Good! Then we'll carry it out, here and now!" said the leader of Study No. 7 cheerfully. "I take it that the sums owing are all small. Nothing over three-and-six, is there?"

The fellows shook their heads.

"Well, anyway, we won't try to divide up the stuff in correct proportions," said Todd. "You'd better all have a tuck-in, and we'll see how far it will go round. Got a pocket-knife, someone?"

Morgan obliged with a pocket-knife, and Todd started to cut the cord round the



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hamper. Billy Bunter blinked at the fellows indignantly and sniffed.

He did not display so much indignation, however, as most of them had thought he would.

They had expected him to yell and struggle, and plead and threaten, and generally "carry on alarming," so to speak. Instead of that, Bunter simply sniffed and looked a little uneasy.

Peter Todd opened the hamper, and the Removites crowded round and gazed in admiration at the contents.

Without a doubt, it was something out of the ordinary in the way of hampers. Chicken, tongue, tinned pineapples and apricots, jams, cakes, pastries, a couple of Christmas puddings, a large tin of toffee—there seemed to be no end to the good things contained in that hamper.

“Well, this is something like!” remarked Squiff.

“Corn in Egypt, and no mistake!” chuckled Tom Brown.

Billy Bunter’s eyes glistened as he saw that wonderful collection of delicacies.

“I say, you fellows, fair play, you know,” he said, barging his way to the front. “I hope you’re not thinking of wolfing up all these things! All the piffling little sums I owe you put together wouldn’t buy half of this tuck.”

“Something in that!” agreed Peter Todd judicially. “Well, we’ll let you join in the feed, Bunter, if you like. You’ll eat as much as the rest of us put together!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, wire in, you chaps!” said Peter hospitably. “Make yourselves at home, you know!”

“Rather!”

“What-ho!”

The Removites sat down; on the chairs, the window-ledge, the coal-scuttle, on the floor, according to their luck, and “wired in” with a will, and for the next ten minutes they thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

“Bit of chicken for you, Ogilvy?”

“Thanks!”

“Pass the cake, you chaps!”

“Anybody possess a tin-opener?”

Study No. 7 had never witnessed a jollier feed.

Billy Bunter set to work in a thoroughly business-like manner. He drew a chair up to the table as near the hamper as he could get, and ravenously ate everything he could lay his fat paws on. Christmas pudding, tongue, cakes, and pineapples disappeared into his capacious mouth with a rapidity that was truly remarkable.

Extensive as the hamper was, it could not stand the strain of such an onslaught for long. Within a quarter of an hour very little was left, apart from empty tins and basins and packing.

“Great!” was the general opinion.

“Thanks very much, Bunter!”

“Don’t mensh!” said Bunter, with an airy wave of his fat hand.

Bunter was shiny and contented now, and he almost beamed on his uninvited guests. The latter were still a little puzzled at the singular lack of protest from Bunter. They could only conclude that the fat junior was making the best of a bad job. Still, it was queer.

“Well, after that, you can consider yourself square with me,” said Tom Brown.

“And with me!”

There was quite a chorus of fellows anxious to assure Bunter that the old debts were now wiped out.

“Right-ho, you chaps!” said Bunter.

“I say, as we’re quits now, I suppose one of you wouldn’t care to advance me five bob on the postal-order I’m expecting?”

“Quite right! We wouldn’t!” grinned Squiff.

“Still, thanks for the feed, Bunter! Enjoyed it no end!”

“Hear, hear!”

The Removites got ready to depart.

It was at that moment that Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, another of the queer inhabitants of Study No. 7, looked in.

He stared in surprise at the crowd.

“Hallo, you chaps! What’s on? Been celebrating something or other?”

“Been having a feed!” explained Tom Brown, yelling the words into Dutton’s ear.

“Friends in need?” said Dutton, with a stare. “Well, I didn’t know we were exactly in need in this study. Eh?”

Tom Brown shouted his original statement again, and the deaf junior looked even more surprised.

“No necessity for that, so far as I can see,” he remarked. “I know we’re pretty hard up here, but I don’t think it’s bad enough to make your heart bleed!”

Tom Brown gave it up.

"I've brought up a letter for you, Toddy," said Dutton, passing over a small business envelope, addressed to Todd.

Peter Todd nodded.

"From the pater," he said, glancing at it. "Excuse me, you chaps!"

He slit open the envelope, and scanned the letter through, and as he did so, a very peculiar expression appeared on his face.

"Bad news, 'Toddy?'" asked Squiff sympathetically.

"Oh, nothing serious," answered Todd carelessly. "The pater was coming down to see me to-morrow, but business has stopped him. Hold on, Bunter! I want to speak to you in a minute."

"I—I've just remembered I've got to see a fellow," mumbled Billy Bunter, looking dubiously at Todd.

Bunter, strange to relate, seemed to have been affected by the news that Todd's letter was from his father. On hearing it, he had started guiltily and made for the door, and would have got away had not Todd intercepted him.

"Just keep Bunter here for a minute, you chaps!" said Todd.

The fellows looked surprised, but they duly lined up in the doorway to prevent the fat junior passing.

Todd behaved strangely after that. Picking up the empty hamper, he examined the label with great care, and as he did so, his expression became quite alarming.

"As I thought!" he muttered. "Oh, the fat spoofer! The—the burglar!"

"What's the matter?" asked the puzzled Removites.

"Matter!" repeated Todd bitterly. "Why, I've been dished and done by that fat brute, that's all! My pater tells me that to make up for the disappointment I'd feel in not seeing him, he sent me a whacking great hamper yesterday."

"Well?"



The Removites sat down; on the chairs, the window-ledge, coal-scuttle, on the floor, according to their luck, and "wired in" with a will, and for the next ten minutes they thoroughly enjoyed themselves.
(See previous page.)



Todd forced his fat study-mate across the table, and, while Tom Dutton held him there, he vigorously applied the stump. Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! (See this page.)

"Well, don't you see, you idiots? That's the hamper we've just polished off!"

"But that was addressed to Bunter!"

"I know it was—after the fat forger had rubbed out my name from the label! You can see for yourselves here!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The fellows swarmed round the hamper. Looking closely at the label, they could see for themselves that Todd was right. Evidently, when they first entered the room, Bunter had just been putting the finishing touches to his handiwork.

"Well, if that's not rich!" gasped Tom Brown.

"Toddy was the one to suggest eating the hamper!"

"And it turns out to be his own hamper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites roared.

"That's right! Laugh, you cackling idiots!" said Todd bitterly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You grinning hyenas! Get out of my study!"

Todd seized his cricket-stump once more and rushed at the hilarious Removites, and the fellows hurriedly departed. It was not wise to argue with the enraged leader of No. 7 in his present mood.

Bunter did his best to leave with the rest, but Todd meant to have him, at least. Fixing a thumb and forefinger firmly on Bunter's ear, he

led him back into the study.

"I—I say, Peter! Don't take it seriously!" pleaded Bunter. "I only meant it as a joke, you know!"

"And I only mean this as a joke!" roared Todd. "Bend over this table!"

Todd had to force his fat study-mate into the required position, then he began to apply the stump with great vigour.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

Howls of anguish rose from Bunter, and by the time Todd had finished with him, he had repented of his little "joke" over and over again.

THE END

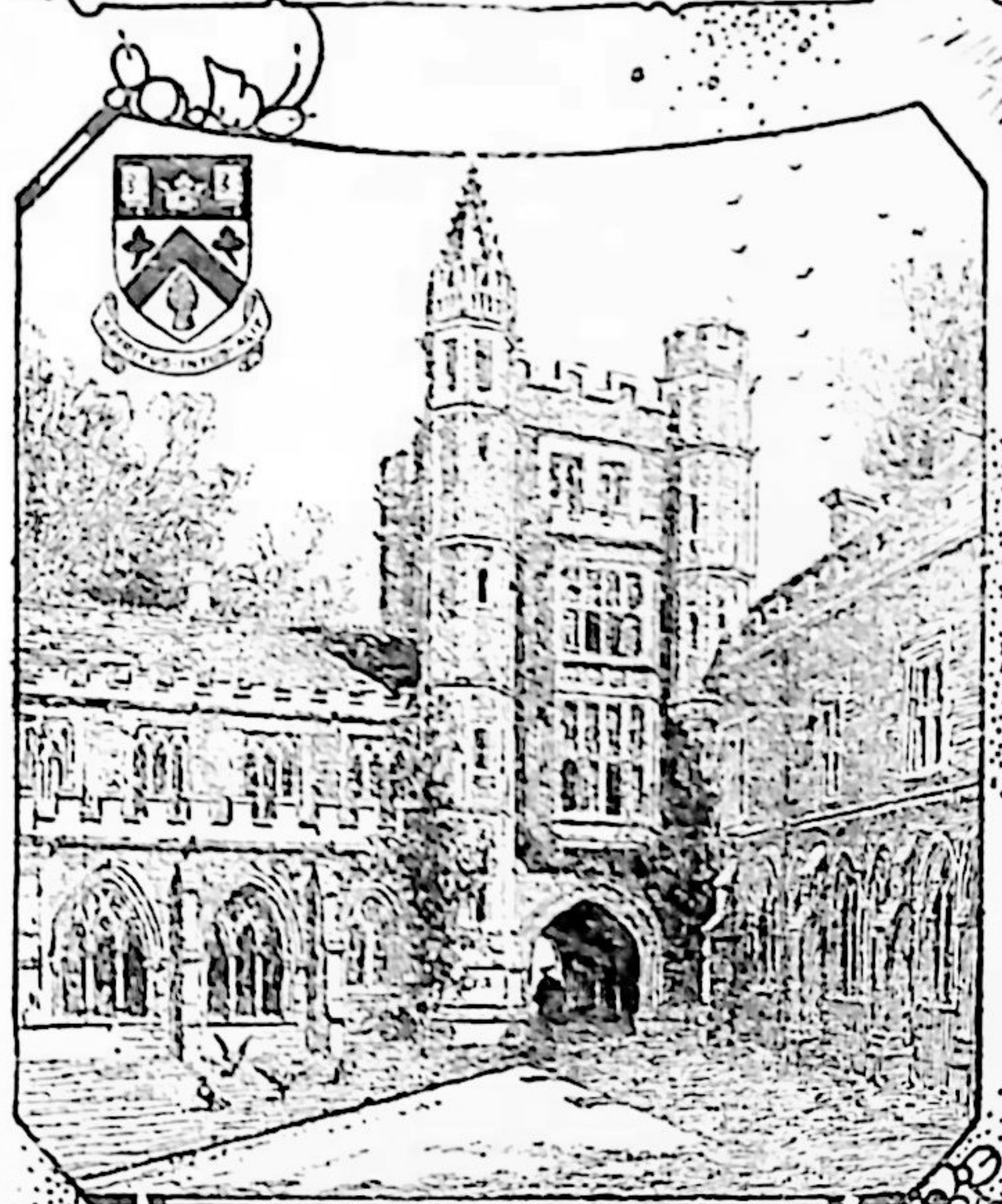
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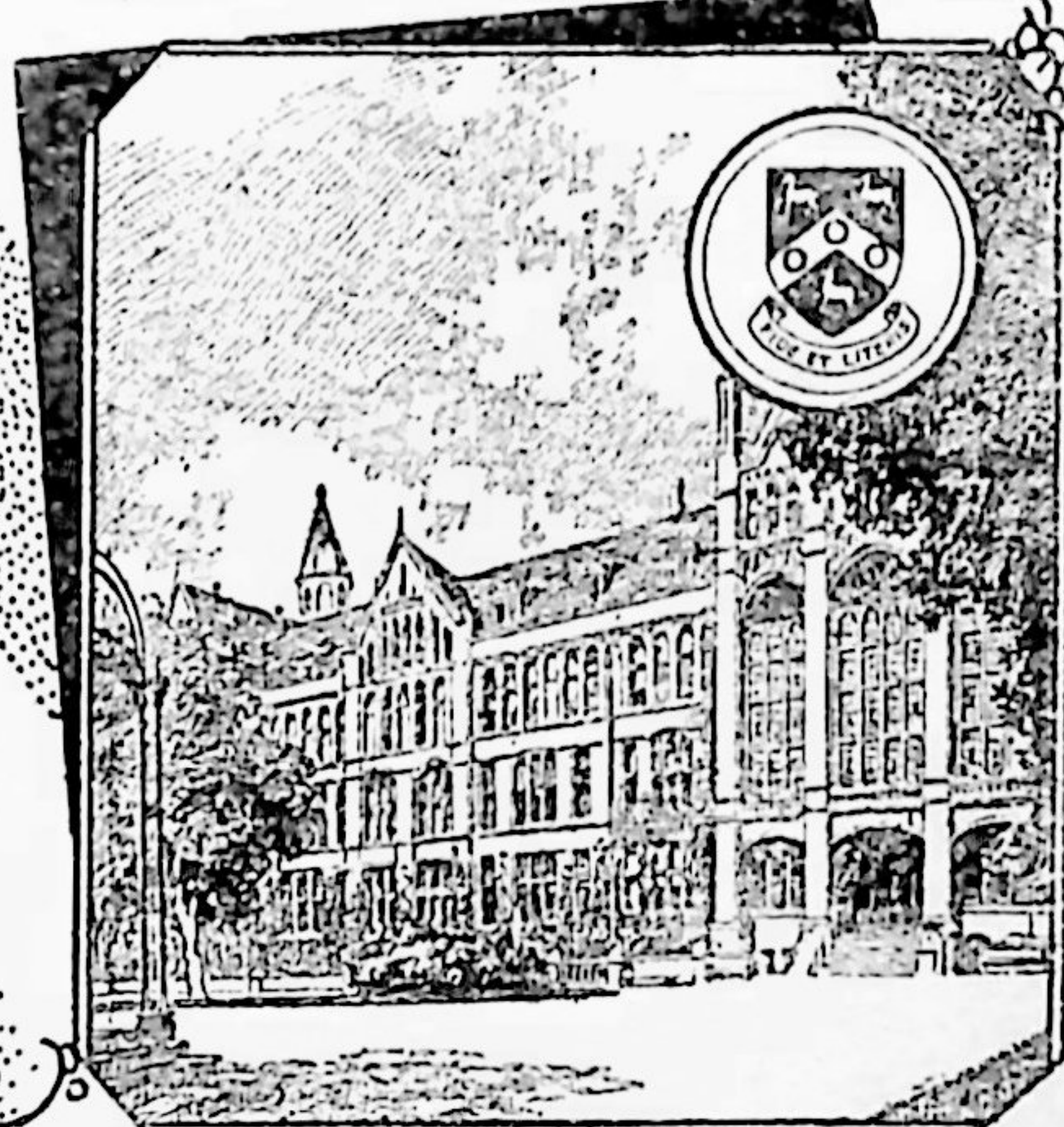
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ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL

EXCELSIOR!

A new version, in the best English language
by Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.



THE shades of night were fastfully falling,
As through an Alpine village came crawling
A youth who bore, 'mid snow and icefulness,
A banner, with the strange devicefulness :

Excelsior !

His brow was sad : his optic eyefulness
Flashed like the lightning in the skyfulness.
And like a silver clarion ringfully
He heard a voice that chanted singfully :

Excelsior !

In happy homes he saw the lightfulness
Of household fires, that burned with brightfulness.
Above, the glaciers glimmered snowfully,
And from his lips the cry came woefully :

Excelsior !

" Try not the esteemed and ludicrous pass ! "
The old man said. " Keep off the grass ! "
The roaring torrent rolls deep and widefully ! "
But loud that clarion voice said chidefully :

Excelsior !

" Beware the pineful trees' loose branches !
Beware the awful avalanches ! "
This was the peasant's last good-nightfulness,
A voice replied, far up the heightfulness :

Excelsior !

At break of day, in state of funkfulness,
Climbing the Alps came pious monkfulness.
And as they stumbled up the slopefulness
They heard a voice, devoid of hopefulness :

Excelsior !

A traveller, by the faithful dogfulness,
Was found amid the snow and fogfulness :
Still grasping in his frozen mitfulness
That banner, with the mystic writfulness :

Excelsior !

There in the twilight, grey and coldful,
Reclinefully lay that youth so boldful.
And from the sky, far-off, aloftfully,
A voice fell, tenderly and softfully :

Excelsior !

