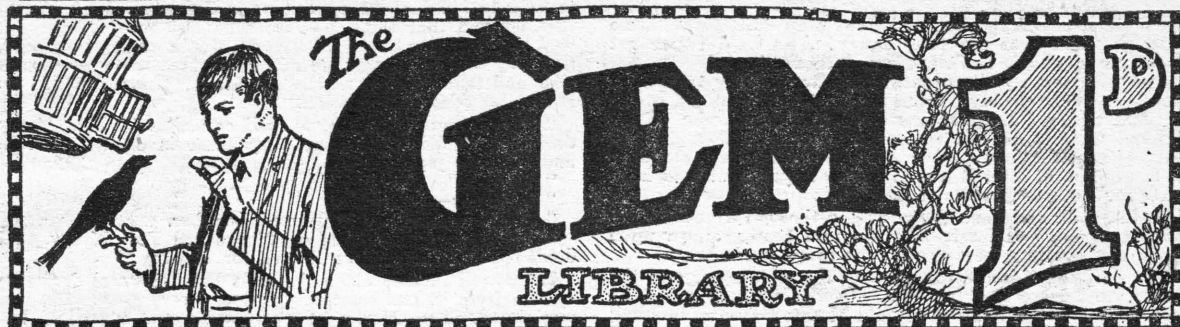


MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF "THE CHEER-OH CHUMS" ON PAGE 24.

Every

Wednesday.



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THE RASCAL
- - OF - -
ST. JIM'S!

A splendid, new, long, complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & CO.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
A Surprising Meeting.

"Blow the rain!" Tom Merry spoke with exasperated emphasis. And Manners and Lowther chimed in, equally emphatically:

"Blow it!"

It was really too bad! The chums of St. Jim's had left the school on their bicycles after lessons that day for a long spin, and when they started the weather was all that could be desired. The sun was shining, and all, as the poet says, was calm and bright. They were a good many miles from home when the sky became overcast; and then the rain began to fall. And it was not merely a shower. It came down steadily, thicker and thicker every minute, and showed no sign of leaving off.

The three juniors had not even brought their capes with them, in their misplaced reliance upon the weather. They had turned back from Abbotsford, and were cycling along the road over Wayland Moor now, hoping to get back to the school before the rain became too heavy. But their hopes were vain. It came down in torrents, and the moorland road, never in very good condition, was a sea of mud round the splashing wheels.

"Blow the rain!"

"Blow the weather!"

"Blow everything!"

The juniors were pretty well drenched already. In a few minutes more they would be soaked to the skin, and they were still miles from the school. And on the road over the moor there was no shelter, only a few gaunt trees standing among the drenched gorse. The Terrible Three of St. Jim's

were accustomed to taking things philosophically, but they could not help feeling exasperated now.

"We can't keep on through this!" exclaimed Tom Merry, ceasing to pedal, and free-wheeling on through the mud and pools of water in the road. "We shall have to get under cover somewhere, you chaps!"

"Where?" growled Monty Lowther. "There isn't a house for miles!"

"And we shall be late for calling-over, anyway!" said Manners.

"Blow calling-over!" said Tom Merry. "I'd rather miss calling-over and get lines than crawl in like a drowned cat. We must get under cover till this blows over."

Monty Lowther grunted.

"I tell you there isn't a house on this road at all!"

"But off the road," said Tom Merry. "We can cut across the moor to the old Manor House."

Monty Lowther cast a rather uneasy glance over the darkening moor, drenched with rain.

"Ugh! That's a rotten place at night!"

"Better than getting soaked."

"Blessed asses we were to come so far!" growled Manners. "D'Arcy's standing a feed in Study No. 6——"

"Oh, don't talk of feeds now! I'm hungry enough anyway. Let's cut across the moor and get into cover."

"And Blake said it would rain!" said Lowther.

"Blow Blake!"

"And Cutts, of the Fifth——"

"Blow Cutts, of the Fifth!"

"Oh, blow everybody, if you come to that!" agreed Lowther. "But Cutts was going out on his bike, and he decided to take an umbrella instead——"

"Blow Cutts and his umbrella! Come on!"

Next Wednesday:

"TAGGLES' BENEFIT!" AND "THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!"

No. 282 (New Series), Vol. 7.

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"But you thought it wouldn't rain, you ass——"
Tom Merry snorted.

"Well, it is raining, ass, and if we stay here, fathead, we shall get soaked to the skin, duffer! So we'd better get under cover, chump! Follow me, fathead!"

And with those polite oburgations Tom Merry turned his bicycle from the muddy road to the drenched moorland beside it. Manners and Lowther grunted and followed him. They did not want to be late for calling-over, and they did not want to miss the feed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing in Study No. 6. But it was evidently impracticable to keep on to St. Jim's in torrents of rain.

So they followed Tom Merry, riding through drenched and dripping grass and ferns, with the rain beating down upon them, and bumping heavily over the rough ground.

The darkness was descending over the wide moor and the gaunt trees were growing dim. In the distance could be seen, dimly, the outlines of the old Manor House, a building long since fallen to decay and uninhabited. The upper storeys of the house were roofless, and the wind beat in through the shattered windows. No one had lived there for a hundred years or more excepting the tramps who sometimes took shelter within the old walls. Round the ruined building were the equally ruined gardens, tangled wastes of wild vegetation.

The three juniors dismounted in the old gateway, and wheeled their bicycles up the muddy drive thick with dead leaves.

Suddenly Tom Merry halted with an exclamation.

"My hat! Did you see that?"

"See what?" growled Lowther.

"A light!"

"Rats! There's nobody there; the place has been deserted for monkeys' ages!"

"I saw a light in that window!" said Tom Merry, pointing.

"Some tramp camping out," said Manners. "Well, he can't hurt us. Come on!"

"Imagination!" said Lowther. "I can't see it."

"It's gone now."

"Well, come on."

They wheeled their bicycles on into the shelter of the old porch. Where the great door had been was now a yawning opening giving free admission into the house. The three juniors lifted their machines up the stone steps into the hall of the old house, and leaned them against the damp, mouldering wall.

It was very dark inside the old Manor House.

The juniors looked about them rather uneasily. The place was very lonely, and there was a story afloat of a murder that had been committed there, and many of the people of the countryside believed that the old house was haunted. The St. Jim's juniors were too practical to believe anything of the sort, but the deserted house was certainly an eerie old place.

Monty Lowther wrung the water out of his cap.

"Wonder how long we've got to stay here?" he grunted.

Plash! Plash! Plash!

Outside the rain was falling heavily, drenching the tangled old gardens, and forming pools and little rivulets on the muddy drive.

Tom Merry moved along the hall, and looked into the room where he had seen—or fancied he had seen—the light. It was the dining-room of the mansion, a fine old room with panelled walls and shattered windows into which the rain was beating. The room was dark and deserted.

"Nobody there!" said Tom.

"Told you you imagined it!" grunted Lowther.

"I didn't!" said Tom Merry warmly. "I tell you I saw a light—just for a second."

"Rats!"

"Look here, you fathead——"

"Well, if you saw a light, somebody must have lighted it. And where is he? Produce your somebody!"

Tom Merry looked round him in perplexity. He was certain that he had seen a light move in the deserted house, and that implied that there was someone else moving there as well as the chums of the Shell at St. Jim's. But who was it, and why was he keeping out of sight? If it was some tramp who had taken refuge in the old Manor House, he had no reason for concealing himself.

"There's somebody here as well as us," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Might be some chap come in out of the rain and going to jape us."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I tell you——"

"Well, produce him!" yawned Lowther.

"I'll jolly well rout him out!" growled Tom Merry. "I don't see what he's hiding himself for, anyway!"

He moved further along the wide hall. Several doorways opened from it, and some of the doors were gone. But one was closed. Tom Merry felt the handle, and turned it, but the door was fast. The junior uttered an exclamation.

"Locked!" he said.

"Oh, it's jammed somehow!" said Lowther. "I dare say I could open it."

"Try it, then, fathead!"

Monty Lowther tried the door, but it did not budge. "By Jove!" said Lowther, getting interested. "It's locked, or else bolted on the inside. That's queer!"

"Jolly queer!"

The three juniors, their curiosity excited, gathered outside the locked door. They had been in the Manor House before, a considerable time ago, during an afternoon's ramble over the moor, and they knew the room beyond the locked door. It was a large room, with French windows looking over what had been the lawn at the rear of the house—now a tangled waste.

Few of the locks in the old house were in working order, and the keys to them had long since vanished. How, then, did the door come to be locked?

The juniors scented a mystery, though what it was they could not imagine. They listened intently, but there was no sound from beyond the locked door. But suddenly, from the front of the house, there came a sound—a sound of footsteps tramping on the muddy drive, and then up the steps into the stone porch.

"Somebody's coming!" said Manners.

A match struck in the dark hall. The juniors fixed their eyes upon the face that was revealed in the gloom by the flare of the match. It was a face they knew, and they uttered an exclamation all at once:

"Cutts!"

CHAPTER 2.

Turned Out!

CUTTS, of the Fifth, stared blankly at the juniors.

In the glimmer of the match they could see that his face was startled, and had gone suddenly pale at the sight of them.

"Cutts!" said Tom Merry again.

Cutts had an overcoat on and an umbrella under his arm. He disappeared from sight as the match went out, but the juniors heard him striding towards them. Tom Merry felt the heavy hand of the Fifth-Former drop upon his shoulder.

"What are you doing here, you young rascal?" said Cutts, in a low, angry voice.

"Hands off, please!"

"Tell me what you are doing here."

"I should think you could guess," said Tom Merry. "We came in for shelter from the rain. I suppose the same as you've done!"

Cutts released him.

"Oh, I see! Yes, I came in from the rain," he said. "It—it startled me to see you here."

"Yes, you looked it," said Lowther drily.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Cutts angrily.

"What I say!" said Lowther. "You looked startled—jolly startled! Did you take us for ghosts?"

Cutts gave a short, harsh laugh.

"Well, they say the old manor is haunted," he said. "Have you seen anybody else about here?"

"Expecting to meet somebody?" asked Lowther.

"Of course not. But have you seen anybody?"

"I saw a light in a window," said Tom Merry; "that's all. But we've just found that this door is locked."

"What does that matter?"

"Well, last time we came in here there weren't any keys to the doors, and all the doors could be opened. It's queer it should be locked up now."

"The owner may have been here since then," said Cutts.

"There isn't any owner; the place is in Chancery. Nobody

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(See column 2, page 26 of this issue.)

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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 282.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.



The three seniors watched Tom Merry & Co. wheel their machines out into the rain. "The rotters!" said Lowther. "They've got us! But we'll make Knox smart for this somehow! We shall be simply drenched!"

(See Chapter 2.)

seems to bother his head about the place at all," said Tom Merry.

"Well, it's no business of yours, anyway!" said Cutts harshly. "You'd better clear out of this place, quick! It's no place for kids like you."

"We're not going out into the rain!" said Tom shortly.

Cutts uttered a muttered exclamation. It was plain enough to the juniors that he was annoyed at seeing them there, though why was a mystery to them. But they certainly did not intend to go out into the pouring rain to please Cutts, of the Fifth.

The Terrible Three were on anything but good terms with Cutts. Cutts was what he was pleased to term "one of the boys," and, in fact, quite a "dog" and a "nut." Cutts's doggish ways would have caused him to be expelled from St. Jim's if the Head had known anything about them. It was an open secret that he betted on horseraces and gambled on cards and had all kinds of friends in Rylcombe and Wayland that the authorities of St. Jim's knew nothing about. And the Terrible Three had not forgotten one certain

occasion when Cutts had endeavoured to entice Tom Merry into his own blackguardly ways.

And the juniors did not believe that Cutts had come to the old Manor House for shelter from the rain either. It was far more likely that he had made some appointment there with a bookmaker or some other shady associate—some acquaintance whose existence he was very careful to keep a secret from everybody at St. Jim's. That was probably his reason for showing so much annoyance at unexpectedly finding the juniors there.

Gerald Cutts moved away towards the porch, and stood looking out into the rain. It was still coming down heavily, though it showed some signs of slackening.

"What is he doing here, I wonder?" murmured Tom Merry. "I thought for a minute he had come in out of the rain. But it isn't that."

"One of his giddy appointments," said Lowther. "You remember the time he got you into meeting Griggs, the bookmaker? May be going to meet Griggs here."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Hark!"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"TAGGLES' BENEFIT!"

A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Footsteps on the muddy drive again. A form loomed up in the dimness of the porch, and the juniors heard a voice they knew.

"That you, Cutts? What rotten weather! Is——"

"Hush!"

"What's the matter?" asked Sefton, of the Sixth.

The juniors knew his voice at once. It was Sefton, of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's—a New House fellow.

Cutts whispered in reply, and the juniors did not hear what he said, but they heard Sefton utter an exclamation of angry annoyance.

"Sefty isn't pleased!" grinned Monty Lowther. "My infants, we are de trop here. And we are going to remain de trop till the rain stops."

"Yes, rather!"

"Is Knox here?" they heard Sefton ask.

"No," said Cutts.

"I'll speak to the young rotters, then!"

Sefton came along the dark hall. In the dimness the juniors could just make him out, overcoated, with a muffler round his neck. He struck a match, and the light glimmered upon their faces.

Sefton's face was dark and scowling.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I'm leaning against the door," said Monty Lowther lazily.

"I'm standing on my feet," said Manners solemnly.

"I'm looking at you, Sefton," said Tom Merry.

Sefton gritted his teeth. The pleasantries of the juniors did not seem to amuse him at all.

"You can clear out of here!" he said.

"Thanks!"

"Well, are you going?"

"Oh, no; we're not going!"

"Look here, you cheeky rats!" said Sefton between his teeth. "I'm a prefect, and I order you to get back to the school. You're late for calling-over, as it is. Go at once!"

"In this rain?" said Tom Merry.

"Never mind the rain. If you're afraid of getting wet, you should stay indoors."

"Well, we're not afraid of getting wet, but we're not going to get drenched to please you, Sefton. Why shouldn't we stay here?"

"You will be late for locking-up."

"We'll chance it."

"You won't chance it!" said Sefton savagely. "You'll go at once! If you disobey a prefect you'll get into trouble!"

"We're not bound to take any notice of New House prefects," said Tom Merry calmly. "We belong to the School House, and you've no right to give us orders, and you know it."

"Are you going?"

"No!"

The Terrible Three drew closer together, quite ready for a struggle if necessary. It was a point of honour with the School House fellows not to take any orders from the New House. And they were within their rights in refusing to obey a prefect of another House, especially when he ordered them to leave shelter and go out into a heavy downpour of rain.

But Sefton did not touch them. He moved away and rejoined Cutts in the porch, and the juniors heard them muttering together, though they could not distinguish the words.

"They're expecting more visitors," murmured Lowther—"quite a family party, in fact! I wonder what it all means?"

"Something fishy, or they wouldn't be so ratty at finding us here," said Tom Merry. "We're doing no harm that I can see."

"Three of the most innocent and harmless youths in the wide world," said Lowther. "They ought to be pleased to see us. But they're not."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"They're expecting Knox," said Manners. "Sefton said so. Knox is a School House prefect. If he comes——"

"Talk of angels!" said Lowther. "Hark!"

Footsteps on the muddy drive again, and another voice in the porch. This time it was the well-known voice of Knox, the prefect—the bully of the Sixth and the special enemy of the Terrible Three in the School House at St. Jim's.

"Hallo, you fellows! Many here?"

"Hush!"

More muttering. Cutts and Sefton were evidently explaining to Knox in low whispers that the Shell fellows could not hear.

Knox came striding down the dark hall. Cutts and Sefton followed him, and Cutts had a light now. He had lighted the lamp from one of the bicycles. The rays flashed on the faces of the chums of the Shell.

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"You kids ought to be indoors," said Knox. "You can't stay out so late as this. You know that well enough."

"The rain——" began Tom Merry.

"It's clearing off now," said Knox. "We shall have to stick here a bit longer, as it's a long walk to St. Jim's; but you juniors have your bikes. You'd better clear off at once."

"But the rain——"

"Never mind the rain! Clear off!"

"Look here, Knox," said Monty Lowther warmly. "we're not going out in this downpour to please you! What is there going on here that we mustn't see?"

Knox started.

"Nothing!" he exclaimed sharply. "What's put that idea into your head, you young fool?"

"Then why can't we stay?"

"Because you're late for calling-over. It's my duty as a prefect to send you in. I order you to clear off at once. If you refuse, I shall report you to the Head."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. They were in a difficult position. Knox was a School House prefect, and certainly had a right to order them home if he considered fit. And the other party were now three—all seniors, and if it came to a tussle, there was no doubt that they could eject the juniors by force from the place.

"Now, don't play the fool, and make me use force," said Knox. "Clear out at once, and I'll excuse you to your Housemaster for being late in. But you must go immediately. You'll be pretty late as it is."

"Look here, Knox——"

"Anyway, you've got to go."

"Or you'll be chucked out," growled Cutts of the Fifth. There was no help for it. Knox had both authority and force on his side. The juniors were indignant, but they were helpless. Without a word, they moved along to their bicycles, and lighted the lamps.

The three seniors watched them wheel the machines out into the rain.

"The rotters!" said Lowther, between his teeth. "They've got us; but we'll make Knox smart for this, somehow. We shall be simply drenched."

"Quick's the word!" said Tom Merry.

And they mounted their machines and rode away over the rainy moor. Through the thickly falling rain they took the road for St. Jim's, and they arrived at the school with every article of clothing on their bodies soaked through to the skin.

CHAPTER 3.

Manners is Not III.

"BAI Jove! You fellows look wet!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth form at St. Jim's, made that observation.

He was quite right. The chums of the Shell did look wet—very wet. Fellows gathered round them to see them come in, dripping with water, and squelching mud and water out of their boots.

"Wet!" growled Monty Lowther. "Yes, we feel rather damp, fathead."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, catching sight of the Terrible Three in the hall, "what a dreadful state you boys are in!"

"A little wet, sir," said Tom Merry. "We were caught in the rain."

"You should have taken shelter!"

"We were late, sir——"

"It would be better to miss calling-over than to get into such a state," said Mr. Railton. "But do not stop to talk; go up and change immediately, and mind you give yourselves a hard rub down."

"Yes, sir!"

And the Terrible Three went up to the Shell dormitory. Gladly enough, they stripped off their drenched clothing, and rubbed down their wet limbs with hard towels.

"I wonder what Railton would say if we told him that Knox turned us out into the rain," growled Manners.

"Can't sneak about Knox," said Tom Merry. "He was a beast; but we can settle with him ourselves, without bringing Railton into it."

"Righto!"

Several fellows came up to see the Terrible Three while they were changing. Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, were the first. Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, followed them in.

"Must have been looking for trouble, to ride through rain like that," said Jack Blake. "Why didn't you get into cover?"

"Yaas, wathah! You have wuined your clothes," said D'Arcy.

"I guess you'll be laid up with colds to-morrow," said Lumley-Lumley.

"We did get into shelter," grunted Lowther, "and Knox turned us out."

"What?"
"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry explained as he rubbed himself down with great energy. His skin was soon glowing crimson with his efforts, and there was not much danger of his catching cold.

But Manners was already sneezing.

"Well, the awful rotter!" said Blake, when he had heard the story. "What did he want to turn you out of the place for? It's all very well, his ordering you to go, as a prefect; but if you'd told Railton, he'd be called over the coals for it."

"Yaas, wathah; and I weally don't see that Tom Mewwy is bound to keep mum about it," said Arthur Augustus. "Mr. Waitton ought to know what a wottah Knox is."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We'll settle with Knox ourselves," he said.

"It was takin' a wotten advantage of bein' a prefect," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard Knox as a disgustin' wottah."

"But why couldn't he let you stay there?" asked Jerrold Lumley-Lumley in surprise.

"Something going on," said Lowther — "something fishy, of course. Knox and Sefton and Cutts were there, and they were expecting others—other fellows of the same stamp, of course. I don't know what the game is, but those rotters are using the old Manor House for some purpose or other."

Lumley-Lumley whistled softly.

"I wonder—" he began.

Then he paused. The juniors looked at him.

"Well, what do you wonder?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, nothing."

Lumley-Lumley left the dormitory.

The juniors stared after him in surprise.

"Lumley can't know anything about it, surely," exclaimed Blake.

"He knows a jolly lot of things, and he used to be very thick with Cutts and his set at one time," growled Lowther.

"But that's all over now."

"Yes, but I believe he knows something. Still, if he wants to keep it dark, that's his business. Our business is to make Knox sit up for turning us out in the rain."

"Yes, rather—atchoo!" said Manners.

"You're catching a cold already," said Tom Merry anxiously. "Perhaps you'd better go to bed, Manners, old man."

"Rats!" said Manners.

"Well, you don't want to be ill, you know—"

"I'm not going to be ill—atchoo-choo!" said Manners.

"It's only an atchoo—sneeze—atchoo—nothing else—atchoo-choo!"

"Sneezy thing to cure!" remarked Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eye-glass upon the humourist of the Shell with an expression of great surprise.

"Would you mind explainin' the meanin' of that remark, Lowthah?" he exclaimed.

"It's a pun," explained Lowther.

"Bai Jove, I don't see the pun."

"It's an easy thing to do, you see—"

"It isn't easy to see your puns—"

"It's an easy thing—sneezy thing—see?" roared Lowther.

"No, I don't quite see. You sound to me as if you're wanderwin' in your mind," said D'Arcy in astonishment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, take him away and bury him!" said Lowther.

"I wufuse to be taken away and buwied, Lowthah. I wegard you as an ass—"

"Atchoo—atchoo-choo!" came from Manners.

"Sneezy, you see," said Lowther. "It's sneezy thing to do—"

"Is that a joke, too?" asked D'Arcy innocently.

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Manners is going to be ill," said Tom Merry.

"I'm not," roared Manners indignantly.

"Yes you are, and we're going to scalp Knox for it."

"We'll give him some knocks," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, I suppose that is a pun, too—"

"Of course it is," yelled Lowther. "Don't you know a pun when you hear one, fathead?"

"I wufuse to be called a fathead. I considah—"

"I've got an idea," said Tom Merry. "There's some giddy mystery going on at the Old Manor House. Knox turned us out into the rain. To-morrow afternoon is a half-holiday, and we haven't got a match on. We'll explore the Manor House."

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's not out of bounds on half-holidays," resumed Tom Merry. "We've as much right there as anybody. We'll explore the place, and if there is anything fishy going on, we'll show these rotters up. We'll teach Knox to turn us out into the rain, and make Manners ill—I mean we'll teach him not to—"

"I'm not ill!" yelled Manners.

"You are!"

"I'll jolly well punch your—atchoo—head, if you say I'm ill again—atchoo—at-choo!" roared Manners. "I haven't even—atchoo—got a cold. Only a little bit of an—atchoo—sneeze. I'm as fit as you are, and I never catch cold—atchoo! I say—atchoo—"

"Sneeze! Sneeze! Sneeze!"

"Sneezy thing than ever!" grinned Blake. "If you haven't got a cold, Manners, I must say it sounds jolly like one. Better go to bed, and have a hot-water bottle, and plenty of blankets—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll hot-water bottle you," growled Manners. And he picked up a sponge from the wash-stand, and dipped it in the water-jug. "What are you Fourth Form kids doing in here, anyway? Clear off!"

"Weally, Manners—ow!"

Arthur Augustus gave a yell, as the sponge circled through the air, Manners squeezing it as it circled.

"Yawwooh!"

"Oh, you ass!" gasped Blake and Herries and Digby together.

They made a simultaneous movement towards Manners. Manners picked up the water-jug, and they changed the direction of their movement towards the door. Manners chuckled as the dormitory door slammed behind the Fourth-Formers. The chuckle turned into a sneeze.

"You've really got a cold, Manners, old man," said Tom Merry anxiously.

"Rats! I haven't!"

Sneeze, sneeze, sneeze! Grooh!

And Manners, having finished dressing, went downstairs, still persisting that he hadn't a cold and wasn't an invalid.

CHAPTER 4.

Gore Does Not Approve.

THE Terrible Three of the Shell prided themselves upon always being fit. Catching a cold was a sign of unfitness. For that reason, doubtless, Manners persisted that he had not caught a cold. But it was pretty plain to everybody else that he had; and Kildare of the Sixth, catching him sneezing in the passage, called him to account. Kildare was the head prefect of the School House, and therefore suppose to keep a careful supervising eye on juniors; and he performed his duties more conscientiously than some of the prefects—Knox, for example.

"Have you got a cold, Manners?" Kildare asked.

Manners shook his head promptly.

"Oh, no, Kildare!"

"Then what are you sneezing for?"

"Oh, I was just sneezing, you—you know," said Manners, as if that fully explained the matter.

Kildare smiled.

"You've got a cold, and you'd better go to bed," he said. "You can leave your prep. for to-night; I'll speak to your Form-master."

"If you don't mind, Kildare, I—I'd rather do my prep."

"But I do mind!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "You'll be ill if you don't take care of yourself, you young ass. Go to bed at once, and I'll ask Mrs. Mimms to send you a hot-water bottle."

"I don't want a hot-water bottle!" roared Manners.

"Would you rather have a licking?" asked Kildare.

And Manners groaned and went to bed. Mrs. Mimms, the house-dame, sent up the hot-water bottle, and blankets were piled over the unfortunate Manners. He was warned that if he got up he would be licked, and so he had to bear it, even if he could not grin. Manners was in a state of sulphurous rage; and his chums shared his feelings. Manners owed his cold to Knox & Co., and Tom Merry was determined that Knox & Co. should smart for it. It was only by luck that Tom Merry and Lowther had not caught colds as well.

"We'll jolly well explore the Old Manor House to-morrow," said Tom Merry determinedly, "and we'll go in a big gang, so that if any of those rotters happen to be there, they can't stop us!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

And the chums of the Shell made their preparations for the expedition. All the fellows who could be relied upon were taken into the scheme. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn of the Shell, and Reilly and Kerruish and Ray of the Fourth, promised their aid at once. Then Tom

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Merry dropped into Vavasour's study to ask him. Vavasour shared the next study to Tom Merry's with Gore and Skimpole. Gore and Vavasour were both in the study when Tom Merry came in, and Gore's looks showed that there had lately been "words."

Gore, the bully of the Shell, did not get on with Vavasour. Vavasour was a very decent fellow in his way. Gore had taken a dislike to him when he first came to the school, chiefly because of his aristocratic name and his extremely aristocratic bearing. But Vavasour had shown that his elegant manners did not prevent him from being a handy fellow with his fists, and Gore had been severely licked when he tackled the new boy.

Then had come the discovery that Vavasour was not really named Vavasour at all. He had been born Smith; and his father had made money, and had legally changed his name to Vavasour. It was a great pleasure to Gore to address him as Smith, instead of Vavasour, and that always led to trouble. Most of the fellows did not care twopence whether Vavasour was named Smith, Jones, or Robinson. He was a good fellow, and he was simply rolling in money. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was the son of a noble earl, did not have anything like the allowance of the rich brewer's son.

Gore was rubbing his nose as Tom Merry looked in. "Hallo! Fireworks?" asked Tom genially. Gore snorted.

"I've been giving Gore a lesson in manners, that's all," yawned Vavasour. "He needs these little instructions from time to time!"

"I've been having a row with Smith!" said Gore. Vavasour flushed.

"Oh, cheese it, Gore!" said Tom Merry. "Why can't you let that drop? It's ancient history now, and fellows are getting fed up with it. I looked in to speak to you, Vavasour—"

"Smith, you mean?" interjected Gore.

Vavasour rose to his feet.

"Come in, Merry! Gore, I don't want to lay hands on you, but if you don't shut up I shall pitch you neck and crop out of this study!"

"Oh, rats!" said Gore. But he did not say "Smith" again.

Tom Merry smiled. The absurd snobbishness which had caused the new boy to be ashamed of a good old English name, had been pretty well knocked out of him since he had been at St. Jim's. But his father's name had been changed by letters patent, and he was entered in the school books as Guy Vavasour, so he could hardly return to the name he was born with. Everybody but Gore was willing to let the matter rest. And probably Gore would be willing, too, when he had had a few more hammerings from Vavasour's elegant fists.

"What's on, Merry?" asked Vavasour, as Gore turned savagely and sulkily to his work.

"We're making up a party to explore the old Manor House on the moor to-morrow afternoon," Tom Merry explained. "I don't suppose you know the place, as you're new here. Will you come?"

"With pleasure, my dear fellow!" said Vavasour.

"There may be a row, if we find certain chaps there," hinted Tom Merry.

Vavasour laughed.

"I don't mind," he said. "The more the merrier."

"Will you come, Gore?" asked Tom Merry, turning to the bully of the Shell. He did not specially want George Gore in the party, but it was only civil to ask him. And Gore, after all, was a good fighting man, if there should be a row.

Gore was looking at him very strangely.

"You're going to explore the Manor House?" he asked.

"That's the idea!"

"What for?"

"There's something going on there. One of the doors was locked when we were there to-day, and there's a giddy mystery about it. Knox and Sefton and Cutts came along, and turned us out into the rain. Manners has caught a cold, and he will be laid up to-morrow, and have to stay in, most likely. We're going to explore the place, and if Cutts and his friends are there we shall have a scrap with them."

"Better leave it alone!" said Gore abruptly. "You won't do any good by meddling with Cutts' affairs!"

Tom Merry stared at him.

"I don't know that it is specially Cutts' affair," he said. "I know those cads turned us out into the rain, and Manners is laid up."

"Better leave it alone!"

"Well, we're not going to leave it alone!" said Tom Merry rather sharply. "You can come or not, as you like."

"You say Knox was there. Suppose he's there again? You can't get into a row with a prefect."

"We're going to chance it!"

"Well, I'm not getting mixed up in rows with prefects," said Gore. "You can leave me out!"

"I'll leave you out with pleasure," said Tom Merry.

"If you take my advice, you'll keep clear of the place," said Gore, as the captain of the Shell turned to the door.

"Well, I jolly well sha'n't take your advice!" said Tom.

He left the study.

Lumley-Lumley's study was his next destination. Lumley-Lumley was there, doing his preparation, with Levison and Mellish, his study-mates. Levison and Mellish, the two cads of the Fourth, looked at Tom Merry very unpleasantly as he came in. They were on the worst of terms with the captain of the Shell. But Lumley-Lumley nodded genially.

"You coming with us to-morrow, Lumley?" asked Tom.

"I guess it depends on where you're going," said Lumley-Lumley.

Tom Merry explained.

"I guess I'm on!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I was thinking of paying the place a visit on my own. I guess we may make some discoveries there."

Tom Merry looked at him sharply.

"Do you know anything about it?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About Cutts' little game, whatever it is?"

"I don't know—but I've got some ideas," said Lumley-Lumley. "No need to tell you what they are, as I don't know for certain."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Just as you like. You used to be very thick with Cutts at one time."

"In my unregenerate days!" grinned Lumley-Lumley. "I'm a good boy now, and trying to set Mellish and Levison a good example."

Mellish and Levison sniffed. They did not at all like the reformation of Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, which had quite broken off his old friendship with them.

"Rotten humbug, I call it!" said Levison.

"Yes, you would!" said Tom Merry.

And he left the study, and the House, and walked over to the New House. Between Figgins & Co. of the New House, and Tom Merry & Co. of the School House, there was a keen rivalry—but on special occasions the rival juniors could pull together. This was one of the special occasions. In case of trouble, Tom Merry wanted Figgins & Co. in the party.

And as soon as the matter was explained to them, Figgins and Kerr and Fatty Wynn and Redfern and Owen and Lawrence willingly agreed to come. Tom Merry left the New House feeling very satisfied.

Quite an army would invade the old Manor House on the morrow afternoon, and if Cutts & Co. showed up there, they would find that force was on the side of Tom Merry. The juniors would have it all their own way. But there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, as Tom Merry was destined to discover.

CHAPTER 5.

Out of Bounds.

MANNERS did not come down the following morning. He had a bad cold, and he had been ordered to keep in bed. The Shell missed him from the Form-room, and although missing lessons was not considered a great hardship, it was extremely "rotten" to be kept in on a half-holiday by a cold. And the resentment of the juniors against Knox and Cutts & Co. was very great. The "army" were ready and eager for the march on the deserted Manor House, if only for the reason that Cutts & Co. did not want them to go there.

Tom Merry had directed his followers not to talk about the matter outside their own quarters. He did not want to give Knox a chance to stop the expedition before it started.

After dinner the juniors gathered in the quadrangle. Tom Merry and Lowther had gone up to speak to Manners before going out, and to see that he had books and papers and everything that could be provided to relieve the boredom of staying in. As they came down from the dormitory Lumley-Lumley met them.

"Ready?" asked Tom Merry.

"I guess so, but— Did you know Knox was with the Head?"

"No. What does it matter?"

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"I guess he's going to chip in."

"Then we'll buck up!"

"Call the fellows together!" said Lowther.

And the juniors hurried out. It was quite possible that Knox had heard something, even that someone had told him. Gore and Levison and Mellish all knew of the intended expedition, and they might very possibly have dropped a hint to Knox, of the Sixth.

At that very moment Knox was in the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes, who was taking advantage of the leisure of the holiday to spend an hour or two with Cicero, did not look pleased when Knox came in. The prefect was very deferential.

"If you will excuse me, sir, I think I ought to bring a certain matter to your notice," he began.

"If it is some matter relating to House discipline, Knox, Mr. Raiton will attend to it," said the Head.

"It is not exactly that, sir. I felt it my duty as a prefect to acquaint you with the matter."

"Very well, Knox," said the Head, with a sigh; "you may go on!"

"There is a building on the moor—you may have heard of it—the old Manor House, sir—"

"Yes; I have heard of it."

"It is a deserted place, and the resort of tramps and other disreputable characters, sir. It is not a safe place for boys, especially juniors boys, to venture into."

"Very probably."

"I have learned that some of the juniors have taken to haunting the place. I will not say that they made disreputable acquaintances there, sir, or that anything wrong is going on; but all danger of it could be avoided by placing the old house out of bounds. As it is a considerable distance from the school, there is no real reason why juniors should want to go there."

"Quite right, Knox! You say the place has a bad reputation?"

"Certainly, sir! A senior boy, who was expelled from St. Jim's—Slath—was known to have had meetings with a book-maker there."

"Dear me!" said the Head. "Certainly, the juniors should keep away from such a place; and, as you say, Knox, they can have no object in going there, excepting for mischief. The place shall certainly be put out of bounds."

"Then perhaps you will give me an order, sir, to put on the notice-board."

"Certainly!"

And the Head wrote out the order, and Knox departed from the study with it, with great satisfaction.

The notice was duly pinned on the board, and there it was read by the prefects, who did not attach any special importance to it. It was read by the juniors, who stared at it, and frowned.

Tom Merry & Co. had gathered in the quad., and were ready to start, when Cutts, of the Fifth, came out.

The black sheep of the Fifth glanced over the little crowd of juniors with his usual cynical, sardonic smile.

"Off on a little excursion—eh?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom Merry curtly.

"If you are going to the old Manor House by any chance, there is a notice on the board you had better read first," said Cutts.

"Rats!"

"That place is out of bounds for juniors," said Cutts, frowning.

"Bosh!"

"Look at the notice, you cheeky cub!"

"Has it suddenly jumped out of bounds?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically. "It wasn't out of bounds yesterday, or the day before!"

"It is out of bounds to-day."

"Rot!"

"It's true enough," said Kangaroo, coming out of the House and looking rather blue. "I've just seen it on the board, Tommy!"

"Seen what?"

"The notice—by the Head."

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a rush of the "army" into the hall of the School House, to see the notice-board.

The news was true enough. There was the paper in the well-known handwriting of the Head of St. Jim's:

"NOTICE!

"The old Wayland Manor House has been placed out of bounds for all boys below the Fifth Form. All junior boys are strictly forbidden to visit the place, or to go nearer to it than the road.

(Signed) H. HOLMES,
Headmaster."

The juniors read in dismay.

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"Out of bounds," said Monty Lowther blankly.

"What rot!"

"Rotten!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It wasn't out of bounds yesterday!" shouted Blake. "This is some of Cutts's trickery! He has got the Head to do this!"

"The Head wouldn't listen to Cutts!" said Figgins.

"Knox, then! Knox has worked it!"

"He was with the Head," said Lumley-Lumley.

"The rotter!"

"The cad!"

"But how did Knox know?" exclaimed Herries. "Somebody must have told him we were going to the Manor House to-day."

"Some rotten sneak!"

"Was it you, Levison?" demanded a dozen angry voices.

"No, it wasn't!" growled Levison. "What the dickens does it matter to me whether you go to a rotten old Manor House or not?"

"It was somebody!" growled Lowther.

"Well, I'm not the somebody!"

"I wedged it as wotten!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I suppose we can't go now, as the Head makes a special point of it?"

"I suppose not!" growled Tom Merry.

"Bad form to back up against the headmastah, you know," said Arthur Augustus, with a solemn shake of the head.

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"It's worse than bad form; it means lickings and gatings," grunted Figgins. "You can bet Knox will have his eyes open!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors raged, but their rage was unavailing. It was useless to think of making any appeal to the Head. Dr. Holmes would have wanted, very naturally, to know why they were so set upon visiting the old Manor House. And they could hardly explain to their headmaster that they wanted to go for the sake of ragging fellows in the Fifth and the Sixth.

Tom Merry regarded his followers ruefully.

"I'm afraid the expedition's off!" he said. "I'm sorry! We shall have to find some other way of making Knox sit up!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Ayad the crowd of juniors broke up angrily. Tom Merry and Lowther made their way to the Shell dormitory.

Manners greeted them with a look of surprise.

"Hallo! Ain't you gone? Atehoo!" he inquired.

"Knox has done us in the eye!" growled Lowther. "He's got the Head to put the place out of bounds, and there's a notice on the board, in the Head's own fist!"

"My hat!"

"So we've come to keep you company," said Tom Merry.

"Like to sit up in bed and play chess, or are you too seedy?"

"I'm not seedy at all."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Then we'll play chess. The ground's too wet for cricket, anyway, and Knox has knocked our expedition on the head. I wonder what the giddy secret is—why doesn't he want us to go to the Manor House?"

Manners shook his head.

"There must be something awfully fishy going on there," he said.

"That's jolly certain. I don't know that I want to get mixed up in it; but I should have liked to give Knox one in the eye," said Tom Merry regretfully.

"We'll find some other way," said Lowther.

And Manners sat up and played chess, and sneezed, and the Terrible Three said things about Knox that were the reverse of complimentary to the unpopular prefect.

But why was Knox so determined that they should not visit the deserted Manor House? What was the secret of the place that Knox knew, and was resolved that they should not know? That was a mystery, and the chums of the Shell turned it over in their minds in vain; they could not think of any possible solution.

CHAPTER 6. Money Wanted!

"VAVASOUR!"

Vavasour started a little.

It was a couple of days after the baffled expedition planned by Tom Merry. Vavasour was in his study, and Gore had just come in. He addressed his study-mate as "Vavasour," hence the latter's surprise. It was the first time Gore had called him anything but Smith.

"Hallo!" said Vavasour, looking up. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing!" said Gore.

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"You are getting very civil all of a sudden," said Vavasour suspiciously.

Gore forced a laugh.

"I hope you don't mind my cutting up rather rusty with you, Vavasour," he mumbled. "I—I was in the wrong, I know. But you—you took me down a peg, you know, when you first came here, and I didn't get over it in a hurry."

Vavasour stared blankly. He could not understand Gore at all now.

"You've got over it now, then?" he asked.

"Ye-es."

"Feeling quite friendly?" grinned Vavasour.

"Quite."

"Oh, good! You are going to be civil—eh?"

"Ye-es."

"Well, it will be a chance," said Vavasour, and he returned to his work.

Gore regarded him hesitatingly.

It seemed that he had something on his lips that he wished to say, but could not, somehow, make up his mind to say it. He grunted, and he mumbled, but he did not speak; and Vavasour looked up again after a few minutes, and scanned curiously the face of the bully of the Shell. Gore was looking worn and worried, as Vavasour noticed now, and there was a deep wrinkle in his brow.

"Anything the matter?" asked Vavasour. "Seedy?"

"Oh, no!"

"You are looking pretty down in the mouth."

Gore gave a short laugh.

"I'm feeling so," he said. "Look here, Vavasour, will you—will you—"

"Will I what?"

"Help me," said Gore.

Vavasour looked puzzled.

"Well, after the way you've treated me, I must say that's pretty cool," he said. "But I don't bear malice. I'll help you if I can, but I'm not much better than you are at Form work. What is it—maths.?"

"No, no!"

"Oh, lines!" said Vavasour. "All right; I'll lend a hand, and I'll make my fist as like yours as I can."

"It isn't lines."

"Then what the dickens is it?" demanded Vavasour.

"I—I've hardly got the cheek to ask you, only I'm in such an awful fix," said Gore.

"Blessed if I see what you are getting at," said Vavasour in perplexity. "Have the fellows found out that you sneaked to Knox about Tom Merry's little scheme?"

Gore started, and turned red.

"I—I sneaked!" he ejaculated.

"Yes," said Vavasour. "I know it was you. I saw you go into Knox's study, and I saw your face when you came out, and when I learned that Knox had got the Manor House put out of bounds, I guessed that he'd got his information from you. It was a rotten thing to do. But I haven't said a word about it, and I'm not going to."

Gore drew a deep breath of relief.

"I didn't sneak," he said. "I happened to—to mention it."

"The fellows would know what to call it, if they knew," said Vavasour, with a grin. "Is it that you are worrying about?"

"Oh, no! It's something else—something quite different."

"And I can help you?"

"Yes, if you choose. You've got plenty of money."

Vavasour whistled softly. He understood now. It was quite true that he was one of the richest fellows at St. Jim's, and it would not hurt him to part with some of his super-abundant pocket-money. This was what Gore wanted, then—this was why the bully of the Shell had ceased to call him "Smith," and was assuming friendly manners. There were some fellows at St. Jim's who sponged on the rich brewer's son, as a matter of course; but George Gore had never been one of them. Indeed, Gore had always had it "up against" Vavasour that he was rolling in money. He had nicknamed him Vavasour-Newrich-Smith. And now—how were the mighty fallen! Gore was hard up; and he was humiliating himself to ask Vavasour to lend him some of the money he had affected to despise so loftily. The new boy's lip curled involuntarily.

"You're hard up?" asked Vavasour, after a pause.

"Horribly."

"What is it—remittance delayed?"

"I'm stony—and not expecting anything just yet."

"Hard lines," said Vavasour.

"I—I suppose you think it's pretty queer coming to you," stammered Gore. "I—I know it is. My own chum Crooke is rolling in money, but—he's as hard up as I am now, as it happens—quite broke."

"Crooke is hard up?" exclaimed Vavasour in surprise.

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"Quite stony."

"Why, he was changing a ten-pound note only yesterday."

"I was changing a fiver yesterday," grunted Gore.

"And it's all gone?"

"Yes."

"Well, I must say you make the money fly," said Vavasour. "I never spend a fiver in a day. Still, it isn't my business, and I don't mind making you a loan. How much—half a quid?"

Gore laughed awkwardly.

"That isn't much for a rich chap like you to lend a fellow," he said.

"Oh, I'll make it a quid with pleasure!"

Gore did not look satisfied. A sovereign was a considerable loan for one junior boy to lend another, especially a fellow with whom he had been on the worst of terms. But Gore was evidently after something much more considerable.

"Could you make it a fiver?" he asked.

"Five pounds?"

"Yes."

Vavasour looked at him hard.

"You are asking me to lend you five quid?" he said. "Excuse me, but I think it's like your check."

Gore flushed.

"I suppose it is," he said; "but—but I—I want it—badly."

A refusal was on Vavasour's tongue. But the white wretchedness in Gore's face touched him in spite of himself; and there was something moving, too, in the humiliation of the bully of the Shell. Vavasour realised that Gore's affairs must be in a very bad way for him to ask his old enemy for help. Vavasour had plenty of money. He took a leather case from his pocket, and selected a five-pound note from several others, and whisked it across the table to Gore.

"There you are!" he said briefly.

Gore clutched at the note as if fearful that the generous junior might change his mind.

"Thanks, Vavasour," he said. "You're a decent chap. I—I sha'n't forget this."

"It's all right; let me have it back when you get your money, that will do."

"I may be able to return it to-morrow," said Gore. "In fact, I think I can with certainty. It all depends, but I think I shall be flush to-morrow."

Vavasour looked curiously at him.

"You're expecting a remittance to-morrow, after all?"

"Not exactly. But I hope to have some money."

"You—you're not getting mixed up in any betting rot, I hope," said Vavasour, looking a little alarmed. "You're not fathead enough to think that you're going to win money on horses, I suppose?"

Gore shook his head.

"I've tried that," he said. "It turned out rottenly. I'm done with that. I've got something better than that on."

"Not betting?"

"Oh, no!" Gore hesitated. "I say, Vavasour, I'd take you into it, if you liked—if I could depend on you to keep mum. You've got plenty of money, and you'd have a jolly good chance. How'd you like to see life a bit?"

"Depends on what you call life," said Vavasour drily. "If it's any rotten, blackguardly bizney like that that Cutts goes in for, you needn't tell me anything about it."

"Oh, if you're so jolly particular—"

"Chap can't be too particular in things of that kind," said Vavasour. "Is it something to do with Cutts, of the Fifth?"

"He put me on to it," said Gore.

"Then I'd rather not hear anything more about it," said Vavasour.

"Oh, all right!"

Gore left the study. In the passage outside Crooke, of the Shell, met him. Crooke was looking worried and anxious. Crooke, of the Shell, was the son of a financier who had made millions on the Stock Exchange, and he always had money in his pockets; but just at present Crooke, for some mysterious reason, was as hard up as Gore. Crooke gave his chum a quick, inquiring glance.

"Did you work it?" he asked.

Gore nodded.

"How much?"

"A fiver?"

"Good egg! That's half each!" said Crooke.

Gore shook his head in a very decided way.

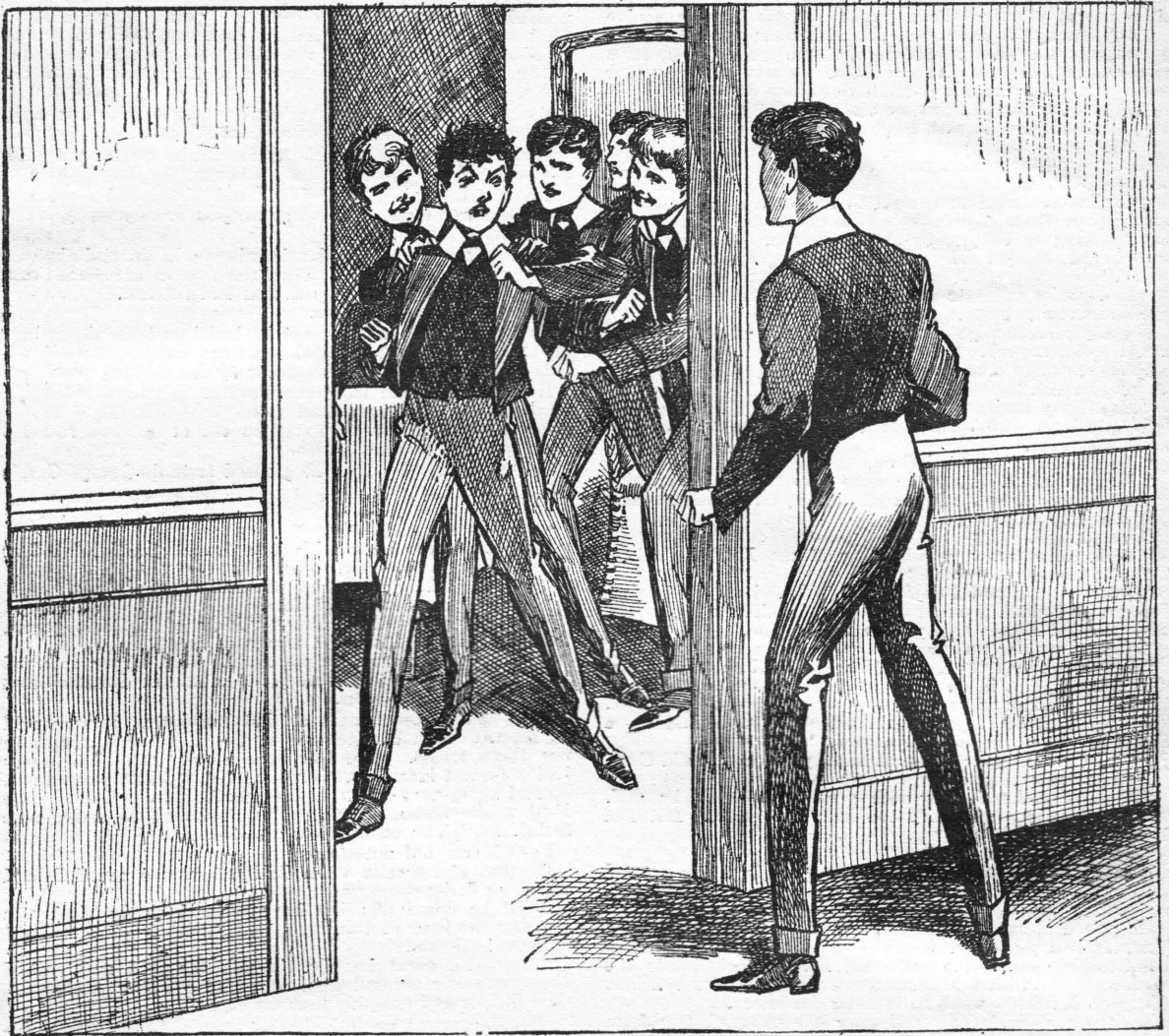
"Can't be done, Crooke. You must raise loans for yourself if you want them. I shall need all this; it's little enough for what I want."

"Look here—"

"Can't be helped; a fiver isn't too much for me!" said Gore. "Try Vavasour yourself."

"He wouldn't lend me anything."

"Try somebody else, then—Cutts—or Knox—"



Harry Wharton looked into the open study with amazement. "What on earth is the matter?" he exclaimed. "We're going to bump Skinner, until he owns up, and gets you off to play in the match this afternoon!" said Johnny Bull. (An exciting incident from the splendid long, complete tale of the chums of Greyfriars, entitled "IN ANOTHER'S NAME!" by Frank Richards, which is contained in this week's issue of "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

"I've tried them!" growled Crooke. "They won't pony up a stiver. Look here, if I don't raise the wind, I can't go to-night."

"Sorry!"

And Gore walked away, leaving his "chum" scowling angrily.

CHAPTER 7.
The Road to Ruin.

TOM MERRY glanced round the common-room, and spotted George Gore sitting in a corner by himself. It was nearly bedtime for the juniors. Tom crossed over to Gore, who raised his eyes from a card he held in his hand, and which he was scanning keenly. He thrust the card hastily into his pocket, and coloured a little as he met the eyes of the captain of the Shell.

"I want to speak to you, Gore, if you don't mind!" said Tom Merry quietly. "I don't want to meddle in your affairs; but I think I ought to give you a tip."

Gore frowned.

"You can run on!" he said.

"We haven't been good friends," said Tom. "But you've got your good points, and I don't like to see a St. Jim's chap going to the dogs. You had to leave St. Jim's once,

and you told us the kind of time your father gave you. If anything should happen to make you leave the school, your pater would cut up very rusty, wouldn't he?"

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not afraid of that!" he said.

"But you used to say—"

"It's different now. When I had to clear out from here before, I had to go home to my pater—I hadn't any other resources."

"And have you now?" demanded Tom Merry, in astonishment.

"Yes, I have!"

"I don't quite see—"

"No need for you to see," said Gore surlily. "It's my business. But I'm not dependent on my pater now—I've got other resources. As a matter of fact I expect to be rich before I grow up, too. What do you think of that?"

"I think you're talking rot!" said Tom Merry. "This only makes me sure of what I was suspecting—that you're very thick lately with Cutts of the Fifth."

"Cutts is a decent chap."

"Not many fellows here think so. Cutts is a rotter, and he makes money—and loses it—out of races. He tried to get me into that kind of thing once, and jolly nearly succeeded," said Tom Merry—"that's why I'm speaking to you. Cutts doesn't care a rap for any junior; he would

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make use of you and throw you aside. So long as you've got any money, he'll let you pal with him; but you'll lose the money, and then it will be the end. I suppose, from what you say, that he's let you into some precious system for backing horses with his friend Griggs, the bookmaker."

"No, he hasn't. He put me on to a jolly good thing, but it's got nothing to do with horses. I'm done with horses."

"I'm going to speak out plainly," said Tom Merry abruptly. "If you were an out-and-out rotter like Levison or Crooke, I'd hold my tongue; but you're not, and I hate to see you on the road to the sack. You're worth something better than that. I saw you this afternoon in Rylcombe Lane talking to Griggs, the bookmaker, and Tickey Tapp, the billiard sharper of Wayland—a chap who's been in prison."

"And you're going to sneak about it?" demanded Gore.

"You know I'm not. I'm speaking to you quietly. What I saw any prefect might have seen, and you know what that would mean to you. I don't know whether it's horses, or billiards, or some other foolery, but you're getting in with a set of sharpers."

"That's my business."

"Cutts is in with them—but Cutts can take care of himself," said Tom.

"And I can't?" sneered Gore.

"No, you can't. You'll be done brown; and if anything comes out, you'll be made the scapegoat; Cutts won't suffer, he's too jolly-deep."

Gore yawned.

"Well, what are you preaching at me for?" he asked.

"You're no chum of mine."

"I know that; and I don't want to be. But I'm in your Form, and I think I ought to speak. You're on the wrong road, and I'd like to help you to stop in time."

"Thank you for nothing."

"Why not chuck it up, Gore?" said Tom Merry earnestly. "You know what it led you into before—the sack, and your father being down on you. The game isn't worth the candle. Even if you win, it goes again when you lose—and it's a rotten, blackguardly business anyway."

"When I want your advice, I'll ask you for it," said Gore. Tom Merry crimsoned.

"Well, I spoke to you with good intentions," he said.

"You'll be sorry when it's too late, I'm afraid. But I'm finished."

"Thank goodness for that!"

Tom Merry moved away, his eyes gleaming. He wanted to help Gore, not to hit him; but he came very near at that moment to planting his fist in the face of the Shell fellow.

He joined Manners and Lowther, who were playing chess. Manners had recovered from his cold now. Tom Merry stood looking on at the game till Kildare looked into the common-room, with the announcement that it was bedtime.

The Shell fellows went up to their dormitory.

Kildare saw lights out, and after the usual chatter from bed to bed, the Shell fellows dropped off to sleep one by one.

Tom Merry did not sleep very soon. He was thinking. He had no special regard for George Gore, who had made himself unpleasant enough to the Terrible Three on many occasions. But Tom was, as he said, sorry to see a St. Jim's chap going to the dogs.

Gore had shown, at one time, signs of changing from his old bad ways and of turning over a new leaf as Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth had done. And it was probably due to Cutts's influence that he had fallen back again.

Tom Merry's resentment towards Cutts was bitter. He could not forget the attempt the blackguard of the Fifth had made to initiate him into his own low-down ways, and Cutts had found an easier victim in George Gore. Gore was convinced of his ability to take care of himself, but in the hands of the astute Fifth-Former he was as clay in the hands of the potter.

And if there should be disgraceful revelations and punishments handed out, Tom Merry was quite sure that Cutts would escape scot-free. Gore might be disgraced, and kicked out of the school, but Cutts was too keen for that.

Something was going on—Tom knew that. He thought of that curious meeting at the deserted Manor House, and the scheme of Knox and Cutts for getting the Head to place the house out of bounds for the juniors. Gore was in it—Tom was sure of that. It was probably Gore who had given Knox information of the intended junior expedition. Whatever it was that was going on at the old Manor House, secretly, Gore was mixed up in it, with Cutts, and Knox, and Sefton, and other black sheep. The foolish fellow, who had been saved once from the consequences of his own folly, was on the road to ruin, and he scoffed at the helping hand that was held out to him.

But what was it that was going on? Something shady, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 282.

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undoubtedly—some form of gambling, in all probability. That was the reason of Gore's foolish boast that he would be rich—that he had other resources than going home to his father if anything should happen to make him leave St. Jim's.

But the obstinate fellow was bent upon going his own way, and he could not be saved in spite of himself.

Tom Merry was still thinking about the matter when he fell asleep.

He was dreaming, with Cutts and Knox and Gore and the old Manor House confusedly mingled in his dreams, when he suddenly awoke.

There was a sound in the dormitory; he fancied that he had heard the door close. With the idea of a Fourth-Form raid in his mind, he sat up in bed and listened.

The silence was unbroken.

Tom Merry was certain that he had heard the door shut. He listened for a few minutes, but there was no sound in the stillness, save the steady breathing of the sleeping juniors.

It was not a raid from the Fourth. Someone belonging to the Shell dormitory had gone out—and Tom Merry guessed whom it was. He stepped out of bed and found a matchbox and struck a match.

In the glimmering light he glanced towards George Gore's bed.

The bed was empty.

Gore was gone.

Monty Lowther opened his eyes drowsily, and blinked at Tom Merry as the match went out.

"Hallo! Wharrer marrer?" he murmured sleepily.

"Gore's gone out!" said Tom.

"Rotter!" yawned Lowther. "More of his little games, the silly ass! Well, it's no bizney of ours!"

And Lowther went to sleep again. Tom Merry returned to his bed, but he did not sleep. The hour of eleven chimed out from the clock-tower.

Gore had broken bounds at that late hour. When would he return? Tom had glanced at Crooke's bed, but Crooke was there asleep. Gore had gone alone. But Tom Merry had a shrewd idea that, though he left the dormitory alone, he had not gone alone from the school. It was Cutts of the Fifth again—Cutts, the evil genius of all the fellows who were foolish enough to come under his influence.

Tom Merry did not sleep.

He was still awake when half-past twelve sounded—and still Gore had not returned.

Then he dozed off; but he awakened as the clock was chiming the hour of two.

Boom! Boom!

The sound came heavily through the still night. And there was another sound—a sound of a fellow closing the door quietly and creeping towards his bed.

Tom Merry sat up in bed, and peered through the darkness. In the dim glimmer of starlight from the high windows he could make out Gore as he began to undress.

"Is that you, Gore?" he asked quietly.

The Shell fellow started violently.

"So you are spying, Tom Merry?" he muttered.

"No; I'm awake, though. I heard you go out."

"Well, it's nothing to do with you, I suppose," muttered Gore. "Don't talk to me! I'm not in a humour for it." Then his manner changed, and he came towards Tom Merry's bed. "I—I say, Merry, you were saying this evening that—that you'd help me—"

"So I would, if I could."

"You can if you like!" muttered Gore. "I—I'm hard up. If you could lend me a few pounds until I get some money—"

"You've lost your money, then?"

"Never mind that. I didn't have much—a rotten five, that's all. Look here, if I could get some capital, I'm certain of making a good thing out of it. Do you know that I came within an ace of making a hundred quid to-night; only I just missed it."

"You've been gambling."

"I've been playing."

"Playing what?"

"Never mind what. Will you lend me a few pounds—?"

"I haven't a few pounds to lend."

"Well, a pound, then. I'll get some more somewhere else, and make up enough to have another try. Lend me what you can—"

"I won't lend you a farthing to gamble with," said Tom Merry quietly.

Gore snapped his teeth.

"Then shut up, and mind your own business," he snarled.

And Gore turned in, and did not say another word.

CHAPTER 8.

Lumley-Lumley Asks Advice.

"I GUESS I'm in a quandary!"

Thus Lumley-Lumley.

The juniors were standing by the pavilion, looking on at a Sixth-Form match and chatting. The Terrible Three had finished their cricket practice, and had come over to the senior ground to watch Kildare bat. The captain of St. Jim's was a great man at the wickets, and his batting was worth watching. The Terrible Three passed cheerful comments upon Kildare's form and upon Sixth-Form cricket generally. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley was leaning against the pavilion, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his blazer and a very thoughtful expression upon his thin, keen face.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther, looking round. "What's the matter with you? Don't you think Kildare's batting is the best in the Sixth?"

"Eh! Is Kildare batting?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Frabjous ass!" said Tom Merry. "Haven't you noticed that Kildare's batting, and that he's knocked up fifty-five against Monteith and the New House lot?"

"I guess I was thinking of something else."

"Then you'd better guess again, and watch the cricket," said Manners.

Lumley-Lumley grinned. In his earlier boyhood he had led a wandering life, and had passed some of his earliest years in America, where he had learned to "guess," and the habit had clung to him. Lumley-Lumley was a somewhat peculiar fellow. He had roughed it in earlier days in a way that the St. Jim's fellows could hardly comprehend. He had seen many cities and countries, and learned to talk with more or less accuracy, many languages. He could have slarged a Bowery tough in New York in his own language; he could have talked to an Apache in Paris in his own "argot." And that peculiar training had had a peculiar effect upon him.

He had a wisdom and a knowledge of the world far beyond his years. In his nature the wisdom of the serpent outweighed very considerably the innocence of the dove.

He had been nicknamed the "Outsider" when he first came to St. Jim's; and indeed he had seemed then the rankest of rank outsiders.

But Tom Merry & Co. had done much for him, and the Outsider had learned to see things in a better way; his better nature had come to light, and it had the upper hand now.

He was still a reckless and daring spirit, not at all averse to dangerous escapades and reckless scrapes. But the blackguardism was gone; he was a chum that Tom Merry & Co. could like.

"Anything up?" Tom Merry asked, noting the wrinkle of thought in the brow of the Outsider.

"I guess so."

"Confide it to your uncle," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"I guess I can give you some good advice, right slick."

Lumley-Lumley laughed.

"Do you fellows remember the time when you used to call me the Outsider—you and the rest of the House?" he asked.

"Ahem!" said Monty Lowther. "Don't talk about that! Since you've taken example by me you have been quite a nice boy."

"But you remember?" said Lumley-Lumley. "I was a wild beggar when I first came here; nothing like what I was before I came here, though!" And he chuckled. "I used to bet on horses, play cards at night, and so forth. Awfully wild and rorty for St. Jim's, but pretty tame to me after punting at a faro bank in the Bowery before I was twelve years old, and playing chemin-de-fer at a dive in Montmartre when I wasn't fourteen."

"You've been a pretty specimen, I must say," said Manners. "Blessed if I know how you've turned out so respectable in your old age."

"Us good boys did it," said Lowther. "We Ericked him. We gave him Little by Little, and he gave us the World of School!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well," said Lumley-Lumley, "I'm not proud of my record, and you chaps are witnesses that I've turned over a new leaf and gone as straight as a die since."

"So you have," said Tom Merry heartily. "My dear chap, we've forgotten all about that time, and if anybody calls you the Outsider again I'll punch his head!"

"Thanks! That's why I guess I'm in a quandary."

"What on earth's a quandary?"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"That's one of the words I picked up in my giddy youth,"

he replied. "In the American language a quandary means a difficulty—when you run up against a snag, you know, and there doesn't seem any way round."

"Oh, I see. You're in a difficulty."

"That's it."

"Good! How much?"

The Outsider of St. Jim's burst into a laugh.

"It isn't money!" he said.

"Sorry! I've had a remittance, and I could have come to the rescue like a man and a brother," said Tom Merry.

"What is it then—toothache?"

"No, ass!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Monty Lowther, as Kildare and Darrel ran three for the School House. "I say, Monteith can't touch their wickets. Bravo, School House!"

"Well run, Kildare!"

"Hurrah!"

"By the way, are you still in that quandary?" asked Monty Lowther, turning round to Lumley-Lumley when the cheering and the rippling handclaps were ended.

"I guess so; and I was going to ask you chaps for advice," said Lumley-Lumley. "But if you're too busy watching the cricket, I guess it can stand over."

"Not a bit of it. We'll watch the cricket with our eyes and listen to you with our ears," said Lowther. "That's an equal division of labour."

"I guess—"

"Shut up, Monty," said Tom Merry. "Now, pile in, Lumley, old man, and tell us all about it."

"I guess it's a regular quandary," said Lumley-Lumley.

"You're in trouble?"

"Oh, no; somebody else is."

"Oh, I see. Pal of yours?"

"No fear. Chap I don't like."

"My only hat!" said Lowther. "Here's Lumley setting up as a good Samaritan. We shall see giddy wings sprouting through his Eton jacket soon."

"If you're going to be funny—" began Lumley.

"Shut up, Monty," said Tom Merry again. "Now, pile in, Lumley."

"It's a rotten quandary," said the Outsider. "Considering my record, I'm not the kind of chap to preach to anybody, am I? I'm not in a position to tell a fellow he's on the road to ruin, and so forth, and ask him to chuck it. He'd throw my own record up in my face for one thing, and I shouldn't have a word to say. That's what's worrying me now. I don't like to see a chap going the way I was going, when I had sense enough to draw up. He hasn't sense enough to draw up, and he go'll on till he's ruined if he ain't stopped."

"Chap in your Form?" asked Tom Merry.

"No; in the Shell!"

"Then you must mean Gore."

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"I do mean Gore," he said. "Gore used to pal with me when I was playing the giddy ox, in my first days here. He thought he was a wild beggar, and a regular dog, and all that you know, though I guess I could have opened his eyes to a few things. But when I chucked it up, Gore didn't. He did have a try once, that time when his pater was down on him, but he's fallen back since, owing to Cutts of the Fifth as much as anything. Now I don't pull with Gore at all, but I used to be his pal, you know, and I don't like to see him going to the dogs and being done in. Only it sounds so much like humbug for a fellow with my record to preach at anybody, doesn't it?"

"I've spoken to Gore about it," said Tom Merry quietly.

"He wasn't even civil. He doesn't want good advice."

"Well, what do you think?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Ought a chap to stand by while a fellow is done brown, and perhaps ruined for life?"

"Not if he can do anything to stop it," said Tom Merry.

"That's the quandary I'm in. There's one way, I think, of curing Gore of playing the silly ass—show him that he's being made a fool of, and made use of, and that his precious friends are swindling him and making money out of him. But it's no good telling him that—he would want it shown up pretty plainly."

"I don't see how you're going to do that, Lumley."

"Well, I guess there is a way; but I'm rather doubtful about taking it. Suppose I went in with Gore—let him take me to his giddy little parties, wherever they are, where he gets swindled, and point it out to him on the spot—"

Tom Merry looked grave.

"That's jolly serious, Lumley-Lumley. You might do that with a good motive, but you wouldn't find it easy to convince the Head of it, if you should happen to be caught there. You might be expelled."

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

"That's a risk to run," he said.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "TAGGLES' BENEFIT!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"It's more risk than a fellow can be expected to run," said Manners. "I think you're an ass if you run it."

"If anything should come out, you'll be judged by the company you keep," said Monty Lowther. "Better leave it alone."

"What do you say, Tom Merry?"

"I think it's awfully risky. Gore goes to some place where gambling goes on, and he would be sacked instantly if the Head knew. Such a thing might come out any day. And if you were mixed up in it, you'd suffer the same as the rest."

"I guess that's so. But—"

"But you're going to do it?"

"I guess so. I've mentioned it to you chaps, in case you should think wrongly about it, if you see me chummy with Gore again," said Lumley-Lumley quietly, "and I wanted your advice."

"Well, you've got our advice," said Lowther.

"Yes; and I guess I'm not going to take it," said Lumley-Lumley, laughing. "I used to do what Gore's doing now, and I backed out in time, and escaped getting it in the neck—as I deserved. It's up to me to help that silly fool out of the same scrape; and if there's only one way of doing it, I guess I've got the nerve!"

And Lumley-Lumley put his hands into his pockets, and walked away whistling. The Terrible Three looked rather queerly at one another.

"If I were a suspicious chap, I should think that Lumley-Lumley was pining for the fleshpots of Egypt, and wanting to get back to his old games," said Lowther.

"But it isn't so, Monty."

"No; I don't think it is; but I know that everybody will think so if Lumley-Lumley is found out of bounds or in shady company."

"It's a risky thing for him to do—risky and plucky," said Tom Merry. "And as for Gore—he's too big a fool to be helped, I believe. Anyway, if anything happens to disgrace Lumley in connection with this, he will have us to speak up for him, and we'll stand by him—what?"

"Yes, rather!"

And the Terrible Three resumed watching the cricket.

CHAPTER 9.
Red and Black.

VAVASOUR stood in his study, with an expression of utter amazement upon his face. He had a card in his hand, which he had picked up on the study floor, and he was regarding it with a gaze of astonishment.

It was a peculiar card. It was oblong in shape, and ruled down in columns from top to bottom. The columns were headed alternately "Red" and "Black." They were filled with numbers—all sorts of numbers that seemed to have no connection at all with one another:

Red.	Black.
1	—
—	15
36	—
—	33
5	—
—	22
25	—
—	31
21	—
—	15
—	15
—	24
—	8
5	—
19	—

So the card began, and the apparently meaningless numbers were continued down column after column, sometimes Red and Black running alternately, sometimes in groups of two or three, and sometimes in "runs" of nine or ten.

Vavasour read down the numbers, and tried to make some meaning out of them; but there was apparently no meaning to be made. He was amazed. He observed that the numbers entered under the head of "Red" never appeared under the other heading, and those entered under "Black" never appeared under "Red." Evidently the numbers belonged permanently to one colour or other in the scheme under which the card was drawn up.

Vavasour wondered blankly what the card might possibly mean, and how it had come into his study. It occurred to him that it might be some weird scientific formula belonging to Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor. But, in that case, how had it come into his study? It must surely belong to either Skimpole or to Gore. Yet, what could they have to

do with a card like that, crammed with meaningless numbers, in equally meaningless divisions of colour?

Skimpole came into the study while Vavasour was staring at the card in his hand. The genius of the Shell blinked at Vavasour through his large spectacles. Vavasour held up the card.

"This belong to you?" he asked.

Skimpole blinked at it.

"I've never seen it before, my dear Vavasour."

"Know where Gore is?"

"He has gone out with Crooke."

Vavasour put the card in his pocket, and left the study. Tom Merry's study was next door, and he could hear the Terrible Three getting tea ready. He knocked at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Tom Merry.

Vavasour came in.

Tom Merry was laying the table, Lowther was in his shirt-sleeves poaching eggs, and Manners was telling him how to do it better—gratuitous information that Monty Lowther received with a series of snorts.

"Just in time for tea, Vavasour," said Tom Merry cheerily. Then, catching sight of the Shell fellow's expression, he added: "Anything up?"

"I've found something jolly queer in my study," said Vavasour. "I don't know whether it's a joke or what it is. Will you look at it?"

"Certainly!" said Tom, in surprise.

Vavasour handed him the card.

Tom Merry stared at it blankly.

"You found this in your study?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; it was on the floor."

"You know whom it belongs to?"

"No. It's not mine, and I've asked Skimpole, and he says it's not his, and Gore's gone out. I don't see how it can be Gore's. There's no sense in it, so far as I can see; and if it's a joke, I don't see where the joke comes in."

"It's not a joke," said Tom Merry quietly. "But you're not quite right about there being no sense in it. Shut the door!"

Vavasour, surprised by the serious looks of the captain of the Shell, closed the study door. Lowther had left off poaching eggs, forgetting all about them as he stared at the card with its alternate columns of numbers.

"You know what it means, Tom Merry?" asked Vavasour.

"Yes."

"Blessed if I do, then! It can't be mathematics. I thought it might be something to do with Glyn's blessed inventions."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's a roulette card!" he said.

Vavasour gasped.

"Roulette!"

"Yes."

"That's a gambling game, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"What on earth do you know about it?" asked Vavasour curiously.

"We had a vacation on the Riviera once," said Tom Merry. "We visited Monte Carlo, where they play this game at the Casino. We had an opportunity of seeing the game played. It's a game played with numbers on a wheel, and the players take down the numbers every time on cards, to calculate the run, though I expect the croupiers know pretty well in advance what sort of a run there is going to be. This is the same thing, only this card says Red and Black instead of Rouge et Noir. This card has been written down by some utter idiot who has been gambling here!"

"But roulette isn't allowed in England," said Vavasour, in astonishment.

"I know it isn't, but you see every now and then in the papers that gambling places are raided by the police, and they find roulette machines," said Tom. "It's done against the law—in secret. There are silly mugs everywhere who want to get rich quick, and are willing to be fleeced for the chance—not that they have any chance, the silly asses! When we had our holiday in the South of France we saw lots of these cards—people leave 'em in railway trains and in cafes, after leaving the Casino. This card belongs to Gore. That's what he has been sneaking out at night after lights out for, the awful idiot. Some utter scoundrel is running a gambling den in this neighbourhood, and Gore is one of the silly idiots being swindled there!"

"Great Scott! If it came out—"

"If it came out," said Tom Merry grimly, "Gore would be flogged, and sacked from the school on the spot—and serve him right!"

"It would serve him right," said Vavasour. "But—but—we've got to keep this awfully dark. Gore isn't a pleasant chap, but we don't want to have a hand in getting any fellow the push."

"Quite right."

"He ought to be stopped, though," said Monty Lowther.

"Better destroy this," said Tom thoughtfully. "You can see the state of reckless idioicy the fellow is getting into, by his leaving it about the study. If the Head knew there was such a thing inside the school, I verily believe he would have a fit. Why, any fellow might have seen it—a prefect, or a master even. The crass idiot!"

Tom Merry shoved the card into the fire, and it crackled up and was consumed. That evidence of Gore's guilt, at all events, was gone.

"Better tell Gore when he comes in," added Tom Merry. "But mind, not a syllable on the subject to anybody else."

Vavasour nodded, and left the study.

"Well, I think that takes the cake!" said Manners.

Tom Merry's face was grim.

"That lets out the secret of the Old Manor House," he said. "That's why the door of a certain room is kept locked; that's why the blackguards have been going there; that's why Tickey Tapp and Griggs are always about the neighbourhood now."

"You think—"

"I'm sure of it. Some gang of awful rascals have started a secret gambling-den in the lonely house, and they play roulette there."

"And St. Jim's chaps go there to play!"

"That's it!"

"But—but if the police came down on them—"

"They would be arrested—St. Jim's chaps and all," said Tom bitterly. "A pretty disgrace for the school! Tickey Tapp and Griggs would have to pay big fines. But those rotters can afford that. They make profits enough in this way to cover ten times the fines they have to pay. And then they'd start the whole thing afresh in some other place, and keep it up till the police got down on them again."

"The rotters!"

"The police ought to be told," said Manners.

"But it would get into the papers. And think! Perhaps half a dozen St. Jim's chaps' names in the list in the papers. What a horrible disgrace for the school!"

"But—"

"It's not our business to give information to the police," said Tom Merry. "But I think we ought to make it our business to stop St. Jim's chaps playing the fool in this way and bringing shame on the old school. There's Gore, and I think Crooke, and Cutts, of the Fifth, and Sefton and Knox—they're prefects—and very likely some more. My sons, we are going to turn this over in our minds, and think out a plan of campaign, and come down heavy on it."

To which Manners and Lowther fully agreed; and over tea the Terrible Three discussed plans of campaign.

CHAPTER 10.

Gore's Great Loss!

GEORGE GORE came into his study with an anxious frown upon his face. His brows were puckered up and his eyes gleamed furtively. Vavasour was at work in the study. Gore did not speak to him. He looked round the room anxiously, as if in search of something he had lost.

Vavasour knew very well what he was looking for, but he did not speak. He waited for his study-mate to ask him.

Gore stammered out a question at last.

"I—I say, Vavasour, have you seen a—a card anywhere about the study?"

"A card with columns of figures on it?" asked Vavasour.

"Yes. You've seen it?"

"It belongs to you?"

"Yes, yes! Where is it?"

"I picked it up," said Vavasour, looking at him steadily.

"I showed it to Tom Merry, and he told me what it was—a roulette card!"

"Hush!" muttered Gore. "Do you want all the House to hear, you ass? Where is the card? It's very important."

"You have been playing roulette?" said Vavasour.

"No business of yours if I have! I suppose you're not thinking of giving information to the Housemaster, are you?" sneered Gore.

Vavasour shook his head.

"I'm not a sneak. But it was for that that you borrowed five pounds of me last week?"

"Yes, it was."

"You can't settle up, by any chance?"

"I've lost!" said Gore sullenly. "If you like to hand me over a tenner for capital, I'd get the five back, and a hundred quid along with it."

Vavasour gave him a compassionate look.

"You think they'd let you?" he asked.

"You don't know anything about roulette," said Gore.

"They can't help it if you win. If your number comes up

you get your money. They can't help the number coming up."

"Then, if you had a run of luck, you might clear them out of every quid they've got?"

"Of course I might!" said Gore eagerly. "If you like to lend me a tenner—"

"Do you think they'd run the risk of being cleared out by a fellow with a run of luck?" asked Vavasour.

"They can't help it."

"Do they ever go broke?"

"Well, no!"

"Then I should suggest that they can help it," said Vavasour drily. "You ass! It must be as easy to cheat with a roulette wheel as with a pack of cards."

"You don't know anything about it," said Gore. "When I'm old enough I'm going to Monte Carlo to break the bank. I shall save up enough money out of my winnings here to do it."

"How much do your winnings amount to as yet?"

Gore grunted.

"I haven't won so far; I've lost!"

"Then you will have to save it up out of your losings."

"Oh, don't be an ass! You needn't lend me money, if you don't want to. Where's my card?"

"I gave it to Tom Merry, and—"

"Oh, you feathard!"

Gore did not wait for Vavasour to explain further. He hurried out of the room and opened the door of the next study. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had finished their tea, and they were doing their preparation.

Gore dashed into the study, and closed the door behind him. The Terrible Three looked up from their work.

"You've got something of mine, Tom Merry," said Gore.

"Vavasour says that he gave it to you. It's mine, and I want it."

Tom Merry looked at him steadily.

"You mean the roulette card?"

"Yes."

"I've burnt it."

Gore started back.

"You've burnt my card!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"Yes. It wasn't safe to leave it about, you ass. Don't you know that you would be ruined if it were found?"

"You—you meddling fool!" hissed Gore. "You've burnt my card, and I hadn't a copy of it."

"What on earth did you want a copy of it for?"

"For the numbers, you fool! I was making a system on the run of the numbers; and now it's mucked up. Oh, you crass idiot!"

"I should have burnt it all the same if I'd known," said Tom Merry quietly. "Have you got the awful cheek to tell us that you go out gambling at some secret den, and that you're making a system? You idiot!"

Gore clenched his hands.

"You fool! You fool!" he muttered.

"I don't think I'm the fool in this case," said Tom Merry, rising to his feet. "I won't lose my temper with you, Gore. You're more a fool than a rascal; I can see that. Do you know you'd be sacked if this came out?"

"I don't care if I am!"

"You don't care if you're sacked?" exclaimed the Terrible Three together.

"No, I don't!" said Gore defiantly. "Do you think I want to go about fooling over Latin and mathematics in a rotten Form-room when I've got a system for making a fortune? I don't care twopence!"

The chums of the Shell looked at him blankly. To them and to all other fellows at St. Jim's—and to Gore, when he was in his right senses—the idea of being expelled from school was the very worst thing that could happen. To be kicked out of the school, disgraced for life—it was the heaviest punishment that could fall upon any fellow.

And Gore did not care!

It showed the depth to which he had fallen, and the extent to which the madness of the gambling fever had taken hold of the wretched boy.

"I think you must be mad," said Tom Merry at last.

"You can think what you like."

"What about your father—"

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"I shouldn't go home if I were sacked. I know a trick worth two of that. I can make money—heaps of it!"

"Have you made any so far?"

"Yes, I have; only I lost it again simply from want of capital to play the game thoroughly and stick to my system. I shall raise the money somehow and bust them. I know I could if I had a chance. And when I'm older I'm going to Monte Carlo to break the bank there," said Gore. "It's been done before."

"Has it?" said Tom.

"I've seen it in the papers."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "TAGGLES' BENEFIT!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"You've seen it announced in the papers, you awful idiot!" said Tom Merry, with pitying contempt. "Hasn't it ever occurred to you that such yarns are spread to entice silly fools to go there and lose their money?"

"Oh, rot!" said Gore. "You don't know anything about the game, and I do. You've never played it."

"That's true enough."

"Look here," said Gore. "I'll take you with me, if you like, and—"

"You jolly well won't. We're not looking for the sack," said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, rats! I suppose you think you've got me under your thumb now that you've found this out!" said Gore savagely. "Well, I tell you that you can go straight to the Head, if you like, and give me away. I don't care two straws."

"We sha'n't do that," said Manners. "But you ought to see that you're ruining yourself, and very likely damaging us. If you keep on like this, it will come out some time; and if it comes out that we know of your rotten doings, it will get us into trouble."

"Mind your own business, then," said Gore. "It was like your rotten cheek to burn my card. If I lose now, I shall owe it to you."

"Oh, rot!"

Gore left the study and slammed the door after him.

"Well," said Manners, "I always knew that Gore was a rascal. But I never thought he was quite so asinine as that!"

"It's got to be stopped," said Tom Merry. "He's simply going mad with it, and he's not going to ruin himself if we can stop it, fool as he is. He doesn't seem to have any sense of shame left. If he had the sense of a worm, he wouldn't go to a gambling-den expecting to get fair play there. It stands to reason that he is cheated. They don't make their profits by playing the game fairly. The silly ass, if he got sacked from here, and depended on that for a living, he would find that it was a pretty rotten reed to lean on."

"Though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him," quoted Monty Lowther.

And certainly that seemed true enough of George Gore. Gore returned to his own study with a scowling brow. His precious card was gone, and his equally precious "system" was suffering in consequence. Gore scowled savagely at Vavasour.

"You've cost me hundreds of pounds, very likely, by giving that card to Tom Merry," he said bitterly.

Vavasour grinned.

"More likely saved you money," he said.

"Look here, after what you've done, I've a right to ask you for a loan," said Gore.

"You can ask!"

"Will you lend me a tenner?"

"No, I won't."

"A fiver, then?"

"Not fivepence!"

"Hang you!"

And Gore stamped out of the study. He turned his steps in the direction of Lumley-Lumley's quarters. Gore was "stony"—his wonderful prospects of wealth had not panned out very prosperously, so far, and the Outsider of St. Jim's was his only hope now.

CHAPTER 11.
For Old Times' Sake.

LUMLEY-LUMLEY was not surprised to see Gore; and he could read in the Shell fellow's face what he had come for. In times past the two had been very "thick," though at last the parting of the ways had come, and they had gone their different roads. Lumley-Lumley was alone in his study, and Gore was glad to see it. He came in and closed the door, and the Outsider of St. Jim's nodded genially.

"Long time since you've dropped in to see me," he remarked.

"Not my fault," said Gore.

"No; mine," said Lumley-Lumley, with a smile. "You're looking rather seedy."

"I'm not seedy. I'm bothered," said Gore. "What would you feel like if you had a fortune right in your hands, and couldn't collar it because you hadn't a little capital?"

Lumley-Lumley tried not to smile.

"I guess I should feel rotten," he said.

"That's how I feel. Look here, Lumley," said Gore, "we used to be good chums. You used to be in with me, and Cutts, and Tickey Tapp and Griggs, and the rest. You knew how to look after yourself, and they never got much change out of you. You chucked it all. I dare say it was sensible. But you must be getting fed up with the Eric bizney by this time. I could show you life now—something a bit better than you used to get."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore glared at him.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"My dear kid, I know about it—all about it," said Lumley-Lumley. "I've had kind offers from Tickey Tapp to take a hand in it."

Gore started.

"Then you know about the game?"

"I guess so."

"Oh," said Gore, evidently taken aback, "why don't you go in for it, then?"

"I've chucked up that rot. It's rotten, and it's stupid. Besides, I've got all my wits about me, and when they used to try to swindle me at nap I could keep my end up. But their latest dodge is too deep for me."

"You know what it is?"

"I know they've got a roulette machine in the old Manor House, to run a gambling club there till the police drop on them," said the Outsider coolly. "Tickey Tapp used to run one in Southampton, and he was fined hundreds of pounds over it. He was imprisoned in Manchester for the same

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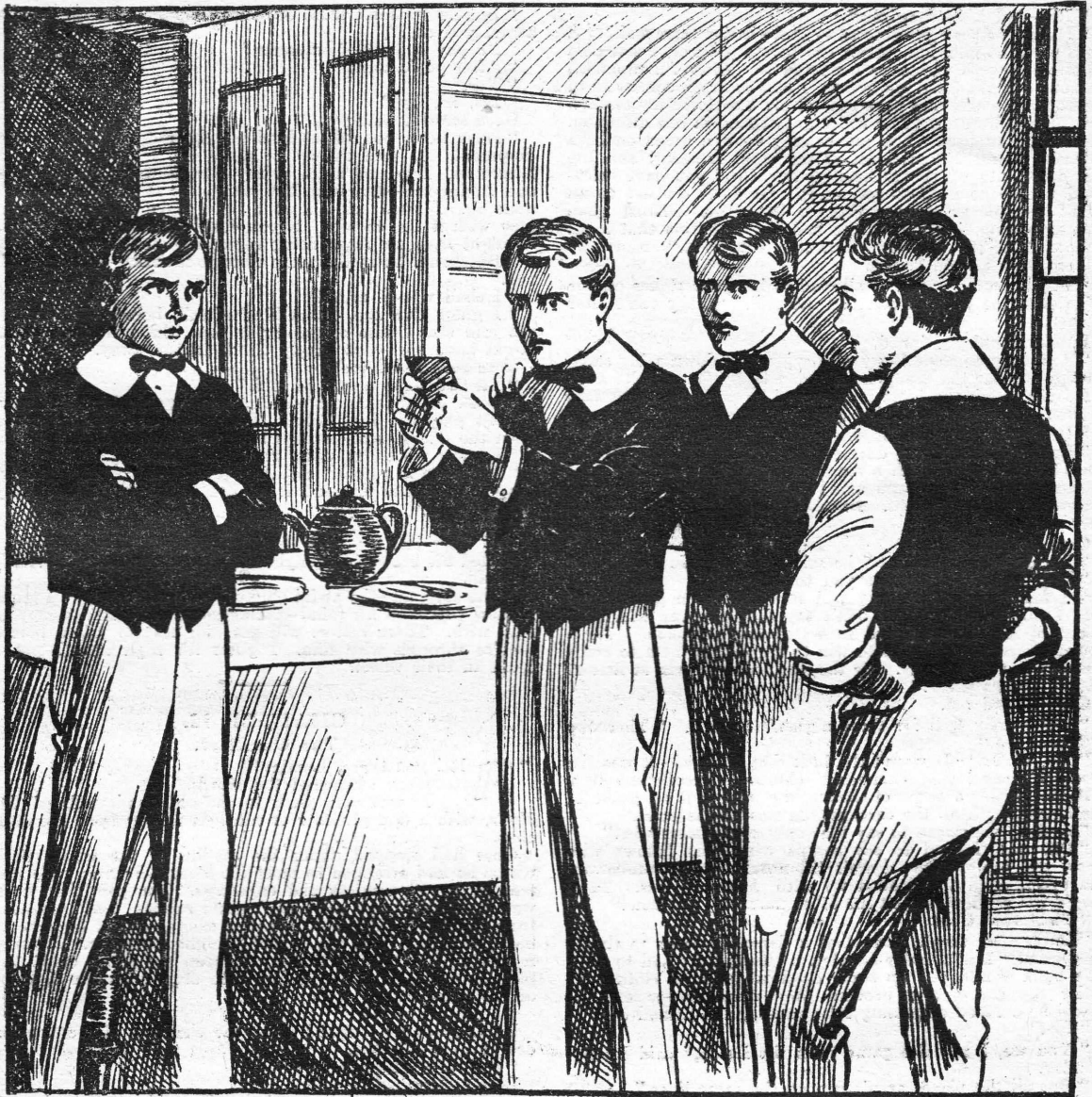


3

1. DAME TAGGLES.

2. CUTTS.

3. KNOX.



Vavasour handed over the card he had picked up in his study. "Do you know what this is, Tom Merry?" he asked. "Yes!" said Tom, with an expression of amazement upon his face. "It's a roulette card!"

(See Chapter 9.)

thing. But, bless you, he comes up smiling every time. There is always a supply of mugs—the supply of silly idiots never will run short. There isn't a town in England where you won't find chaps who want to get rich quick, and think they can beat professional swindlers at their own game."

"But this isn't a swindle," said Gore. "You don't understand. They've got a roulette machine, exactly the same as at Monto Carlo. You stake on the numbers, and if the numbers come up you win. They can't help it."

"Much the same as staking on the thimble that the pea's under," said Lumley-Lumley. "Have you ever tried that way of making a fortune?"

Gore frowned. "Don't talk rot, Lumley. How can they possibly cheat with a roulette-wheel?"

"Poor old innocent duck!" said Lumley-Lumley compassionately. "Have you ever handled a roulette-wheel?"

"Of course I haven't."

"Well, I have. When I was half your age, Gore, I was in some queer places in the world, and there are precious few gambling games that I haven't had a hand in. I've had a lot of experience, and I've learned one lesson—that it's all rot—cheating from beginning to end without a chance for

the outsider. The way to make money out of roulette is to start a casino in some rotten country where it's allowed, that's the only way."

"Rot! Every player has a chance."

"Every player has exactly the chance that the croupier allows him, and no more," said Lumley-Lumley. "Look here, Gore, I want to back you up for the sake of old times. You know my pater wasn't always a millionaire. I've been through some rough times. When I was a mere kid I had a job in San Francisco—the pater was laid up with a bullet in his leg that he'd got in a row there—and I had to get in the money somehow. Well, I had a job in a roulette den that was run in Chinatown there to swindle the sailors off the ships. After the game was over for the night, and the punters had gone, I used to amuse myself sometimes with the roulette-wheel, practising."

"Practising what?"

"Bringing up the numbers the same as the croupiers do," said Lumley-Lumley coolly.

Gore jumped.

"Do you mean to say they can bring up what numbers they like?"

"I guess so. I know they'd be sacked if they couldn't."

"But—but it's impossible."

"It's easier than bowling at cricket—easier than making a good break at billiards. After one hour's practice, I was able to bring up zero whenever I wanted to. After I'd practised an hour a night for a few weeks, I had as much command of the roulette-wheel as I have now of my bicycle or my cricket-bat. It's quite easy. The wheel goes round in one direction, the ball in another. You put exactly enough speed on both to make them slacken down at the right moment, and the ball drops into whichever hole on the wheel you have calculated upon—the number you want. It looks difficult to an outsider—same as it looks difficult to see a billiard chap making a long break, with the balls in a position that looks impossible to the amateur. But they can do it."

Gore drew a deep breath.

"But in roulette you're allowed to lay your stakes on the table after the ball has started," he said. "They can't alter it then."

Lumley-Lumley grinned.

"And suppose some lucky player jammed down a big stake on the number the croupier intended to bring up?" he said. "Do you think the bank is prepared to pay out a big sum of money for want of taking a few precautions?"

"But they can't alter it when the ball's started."

"Rats! They have different methods. Some roulette machines are made with a secret brake, to make the wheel slacken down in time and avoid a number. Some of the rotters have other dodges. But they never let you win unless they choose."

Gore shook his head.

"I can't believe all that," he said. "It sounds too thick."

"I guess I don't expect you to believe it. A gambler won't believe anything that will stop him from gambling," said Lumley-Lumley. "I don't say people never win. At that den in Frisco I used to watch the gamblers. New-comers were generally let to win to encourage them to come again with more money. By the way, did you win at first at Tickey Tapp's place?"

Gore turned red.

"I won jolly well for three nights," he said. "Then the luck changed."

"Ha, ha, ha! It wasn't the luck that changed—it was the croupier's mind that changed!" chuckled Lumley-Lumley. "Roulette isn't a game of chance, my infant; it's a game of dead certs, with all the certs on the side of the bank."

"And do you mean to say that only new-comers win?"

"Oh, no! I used to see sharps win—keen fellows who knew the game. They'd wait till nearly every number on the green cloth was loaded up with heavy stakes. Then they'd put small stakes on the other numbers, and win!"

"Oh!" said Gore.

"Only, after they'd done that a dozen times or so they'd be spotted," said Lumley-Lumley. "Then they had to quit. The bank would put up some employe in plain clothes to collar the stakes and pretend they were his—or else he would be accused of passing false money, and kicked out."

"Oh!"

"You see, I saw the game from the inside," said Lumley-Lumley.

"But all the places aren't run on the same lines."

"Not all, certainly; but in results it comes to the same thing. Different places have different dodges, that's all."

"I believe Tickey Tapp plays squarely."

"I guess you'll go on believing that so long as you can raise a red cent to play with. Lots of people go on playing after they've found out that they're being welsed. It's a kind of fever—they can't help it. But you didn't come here for good advice—you came here to borrow some tin."

Gore grinned rather sheepishly.

"Well, yes," he said.

"You want to play, after what I've told you?"

"I think Tickey Tapp is all right. After all, what you saw happen in a den in San Francisco mightn't happen everywhere."

"Suppose I prove it to you?"

"You can't!"

"I guess I'll try. When are you going to Tickey Tapp's place again?"

"To-night."

"I guess I'll come with you."

"And—and you'll lend me some money?"

"I'll lend you a couple of quid, if you like, though it's simply throwing money away."

"I—I want a good sum, to play the game on big lines," said Gore, hesitating. "Twenty pounds would do. Then I could make a big win."

"My dear chap, I haven't twenty quid to throw away!" said Lumley-Lumley, in astonishment.

"Your pater's a millionaire—"

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"But he wouldn't hand out sums like that for me to give away, you ass!"

"I'd pay it back—to-morrow!"

"After you'd won?"

"Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore scowled savagely.

"Look here, you might lend me the money. I'm getting desperate. I owe money to a lot of fellows that I've borrowed. I've sold a lot of my things—my bat, and bike, and fishing-rod—and now I'm stumped. If I don't win I'm done in. I must win. And I must have some capital to play with if I'm to win. If you could hand me twenty quid it might save me from doing something desperate."

"But you'd be in the same state to-morrow—you wouldn't win."

"I shall win—I must!"

"I guess I've heard that kind of talk before. When you get into that frame of mind you lose whatever chance you might have had—you simply chuck money away."

Gore rose to his feet.

"I'll find some way," he said.

"Look here," said Lumley-Lumley, eyeing him narrowly, "don't play the fool, Gore. You don't want to be sacked from the school, and perhaps sent to a reformatory."

"I know what I'm going to do."

"I'll make it a fiver," said Lumley-Lumley, "on condition that you promise to chuck it up if I prove to you that they cheat."

"Done!"

And Gore left the study feeling satisfied. Lumley-Lumley wrinkled his brows in thought. He was in a troubled frame of mind.

"The silly ass—the awful chump!" he muttered. "I guess I know what's in his mind—taking somebody else's money to play with. Those rotters will get him sent to prison before they're through with him. I guess it's high time I put a spoke in their wheel."

CHAPTER 12. The Gamblers.

"ARE you there, Lumley?"

Gore whispered the words.

It was very dark in the old quadrangle of St. Jim's, with a dim glimmer of starlight falling upon the dark elms.

Gore had stopped under the shadow of the school wall, where he had arranged to meet the Fourth-Former. He was trembling with anxiety and eagerness. The gambling fever was upon him, and all other considerations had vanished from his mind. The risk of being caught out of bounds, of being expelled from the school, weighed nothing. Nothing mattered—nothing but the numbers on the green cloth, the piles of gold and silver he hoped to draw from the clutches of the croupier.

"I guess I'm here."

Lumley-Lumley stepped from the shadows. Gore drew a deep breath of relief.

"I—I was afraid you—"

Lumley-Lumley chuckled.

"Afraid I'd altered my mind?" he said. "Well, here I am. Come on!"

They climbed the school wall, and dropped into the road. Hardly a word was said as they tramped down the dark road and along the footpath through the wood, and came out on the road over the moor.

Lumley-Lumley was unusually quiet and grave.

He was doing a dangerous thing. If his night's exploit should be discovered he knew what it would mean—the same punishment for him as for Gore.

Why was he doing it?

The keen desire for adventure, perhaps, was partly the cause. But his chief reason was a generous desire to save a fellow who had once been his chum, and who was driving recklessly and insanely on the road to ruin. Lumley-Lumley had had the strength of mind to turn his back upon his old blackguardly pursuits. Gore was not made of the same stuff. And it was worth an effort, and a little danger, to save him. Lumley-Lumley, with his own record in his mind, was conscious of the fact that it was not for him to "preach" to Gore. But if he could prove to the foolish boy that he was being swindled, without a chance for his money, Gore could hardly persist.

Dark and lonely loomed up the deserted Manor House on the moor. Not a gleam of light came from the shattered building.

Anyone passing along the road at that late hour would have supposed that the place was utterly deserted. Tickey Tapp & Co. could not have found a safer place for their

nefarious work. In Wayland and Bylcombe and Abbotsford the police had a very keen eye open for Tickey Tapp, and he could not have run his gambling-den long in any of those places without detection. But the lonely house on the moor was safe enough. Of course, discovery was bound to come in the long run. But Tickey Tapp had a great gift for looking after himself. At the worst, it would be a matter of heavy fines, and one evening's profits, perhaps, would suffice to pay the fines, and Tickey Tapp would depart for fresh fields and pastures new, with plenty of money in his pocket to start his rascally den somewhere else.

As Lumley-Lumley had said, the supply of "mugs" was unlimited, and Tickey Tapp would never be in want of grist for his mill—until some fine day he should happen to go a little too far, and land himself into penal servitude.

The two juniors left the road, and tramped across the moor to the dark old building. They groped their way into the dark hall, and along to the locked door which had so surprised the Terrible Three on the occasion of their visit to the deserted manor.

Gore tapped on the door three times in a peculiar way. It opened. But there was no gleam of light. Inside the room were heavy hangings to shut off the light.

"What's the game?" said a voice from the darkness.

"Red and black," said Gore.

"Step in."

Lumley-Lumley grinned in the darkness. He understood that this was a system of passwords, arranged by the secret gambling-club for their safety.

The juniors entered, and the door was carefully closed and locked behind them by the unseen attendant. Then the hangings were drawn aside, and the light burst upon their eyes as they advanced into the room.

Lumley-Lumley gazed about him with cool, keen eyes.

The room was a large one. It was sparsely furnished—a table, and a number of plain deal chairs. The windows were thickly covered with hangings of coarse canvas, to keep the light from escaping.

There was a crowd in the room.

The table was covered with a green cloth, marked out in thirty-six numbers for the game of roulette, and with the squares for red and black, pair and impair, passe and manque, and the spaces for the "dozens" and "columns."

In the centre of the table was the roulette machine.

A deep wooden bowl, with a revolving wheel in the centre. The wheel was marked off into thirty-seven compartments—one for each number, and one for zero.

At the wheel sat Tickey Tapp in person—a low-browed, cunning-faced man, in evening-clothes, which seemed to show up, as no other attire could have done, his half-bullying, half-cajoling countenance.

Tickey Tapp was acting as croupier—doubtless having more reliance upon his own skill with the wheel than anyone else's.

Behind him Mr. Griggs, the bookmaker, sat on a raised chair, acting the part of chef-de-partie, or overlooker of the game.

Two or three other men in dingy evening-clothes sat at the ends and sides of the long table, acting as croupiers for paying out or placing the stakes.

Round the table was a crowd. Lumley-Lumley looked them over with great curiosity. Except for the bareness of the furnishing, the room was very much like gambling-dens he had seen in many a low quarter of a Continental town.

But the visitors to Tickey Tapp's precious establishment were different.

There were St. Jim's fellows there—Lumley-Lumley recognised Cutts of the Fifth, Knox and Sefton of the Sixth. They were "seeing life," and paying pretty handsomely for the sight.

There were others that Lumley-Lumley knew by sight; tradesmen from Wayland, also seeing life; shop assistants and betting men; men and youths of all classes and stations. Some of them wore moustaches that were evidently false, not caring to have their faces recognised in such company, in such a place.

There were fifty or sixty people in the room altogether.

Tickey Tapp had his hand upon the wheel as the juniors came in, and was inviting the punters to play.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

He gave Gore a nod, and smiled to Lumley-Lumley. Evidently he was glad to see the millionaire's son coming back to the fold.

"Glad to see you again, Master Lumley-Lumley," he said.

Lumley-Lumley nodded.

Stakes were being placed on the green cloth. The simplicity of the punters made the outsider of St. Jim's smile compassionately. It did not seem to occur to most of them that Ticky Tapp had any control over the wheel, and could bring up any number he chose. Even before the roulette

wheel started on its revolutions the players mostly put down their money. Gold and silver coins were scattered over the numbers, or in the spaces devoted to the colours.

Some, however, seemed to know the game better. They waited till Ticky Tapp had started the wheel, and sent the ball whizzing round the bowl, before they laid down their stakes. They knew better than the others, or they suspected. But they did not suspect that Tickey Tapp could control the wheel up to the very last moment when the ball dropped into one of the sockets.

"Make your game," said Ticky Tapp. "Game made? Rien ne va plus!" he added in French, in the approved style of a Continental croupier, meaning that it was now too late to place fresh stakes, or to alter those already laid.

The ball was still whizzing round.

It slackened, and sloped down the rim of the bowl towards the still revolving wheel, and clicked as it came into contact with it, and rolled into one of the sockets.

The hole into which it fell was numbered five, in red.

"Five, red, impair, and manque!" said Ticky Tapp.

Lumley-Lumley closed one eye at Gore.

Number five had not been staked at all, but there were plenty of stakes on other numbers—all of which were immediately raked in by the croupiers.

Gore avoided Lumley-Lumley's eyes.

CHAPTER 13.

The Hawk and the Pigeons.

"MAKE your game, gentlemen!"

A new round was commencing. Lumley-Lumley did not play; he stood looking on with his hands in his pockets. Gore changed his five-pound note, and began to stake.

A fat gentleman in evening clothes, with a huge diamond blazing in his shirt-front, was staking heavily with gold. The fat gentleman's face looked something like a prize-fighter's; and his diamond would have been worth a thousand pounds at least—if it had been worth anything. He seemed to have plenty of money. He staked sovereigns on a dozen numbers at least, in some cases piling up the golden coins in little heaps. On number five he placed six sovereigns in a pile. As the bank paid out thirty-five times the amount of a stake on a winning number, he stood to win two hundred and ten pounds if number five came up.

Lumley-Lumley watched with a cynical smile.

He knew that number five would come up, unless Tickey Tapp missed it by accident, as sometimes happens to the most skillful croupiers.

Lumley-Lumley had, as he had told Gore, seen the game worked from inside. And he knew at a glance that the fat gentleman was a "stool-pigeon"—one of the "gang" whose business was to win with large stakes, to encourage other players. For if the fat gentleman won over two hundred pounds on a single coup, and was paid up on the nail, how could the other players suspect that the bank was dishonest? The unfortunate dupes did not know that it was all part of the scheme, and Tickey Tapp could afford to pay out money to his partner, as every sovereign of it remained, of course, in the firm.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

The ball whizzed round again.

Click!

It dropped into number five.

"By Jove, five's repeated!" said Cutts, of the Fifth, with quite the air of an old habitue of casinos.

Gore had lost his money—he had played on number thirty-six. He turned to Lumley-Lumley with a sneer on his face.

"What does that look like?" he said in a low voice.

"You see that fat chap's won!"

"I guess so."

"Tickey Tapp has to pay him over two hundred quid—look at him handing over the bank-notes," said Gore enviously.

"They won't go far!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that people who win big sums at roulette are either newcomers who are being encouraged to play, or else 'stool-pigeons' employed by the bank to encourage the fools. That money remains in the firm."

"Oh, I don't believe it!"

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if it's true," said Gore, "I can win by backing the same number."

"Ass! It won't come up then."

"I won't put my money down till after the ball's started."

"I guess it will come to the same thing."

"I'm going to try."

Gore approached the table again.

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A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co.
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

He waited till the fat gentleman was playing. The heavy punter placed five sovereigns on number seventeen. Gore waited till Tickey Tapp had started the wheel and the ball, and then placed five shillings beside the five sovereigns.

Tickey Tapp had his eyes on the table. He gave Gore a quick, searching look. That look said as plainly as words could say, "So you tumble, do you?"

The next instant Tickey Tapp's face was quite expressionless again.

Gore watched to see whether he meddled with the wheel in any way. There was no evidence that he did. But when the ball dropped into a hole, it was into thirty-four, the next number to seventeen on the wheel.

The fat gentleman had lost his five sovereigns. Gore had lost his five shillings. If Lumley-Lumley was not mistaken, the bank made more profit out of the five shillings than out of the five pounds.

Gore looked blank for a moment. What had happened, had borne out Lumley-Lumley's warning to him.

But a gambler is the last person in the world to take a warning. He would rather play and lose than not play at all.

Gore went on playing. In a quarter of an hour his five pounds had melted away, and he came over to where Lumley-Lumley was standing watching the game.

"All gone?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

Gore nodded. "Sorry, old man," said Lumley-Lumley. "But you've got no chance, you know."

Gore gritted his teeth. "I'm just getting on to the game," he said, "and I don't believe a word about their cheating. Lend me a quid."

"What's the good?"

"Lend it me!"

"Look here," said Lumley-Lumley, "there's a chap there—he's a grocer in Wayland, and can't be one of the gang. He's backing red with two pounds a time. Put five shillings a time on black, and you'll win—excepting when Tickey Tapp makes a mistake, and lets the ball drop into red."

"I'll do it, if you'll lend me the money."

Lumley-Lumley handed Gore a sovereign. Gore changed

it into silver, and took his companion's advice. He won on black, and won again; and in spite of himself he had to admit that Lumley-Lumley had given him good advice. Tickey Tapp was regarding him very queerly. Gore determined to make a good thing out of his chance while it lasted, and he placed all he still had on black for a "run of colour." The Wayland grocer was still playing on red, and he had placed a five-pound note there.

And it was red that came up!

The Wayland grocer—who had just sworn inwardly that if he lost that fiver he would clear out—won! And went on playing—and that fiver did not remain his very long. It departed, and drew other fivers after it! Gore had lost, and was cleared out!

He came back to Lumley-Lumley.

"The chap won on red," he muttered.

"Yes, when you doubled on black, ass, and allowed Tickey Tapp to see what you were doing," growled Lumley-Lumley. "Why couldn't you be satisfied with what you could get?"

"Lend me another fiver."

"I guess not."

"A quid, then?"

"I've only got one more quid with me."

"Lend it me. Luck may change after all—at the very last piece."

Lumley-Lumley made a grimace, and handed out the sovereign. Gore hurried to the table with it. If he could win with a gold piece on a number, it would mean thirty-five pounds—all his losses recovered, and a good sum in hand. He resolved to chance it. He scanned the board. The punters were playing heavily now, and nearly every number glistened with gold or piles of silver. Of all the numbers, only number six was left untouched. Gore placed his sovereign on number six—after the wheel had started. If there was anything in Lumley-Lumley's description of the game, he ought to win now!

He waited feverishly for the announcement to come.

The wheel slacked down—the ball clicked into a socket.

"Twenty-seven, red, impair, and passe!"

Twenty-seven was the next number to six on the wheel. Gore's chance was gone—by a single hole! The wretched boy gritted his teeth.

What had happened bore out only too well what Lumley-Lumley had told him. Tickey Tapp had intended 6 to come up, in order to clear the board. By some unknown and mysterious means the wheel had been checked, after Gore had laid his coin on six, and the next number had come. On twenty-seven was a half-crown, and the bank had to pay out thirty-five times that amount to the winner. But it had been saved from paying out thirty-five pounds to Gore.

The Shell fellow clenched his hands.

"Had enough?" asked Lumley-Lumley, as George Gore retreated, dispirited and wretched, from the table.

"Got any more money?"

"No!"

"You saw what a narrow shave it was!" muttered Gore.

"The next hole on the wheel—the very next number!"

"But I told you that—"

"Oh, rot! I don't believe a word of it! He can't control the wheel."

"If you still believe that, old man, I'm afraid you're a hopeless case, and it's no good my staying here," said Lumley-Lumley. "Anyway, you're stony now, so let's go."

"I'm going to speak to Cutts."

Gore approached Cutts and Knox and Sefton in turn. He was evidently trying to borrow money; and his face when he rejoined Lumley-Lumley showed that he had not succeeded.

"Sure you've got nothing left?" he asked desperately.

"Quite sure."

"You might have brought some more with you."

"For you to chuck away—thanks!"

"Oh, let's get out!" said Gore miserably.

They left the place. Gore hardly spoke a word as they tramped away over the moor, and back to the school, under the midnight sky. It was not till they were within the walls of St. Jim's that he revealed what was working in his mind.

"Look here, Lumley!" he muttered, catching the Outsider's arm. "You've got some more money in your study—"

"Well?"

"Lend me some, and I'll go back—"

"You haven't learned your lesson yet, then?"

"I know I can win, with sufficient capital"

"After what you've seen with your own eyes?"

"Oh, rot! I don't believe a word of it. It's all chance—and luck must change."

Lumley-Lumley shrugged his shoulders.

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"You're a bigger ass than I took you for, that's all," he said. "You've had seven pounds from me, and you'll never be able to pay a shilling of it back. I've tried to get you out of this, for old times' sake. If you can't be cured, I'm done. And I've got no more money to chuck away to those thieves."

"I'll pay it all back—"

"When you win?"

"Ye-es."

"When the cows come home!" said Lumley-Lumley contemptuously. "Rats!"

"You won't lend it to me?"

"No, I won't."

"Then go and hang yourself," snarled Gore. "I'll get it from somewhere else—somehow—and I'll break that bank yet."

"Gore! What are you going to do?"

"Mind your own business."

Gore disappeared into the darkness. Lumley-Lumley followed him more slowly towards the School House. He climbed in at the box-room window, and went to the Fourth Form dormitory. But Gore had not gone to his dormitory. He had gone to his study—the study he shared with Vavasour.

CHAPTER 14.

Gore's Crime!

TOM MERRY moved in his bed, and awoke.

It was very dark in the dormitory; and in the darkness someone was standing beside his bed, and shaking him by the shoulder.

"Grooh!" murmured the captain of the Shell. "Wharrer marrer? 'Tain't rising-bell."

"Wake up!"

It was Jerrold Lumley-Lumley's voice.

Tom Merry started up in bed. It was past midnight, and he was amazed. He was wide-awake enough now.

"That you, Lumley?"

"I guess so."

"What on earth are you doing out of bed at this time of night?"

"Trying to wake you up, I guess."

"Well, I'm awake now. What's the matter?"

"Matter enough," Lumley-Lumley struck a match. "Look at Gore's bed!"

Tom Merry blinked in the light of the match. George Gore's bed was empty; the black sheep of the Shell was absent again.

"He's gone out, then," said Tom. "It's happened before, Lumley. How did you know?"

"Because I've been to the Old Manor with him."

Tom Merry started.

"You have?"

"I guess so. I told you I was going into the game with him, to teach him better. I've tried it."

"What are they doing there?" asked Tom, in a low voice, as the match went out, and the Shell dormitory was plunged in darkness again.

"Playing roulette."

"And Gore—"

"He played, too—and was swindled like the rest."

"Blessed if I know where he gets the money from!"

"I guess he got some from me; and he's sold things, and owes money all round. He was swindled under his very nose, but he wouldn't believe it. I came back to the school with him, but I guess I didn't go back to bed. I waited to hear if he came up to the dorm."

"And he didn't?"

"No. He's gone out again."

"Gone out again!" said Tom Merry. "Gone back to that place?"

"You bet!"

"But what's the good of his going back if he's got no money?"

"I'm afraid he's found some," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley quietly. "That's why I've come to you, Tom Merry."

Tom drew a deep breath.

"Do you mean to say that—that he's taken money—money that isn't his?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

"I know he's gone back, and he wouldn't go without money—and he had no money of his own."

"Good heavens!"

"I want you to come down with Vavasour."

"Why Vavasour?"

"To see whether he misses anything from his study. You know he shares his study with Gore, and Gore would know where he keeps his valuables; and he's always got such a blessed lot of tin."

"I understand."

Tom Merry slipped out of bed, and stepped to Vavasour's bedside. The new boy of the Shell woke as Tom shook him.

"Hallo!" he said drowsily.

"Will you get up, Vavasour, and come down to your study? It's important," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Don't talk now; I don't want the fellows to hear."

"Right-ho!" said Vavasour quietly.

Tom Merry and Vavasour dressed quietly and quickly in the darkness. Lumley-Lumley waited for them. They left the dormitory silently, leaving the rest of the Shell asleep.

Vavasour followed his companions to the study without a word. He knew that something unusual must have happened, but he waited patiently to be enlightened.

"What is it?" he asked at last, as they stopped in the Shell passage.

"Come into your study."

"My study?" said Vavasour.

Tom Merry nodded, and opened the study door. The door was closed, and the blind carefully lowered, before Lumley-Lumley lighted the gas. Then Vavasour looked at his two companions in amazed inquiry.

"What on earth does this mean, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry's face was pale and excited. Lumley-Lumley's was hard and grim.

"Do you keep any money in the study?" Tom asked.

"Yes; in my desk."

"Much?" asked Tom.

"I have twenty pounds there."

"See if it's safe!"

"Oh!" said Vavasour. He went to his desk, and examined it, and uttered a sudden sharp exclamation. "Somebody's been here."

"Is the money there?"

"No!"

Vavasour pointed to a drawer of which the lock was broken. It had evidently been forced open with some tool.

"The drawer was always kept locked, and I have the key on my chain," he said. "The lock has been busted."

"I guess that settles it," said Lumley-Lumley.

"You know who did it?" asked Vavasour.

"I know that Gore came in here. I suppose he knew that you kept money there?"

Vavasour nodded.

"Yes, he knows that, of course; so does Skimpole. But—but has Gore taken it? He's got his faults; but I should never have believed him to be a thief."

"The next step to gambling is stealing," said Tom Merry quietly. "It's like drink, I suppose—takes hold of a chap and drives him out of his senses. Gore isn't in his right senses now; he's like a madman. He's done this—the fool!"

"The rascal, you mean!" said Vavasour.

"Rascal, too, but more fool than rascal!" said Tom.

"He has been gambling to-night, and Lumley-Lumley has seen him swindled. The idiot has gone back for a last chance—not that he has any chance—and he's taken your money to play with. I don't think he means to steal it. He's going to put it back, when he comes back—if he wins—"

"But he won't win."

"No; and that makes him a thief, but he doesn't mean to be one. It's in your hands, Vavasour, to show him up, disgrace him, and get him kicked out of the school. And he hasn't treated you well!"

"He hasn't," said Vavasour grimly. "He showed me up once—you remember that."

"I haven't forgotten it. Only—"

"Only what?"

"You've the right and the power to ruin him," said Tom Merry. "Only—he's a St. Jim's chap, and he's more fool than rogue. I wouldn't be hard on him if I were you."

"I can't lose twenty pounds."

"I don't mean that. We shall have to stop him, and take the money back—and then I think we might keep mum."

"That's what I was thinking, I guess!" said Lumley-Lumley. "I was taking a hand in this game to save him, not to ruin him."

"I'll do as you think best," said Vavasour, after a pause. "The money isn't very much to me; though, of course, it would be a big sum to lose. But I don't want to be hard on Gore. I think he must be feeling pretty bad as it is—he must have been simply desperate before he came to this."

Tom Merry's face lighted up.

"Then you'll help us to save the poor idiot, instead of crushing him down?"

"Yes, I will."

"You won't be sorry for it, Vavasour. And we shall get the money back."

"I guess I've got that cut and dried," said Lumley-Lumley. "You fellows and the others will have to come. There's only one way of stopping this game."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "TAGGLES' BENEFIT!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Informing the police?" asked Vavasour.
 "That's one way. It would serve Tickey Tapp right enough. But it would mean utter ruin for the St. Jim's chaps mixed up in it. I dare say they deserve it, but we don't want to be the cause of it."
 "Then what can we do?"
 "Take the law into our own hands," said Lumley-Lumley coolly.
 Tom Merry looked at him quickly.
 "You—you mean—"
 "I mean, take a big gang of fellows we can rely on, and smash up the place!"

CHAPTER 15.
On the Warpath.

TOM MERRY drew a deep breath. Tom and his chums had discussed the matter more than once, trying to think of some plan of campaign for rescuing Gore from his evil associates, and punishing the rascals who were leading him to his ruin.
 But any scheme so daring as this had not occurred to their minds. Yet its very daring recommended it to Tom Merry.
 "Good egg!" he said.
 But Vavasour looked very startled.
 "Smash up the place!" he repeated blankly.
 Lumley-Lumley nodded coolly.
 "I guess that's my idea. Look here, the place is run against the law. If the police knew they'd raid the old Manor House, and arrest every man jack found in the place. Well, we don't want to get the police in, so we'll raid it ourselves."
 "Great Scott!"
 "I was there," said Lumley-Lumley. "There were about fifty or sixty people. But they wouldn't show fight. At the first alarm, they'd be scared to death of being recognised and had up before the magistrates. You must have heard of gaming-dens being raided by the police. At the first alarm there's a rush to escape. It's nobody's business to put up a fight for the croupiers. Everybody wants to get away without being recognised. But even if they showed fight, we could handle them."
 "Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry.
 "It means breaking bounds at night—going to a place out of bounds, too," said Vavasour. "There would be an awful row if it came out."
 "It won't come out. Knox and Cutts and Gore won't tell the Head they were found in a gambling-den, I suppose?"
 "Ha, ha! No!"
 "Tickey Tapp & Co. will be glad enough to clear off without making a fuss. They're liable to arrest, and they know it."
 "That's so!"
 "Then where's the danger for us? I guess it will be all serene. And we'll make it impossible for the scoundrels to carry on their business there any longer. We'll take tools with us and break up the roulette machine, for one thing."
 "Good egg!"

"It's a go," said Tom Merry. "We'll wake up the fellows, and they'll come right enough. What Gore's done we'll keep dark among us three. We'll take twenty chaps and raid the show. If I'd thought of the idea myself I should have done it. It's a bit startling at first, but it's a good idea."
 "I'll go!" said Vavasour.
 "I'll call the fellows," said Tom Merry. "I wish we could have Figgins & Co. with us; but we can't wake them up in the New House. But there are plenty of School House chaps game for it, I know that."
 "Sooner the quicker," said Lumley-Lumley. "I'll get the Fourth, and you get the Shell fellows out. Every chap take a cricket-stump or something in case it's wanted."
 "Right-ho!"

Tom Merry and Vavasour returned quietly to the Shell dormitory, and Lumley-Lumley to the Fourth-Form quarters. It was long past midnight, and all the fellows were fast asleep, the last light in the last window below had long been extinguished.
 It was a risky proceeding that the heroes of the School House had undertaken; but Tom Merry did not shrink from it, and neither did his chums when they were awakened, and it was explained to them.

Tom Merry called Manners and Lowther first, and then Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane, and Bernard Glyn, and several others.
 There was a slight buzz in the sleeping dormitory. Other fellows whom Tom Merry had not called woke up, and wanted to know what was going on. Crooke was specially curious.
 "You fellows going on the razzle?" he asked.
 Tom Merry did not trouble to reply.
 "I guess it won't be much of a razzle for the other party!" chuckled Buck Finn, the American junior who was one of the party.

"Quiet!" said Tom Merry. "If we got a prefect down on us, all the fat would be in the fire."
 "Yes, rather!"
 The Shell fellows dressed themselves, and, taking their boots in their hands, they descended the stairs to the study passage.
 There they were joined by Lumley-Lumley and the members of the Fourth Form who had joined the expedition. Blake & Co. had risen as one man when they heard the news from Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.
 Blake, and Digby, and Herries, and D'Arcy were all there, with Reilly and Kerruish and Ray and Lorne and several more.

Taken altogether, Shell fellows and Fourth, the party numbered twenty.
 And in their studies they provided themselves with cricket-stumps, to be armed in case of a tussle at the Old Manor House on the moor. They did not mean to stand upon ceremony. They had the right on their side, and they had the law on their side, and they meant to come down very heavy on the secret gaming club.
 Most of the fellows regarded it as an adventure, and were very keen about it for that reason; but some of them took a more serious view of the matter.

The crime of George Gore was kept to the three fellows who knew of it; if Gore could yet be saved, they would keep his miserable shame a secret.
 Monty Lowther struck matches in his study to sort out his tool-chest. Lowther, like Blake of the Fourth, was an amateur carpenter. When he mended things the results were not always satisfactory. But this time he was only required to destroy, and there was no doubt that he would excel himself.
 "They won't get that roulette-wheel round again when I've once got to work on it with my hammer," he said confidently.

"It would be a good ideah to take a cwowah," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully. "The wottahs may try to keep us out, and we may have to break in."
 "I guess that's all right," said Lumley-Lumley. "I know the pass-word, and they'll open the door to us. If they don't we can smash in the windows of the roulette-room. It's on the ground floor, and most of the glass is gone away. They've got hangings inside to keep in the light, and we could have 'em down in a jiffy."
 "Bai Jove! It will be wathah a surprisw for the wottahs."
 "They'll think the police have got on to 'em!" chuckled Jack Blake. "I've got a police-whistle, by the way. Might give 'em a toot on it to scare 'em when we rush in."
 "Good egg! That will send them bolting!" laughed Tom Merry. "And then we can take our time to wreck the show."
 "Yaas, wathah!"

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"Mind, not a sound as you get out," whispered Tom Merry, as he led the way to the box-room at the back of the House.

One after another the "army" lowered themselves from the box-room window to the roof of the outhouse below, and thence to the ground.

Tom Merry was the last, and he closed the window carefully after him. Like dim shadows the silent juniors flitted across the quadrangle.

The school wall was climbed, and they dropped into the road. Under the glimmering stars they set off at a swinging pace.

"We sha'n't catch Gore before he gets there, I guess," Lumley-Lumley muttered.

"Before he has lost the money, I hope," said Tom Merry. "Still, Vavasour knows the numbers of the notes, and he can claim them in any case."

"I guess so."

The party swung on through the dark wood, their hearts beating high with excitement. They came out on the road over the moor.

Dim and dark the Old Manor House loomed up from amid the gaunt trees in the ruined and tangled wilderness of neglected gardens.

"Pewwaps I'd bettah go and scout first, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a thoughtful sort of way.

"Perhaps you hadn't," murmured Blake, taking hold of his elegant chum's arm. "Perhaps you'd better be quiet." "Weally, Blake—"

"Follow your leader!" said Tom Merry, and he left the road and plunged away through the ferns and straggling gorse.

Five minutes more and they were in the dark hall of the old mansion. Lumley-Lumley groped his way on, and tapped at the locked door in the same way that George Gore had tapped earlier that night.

The door opened.

CHAPTER 16.

The Raid.

TICKEY TAPP looked at his watch.

The roulette-room was still crowded, though a number of the gamblers had gone, for the hour was growing very late.

The meetings of the secret gambling club were held at night, and at a late hour, for very good reasons—to escape discovery by the police and to enable the foolish punters to come and go unseen. When he had a good crowd there with money to lose, Tickey Tapp would keep the wheel spinning till close upon dawn. Tickey Tapp knew that the game could not last long in any one place, and he wanted to make hay while the sun shone—to extract all that was to be extracted from his victims before the police fell upon him and closed his nefarious establishment.

It was close upon two o'clock now, and the crowd was thinning off, and Tickey Tapp was thinking of closing down the game.

George Gore had re-entered, and Tickey Tapp's eyes glimmered as he saw him come back. He knew that the foolish lad had been away for more money, and had come back to try his luck once more; not that "luck" had much to do with the game of roulette, but Gore firmly believed that it had.

Gore walked up to the table and laid down a five-pound note to be changed.

Money was handed out for it in sovereigns, half-sovereigns, and half-crowns. Half-a-crown was the smallest stake allowed at Tickey Tapp's table.

Tickey Tapp decided to run on the game a little longer. He could see that Gore was in funds again, and he intended to have those funds before he stopped the roulette-wheel for the night.

And in order to induce the reckless and stupid boy to plunge, and get it over, he gave him a win to start with. Gore laid a couple of sovereigns on red, and as another punter had placed an equal amount on black, Tickey Tapp lost nothing by letting red win. A win of a couple of pounds to start with encouraged Gore; his luck had changed at last, and he was going to break the bank. His eyes gleamed and his breath came thick and fast.

He deserted the colours, and began to play upon the numbers. Gore observed that the numbers were nearly all covered, and remembering, in spite of himself, Lumley-Lumley's warnings, he dropped a sovereign on zero after the ball had started. Then he placed half-crowns on numbers 26, 32, 3, and 15—the numbers each side of zero on the wheel. If the ball stopped anywhere near zero he was sure to score now.

The wheel slacked down.

"Nineteen, red, impair, and passe."

Gore clenched his hand.

Nineteen was the next number to 15; he had missed a win by a single hole again.

And in doing so, he had lost his sovereign and his four half-crowns with which he had covered up so many numbers in order to make sure. He anathematised his stupidity in not putting an extra half-crown on 19, refusing to believe that if he had done so 19 would not have been the number to come up.

"Make your game, gentlemen!" said Tickey Tapp blandly.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

It was a new-comer at the door. The punters were placing their stakes, and they did not take any notice of the knocking at the door. But as the door was opened by the man in charge there was a sudden disturbance.

Instead of the password being given there was the sound of a tussle, and the man in charge of the door came whirling through the heavy canvas hangings, dragging them down from the hocks with his weight.

Tickey Tapp started to his feet with an oath.

Pheep!

It was the shrill blast of a police-whistle.

Tickey Tapp turned pale.

"The police!" muttered Cutts of the Fifth.

"The police!" The words were repeated in various tones of fright among the players. "The police!"

Cutts of the Fifth made a dash for the window. He dragged away the canvas hangings there, and plunged headlong through the window, rolled in the ragged bushes outside, and picked himself up and ran. He had money on the table, but he left it there. He was only thinking of escaping without being recognised. Even Cutts' nerve shook at the thought of being arrested, and taken to the local gaol, to be bailed out by the Head in the morning. It would have been a sudden and disgraceful termination of his career at St. Jim's.

Knox and Sefton of the Sixth followed him like lightning. They were out of the window, and running as if for their lives, almost before the blast of the police whistle had died away.

Some of the players followed them through the window, and some fled by another door. Some stood transfixed, too scared and startled to act.

Among the latter was George Gore.

Tickey Tapp & Co. could not bolt. They had too much money on the table. And in another few moments they saw that it was unnecessary to run.

It was not the police.

The fellows who came crowding in at the doorway, pitching the doorkeeper out of the way, were certainly not policemen.

They were juniors of St. Jim's.

Tickey Tapp glared at them in angry amazement. He was relieved to find that his den had not been raided by the police. His sudden terror and dismay had changed to rage.

Gore swung round, and looked at the juniors blankly.

"Tom Merry!" he muttered. "You here!"

Tom Merry's hand was on Gore's shoulder the next moment.

"Where is Vavasour's money?" he said, in a low voice.

Gore blanched.

"Vavasour's money! What do you mean?" he muttered thickly.

"I mean that you have taken twenty pounds from Vavasour's desk, and you are going to give it back to him."

"Is that what you've come for, hang you!"

"That, and other things."

"Hang you!"

Vavasour and Lumley-Lumley took Gore by the arms. The other juniors had other work to do. Tom Merry left the bully of the Shell to Vavasour while he devoted his attention to Tickey Tapp & Co.

"My banknotes, please!" said Vavasour quietly. "Don't be afraid. We're going to keep it dark on conditions, Gore. But you've got to hand back the money."

Gore groped in his pockets, and without a word he handed the money back to its owner.

Vavasour slipped it into his pocket.

"Now get out, and leave me alone," muttered Gore.

Vavasour shook his head.

"We've come here to shut up this place," he said.

"What! What!"

"And you're going to promise never to see any of that gang again, or else you're going to be exposed in public as a thief!"

Gore groaned.

"Let me go! Hands off!"

Lumley-Lumley tightened his grip on Gore's arm.

"I guess we're sticking to you," he said.

Tickey Tapp and his associates had drawn together. The players had gone, or were going; they had no wish to be mixed up in a row. Only the gang remained—among them the fat gentleman whose great winnings had excited Gore's envy earlier in the evening. The way he acted now was a plain enough proof that he was a member of the gang. He was helping Griggs to collect up the money on the table. Some of the punters had grabbed some of it in the confusion, and some was scattered on the floor.

Tickey Tapp brandished a heavy fist at Tom Merry.

"Ow dare you come here?" he roared.

Tom eyed him scornfully.

"We've come here to get a schoolfellow out of your clutches, you swindling thief!" he said contemptuously.

"Don't you call me names," said Tickey Tapp furiously.

"I'm an honest man, and I run a fair game!"

"Rats!"

"You've got him, anyway," said Tickey Tapp. "Take 'im away! Clear out."

"We're not finished here yet."

Tickey Tapp clenched his hands.

"You impudent young scoundrel! What do you want?"

"We're going to smash up the place, and to-morrow the police will know that a gambling club has been run here," said Tom Merry calmly. "You had better clear out while you've got time, Mr. Tapp."

"I tell you—"

"Shove the table over!" shouted Blake.

"Hurrah!"

"Ovah with it, deah boys!"

Tickey Tapp simply danced with rage.

"You let my property alone!" he roared. "You—you young villains!"

"Shut up, or we'll shove you over, too!" said Blake.

"Hands off my property—"

"Now, then; all together!" said Kangaroo, of the Shell, grasping the roulette table.

Crash!

Tickey Tapp and Griggs and several more rascals rushed at the juniors to rescue their property. Tom Merry gave a shout:

"Collar them! Bump them! Wallop them!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hurrah!"

The excited juniors piled on the gang of gamblers. Tickey Tapp & Co. were simply overwhelmed by numbers. They were bumped on the floor, and rolled over, and sat upon by a dozen fellows, and pinned down helplessly.

In that position they had the pleasure, or otherwise, of watching the remorseless destruction of their property.

Tickey Tapp, who had paid twenty guineas—of somebody else's money—for that roulette machine, groaned as Monty Lowther's hammer descended upon it.

Crash! Crash! Crash! Crash!

The wheel flew into pieces under Lowther's terrific drives.

Meanwhile the other fellows were busy on the table and the chairs and everything else that belonged to the gambling club.

Smash! Crash! Smash! resounded on all sides. The gambling gang looked on in fury.

"There! I think I've about finished that!" said Monty Lowther, surveying his handiwork at length with justifiable pride.

He had finished it; there was no doubt about that. The roulette-wheel was in fragments, and the bowl it had revolved in was in fragments too. Tickey Tapp would require a new outfit when he re-started his Sporting Club in some other quarter.

Tom Merry looked round the wrecked room with a grin.

"I fancy that's pretty complete," he said. "Now for those swindlers! They ought to be put through it a bit."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't you dare to lay your 'ands on me!" roared Tickey Tapp. "I'll 'ave the law of yer!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, I think I can see you having the law of anybody," he said contemptuously. "The law would be very glad to get hold of you, Mr. Tapp. You know very well that if the police had found you here you would have been shoved into prison. There ought to be a law for giving rotters like you the cat! As there isn't, we'll give you the stump!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Roll 'em over and give 'em a dozen each!" said Blake.

"'Ands off!" shrieked Tickey Tapp.

"Lemme alone!" roared Mr. Griggs.

But the juniors did not heed them. Each of the gang, in the Gem Library.—No. 282.

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turn, was rolled over and given a dozen cuts with a cricket-stump. They roared and yelled and struggled, but that was all they could do.

"I guess we're finished here," drawled Lumley-Lumley. "Tickey Tapp, old man, you'd better vamoose the ranch. The police will be looking for you to-morrow. Gentlemen, chaps, and kids, it's time we got back to bed!"

"And the raiders, quite satisfied with the results of their visit to the old Manor House, crowded out of the wrecked room.

They left Tickey Tapp & Co. swearing fluently and vowing vengeance. But vengeance was not likely to be within their reach. Tickey Tapp was pretty certain to take Lumley's advice, and clear out of the neighbourhood while there was yet time. His game was up in that quarter, and he knew it.

Gore did not utter a word during the tramp home to St. Jim's. The juniors reached the School House, but as the Shell fellows went into their dormitory there was a sudden exclamation:

"So I've caught you!"

A light gleamed out. Knox was there! The prefect eyed the juniors with malicious satisfaction.

"Caught!" he said. "Out of bounds at three in the morning!"

Tom Merry looked at him steadily.

"Do you know where we've been, Knox?"

"I don't!" said the Sixth-Former. "But you'll have to explain to the Head in the morning, my fine fellow! You're caught at last!"

"You'd have seen us if you hadn't been in such a hurry to get through the window," said Kangaroo.

Knox jumped.

"What! What do you mean?"

"We've been to the old house on the moor," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Wha-a-at!"

"We've smashed up the gambling-club and wrecked the place, and we're going to set the police after those scoundrels to-morrow," said Tom Merry.

"You fancied it was a police raid, but it wasn't; it was us," said Monty Lowther. "You must allow me to compliment you on the way you whisked through the window, Knox, old man. I didn't know you were so strong on gymnastics."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It—it—it was you!" stuttered Knox at last.

"Yes. And if you want the matter out before the Head, we're quite ready to tell him the whole story," said Tom Merry scornfully.

"I—I—I sha'n't report you," muttered Knox. "I—I'm willing to look over this. I—I shall let the matter drop."

"You'd better," said Manners.

Knox slunk out of the dormitory. He had discovered that Tom Merry & Co. were absent on his return to the school. And he had anticipated a triumph over his old enemies in the Shell. His triumph had been short-lived. Knox was not likely to have the matter carried before the Head.

Tom Merry put out the light, and he sat on the edge of Gore's bed to speak to him before he turned in himself.

"Gore!"

"What do you want?" muttered Gore sullenly.

"I want to tell you that if you stop this foolery—and you'll have to stop it now—you've got nothing to fear."

"Vavasour—"

"Vavasour has agreed not to say a word. Lumley-Lumley knows, and he's going to keep mum. If you run straight after this not a word will be said about your taking Vavasour's money."

Gore drew a deep, deep breath.

"You haven't told the others?"

"Not a syllable."

"I've been a fool," muttered Gore—"a confounded fool! I was an idiot to think I could beat Tickey Tapp at his own game! Now I've had time to think over it I can see that Lumley-Lumley was right—the game isn't run fairly. And—"

"Chuck it right out of your mind, Gore, old man. There are better things to think about than rotten gambling."

"You're right, Tom Merry. I've made up my mind about that. And—and if you fellows keep dark what I've done, I swear that I'll never make a fool of myself like that again!"

Tom Merry's hand gripped Gore's in the darkness.

"Stick to that, old man, and you'll never be sorry for it," he said.

And Gore did stick to it; and certainly he never had any reason to be sorry that Tom Merry & Co. had saved him—though by somewhat rough-and-ready methods—from the road to ruin.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry and his chums next Wednesday. In the meantime just try your hand at "Poplets" in "THE PENNY POPULAR," out on Friday.)

THE CHEER-OH CHUMS!



A Grand, New, Short Serial Story.

THE FIRST INSTALMENT BRIEFLY EXPLAINED.

The Cheer-Oh Chums are the greatest of friends. Three of them are girls, whose names are Pat Wentworth, Polly Lake, and Madge Jackson, and all three are under the severe charge of Miss Primmer, headmistress of the Shoremouth High School for Girls. The other half of the Cheer-Oh Chums are three juniors belonging to a college within easy walking distance of Shoremouth. Their names are Jimmy Dunn, Billy Denton, and Dick Brewster. The Cheer-Oh Chums form a sort of secret society with one rule, and that is, all members must be always merry and bright. They

meet in a secret hut quite close to the two schools, and at every meeting they solemnly sing their anthem, which goes as follows:

"Come rain or fine or dull or shine, come fair or stormy weather;
Whatever comes the Cheer-Oh Chums will always stick together—

Will always stick together!"

(Now go on with the story.)

CHAPTER 2.

Wanted—Two Pounds.

"Of all the silly asses that had the nerve to pretend they were human beings, you're about the silliest."

The three boys were on their way back to the school, having parted with their girl chums, and the time had come for Jimmy and Billy to tell Dick as much of what they thought of him as they were able to express. It was Billy who commenced the attack.

"What's the matter with you?" Dick growled.

"Same as what's wrong with you. Stoney broke. So's Jim."

"Well?"

"It isn't well," Jimmy cried. "Blessed if I call it well. You—you deserve a month without the option of a fine."

"What on earth have I done?" Dick growled, still pretending not to know the cause of his chum's indignation.

"Are you a bloated millionaire?" Jimmy demanded fiercely.

"Course not."

"Then why in the world were you ass enough to suggest that the Cheer-ohs should spend next Tuesday at Cliffbury. You knew we were all broke, and the girls are broke, too."

"I didn't think. Sorry, you chaps. I thought what a ripping idea it 'ud be, and forgot all about money. I shall have ten bob at the end of the week."

Billy groaned.

"Ten bob!" he repeated scornfully. "Do you now how much a day at Cliffbury is going to cost us, what with railway fares and grub? Two quid—two blessed quid! We can't possibly do it under. Perhaps you know where it's coming from, because I don't."

"Of course he knows where it's coming from," said Jimmy. "He jolly well got us into the mess, so he can jolly well get us out again. Got any rich uncles you can write to, you howling muddler?"

"One; but I wanted to save him up for the holidays."

"Well, you can't," said Jimmy. "You jolly well write to him as soon as you get back. We'll help you compose the letter. Come to think of it, I've got an aunt who may be good for ten bob. Anyway, I'll drop her a polite note, and see."

"And I've got a godfather who sometimes dubs up," Billy added. "He's frightfully keen on poetry, and if I can make some up, and send it on to him—"

"The stuff I wrote about the Cheer-oh Chums'll do," said Jimmy. "Mind you write to-night."

Dick took advantage of his chums' optimism to try to re-establish himself in their good graces.

"We shall be all right," he affirmed. "We'll be howling Rothschilds if all this comes off."

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: **"TAGGLES' BENEFIT!"** A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co, By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"It doesn't say you're not a howling fathead, all the same," growled Billy. "Suppose we can't raise the tin, after all, how are we to let the girls know? We can't write to them, for all their letters are opened and read. They'll turn up on Tuesday, having got leave to stop out all day, and we shall have to turn up and say we can't go, after all. Nice fools we shall look."

"And," added Jimmy, "they'll have to pretend they don't mind, and tell us it doesn't matter a bit."

The two indignant ones snorted, and Dick retired into his shell, as it were.

"Nother thing," Jimmy continued, after a pause, "our new chum, Madge Jackson, has got a young brother coming to the coll. the day after to-morrow. We shall have to be decent to the kid, and that means treating him. Where are we going to find the tin for that?"

"Well, it isn't my fault he's coming," said Dick. "I'm not his pater, am I? One thing, my credit's good for another few bob at the tuckshop. Now, suppose we chuck rowing?"

"All right," said Jimmy. "We'll call it pax. Dismissed with a caution under the First Offenders' Act. I think we'll do a small sprint, or we shall be late for prep."

They got in just as the bell was ringing, and went straight to the study they shared together in Bennet's, an in-College house on the east side of the close.

There, with chairs drawn up to the table, they got instantly to work, and, hurrying through their preparation, had half an hour to spare before the bell went for supper.

"Now for the letters," said Jimmy, putting his books away, and taking out a box of stationery.

Jimmy, who was acknowledged to be a marvel at composition, wrote his own letter, and was part author of those sent off by his chums, with the result that the following missives were dropped into the school letter-box:

"Dear Uncle James,—You will wonder why I have not written for such a long time. As a matter of fact, I have been busy with my lessons, and we have all been deeply distressed at the illness of our lady mayoress, who is a friend and well-wisher of the College. Now, dear uncle, she is happily recovered, and we are to have a whole holiday on Tuesday to commemorate the event. We think of spending the day at Cliffbury—that is, if we have any money. Isn't money a dreadful thing, uncle? I wonder if we shall have any! Do you think we shall? Please give my love to aunt, and believe me,—Your loving nephew, DICK."

Jimmy's letter was not less artistic. He wrote:

"My darling Auntie,—When are you coming to see me again? Last time you came down here all the chaps thought you were my sister, and tried to get me to give them photographs. Funny mistake, wasn't it, auntie? Do you remember Dick Brewster, the nice boy who made tea for us when you came here? He's got himself mixed up with a secret society called the Cheer-ohs, and unless he can raise ten bob to pacify them he looks like getting scragged. What do you think he had better do? Your advice is always invaluable.—Your affectionate JIMMY."

Billy addressed his godfather as follows:

"Dear Godfather,—I know you're always writing poetry, so what do you think of the enclosed? If you like I will sell it to you for two quid, and you can send it up to the papers, and say you did it yourself. Anyhow, please send the two quid.—Your ever affectionate, BILLY."

"P.S.—Please don't forget the two quid, because it's awfully important."

"If that little lot doesn't fetch 'em," said Jimmy, "nothing jolly well will! Drop 'em in the box as you go down to the dining-room."

A Question of Too Much Grub!

DICK, running into the junior day-room to get his cap, saw a very small boy with a very big hat-box under his arm, attempting to defend himself against some dozen Second Form youngsters, who were executing a kind of war-dance round him. He was not being hurt, but he seemed considerably frightened, and about as able to take care of himself as a rabbit in a cage full of boa-constrictors.

The youngster's face was strange to Dick, which meant that he was a new boy, for Dick knew every boy in all seven Houses of the school by sight, if not by name.

Suddenly he remembered it was Friday—the day Madge's brother was expected.

Accordingly he went to the rescue, and, charging through the ring, administered a clout here or there, where he thought it was deserved.

"Now then," he cried, "let the new kid alone, can't you? Beastly little bullies! All right, young Robbins, I'll give you toke when I catch you! Richardson minor, I'll slosh you over the collar-bone when I meet you again! And you can tell your precious brother about if you like!"

The ring promptly broke up, and those who had formed

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it fled precipitately. From a safe position close to the door they turned to jeer at Dick.

"Think you're beastly funny, don't you?"

"Yah, gorilla-face!"

"Who's afraid of silly old Brewster?"

"Who stopped the clock by looking at it?"

"Yah! Boo! Yah!"

Dick took no notice.

"Your name Jackson?" he said to the new boy.

"Yes, if you please," said Madge's brother, still hugging his hatbox like a baby.

He spoke in a thin, reedy voice, and looked as if he thought Dick was going to make a meal of him.

"I s'pose you haven't been here very long?"

"Only a few minutes, if you please."

"You've been put in this House?"

"Yes, if you please."

"Well, I s'pose you've been put here whether I please or not. Don't look at me like that. I don't bite on Fridays, because it's unlucky. Don't say 'If you please' every time you open your mouth. I s'pose you're hungry? What?"

"Yes, if you—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, yes, thank you."

Dick grinned.

"I like the 'thank you,'" he said. "Well, come along to the shop, and we'll see what we can do. I'm going to keep an eye on you. I know your sister, you see."

"What, Madge?" said the new boy, opening his eyes very wide.

"Guessed it first time!"

"She's at Miss Primmer's," young Jackson volunteered. "I'm going there to see her every Sunday afternoon. Do all the other boys know her?"

"No, they don't!" said Dick quickly. "And don't you tell any of 'em that I do, if you value your skin! It's a secret. See? And don't you be so jolly polite to everyone, or you'll have a rough time here. Now we'll see if there's any grub left at Mother Gudgeon's."

They went off together, and the new boy waited outside the shop while Dick went in and made sure that his credit was good until Saturday week.

Hubert Jackson was very shy at first, but he allowed himself to be persuaded to start off with a cream-bun and a bottle of ginger-beer. Then he had another of each, and then another. After the third, Dick began to open his eyes; after the fourth he caught his breath; after the fifth he went in search of Jimmy and Billy, and brought them back with him to the shop.

Spellbound, they watched the diminutive new boy eat and drink. And when he at last confessed that he had had enough, Jimmy grasped him warmly by the hand.

"The record's broken!" he cried. "Eleven cream-buns and five ginger-beers in sixteen minutes thirty-five and two-fifths seconds! You ought to do it on the stage. Hold hard, kid, there's nothing to blub about! What's the matter with you?"

"Please," said the new boy, trembling—"please, I don't feel very well!"

Billy gasped.

"Shouldn't think you did!" he exclaimed. "Where don't you feel well?"

Hubert Jackson pointed to a spot between two of the buttons of his waistcoat.

"There?" said Jimmy, prodding him.

"Wow! Yes, there."

Billy frowned at Dick.

"You've stuffed the little beggar up to his eyes!" he said. "Nice thing to do to the brother of a Cheer-oh!"

"I only meant to be decent to the kid."

"Well, if he doesn't peg out it won't be your fault," said Jimmy. "I never saw such an utter ass! Come on, new kid—better come and see ma. You hand him over to the matron, Dick. It's your job."

The three chums did not meet again until the five-till-six recreation hour, when Dick was able to issue a bulletin as to the new boy.

"I left him blubbing, and ma pushing quarts of physie down his neck," he said. "Funny kid, isn't he? But he's going to be jolly useful to us."

"How?" Billy demanded.

"Well, he's going to the school to see his sister every Sunday, and if we have any messages to send he can take them for us. For instance, if we can't raise the tin for Tuesday, we can give him a note for Madge, explaining that we can't come. See?"

"Oh, we shall get the tin all right, after those letters I got you chaps to write!" Jimmy observed, with a cocksure air. "You wait and see. We ought to hear from them by Sunday morning."

They waited—and saw.

No Luck!

"PLEASE, sir, any letters for me?"
 "I know there's one for me, sir."
 "And me?"

"That's mine, sir—the grey envelope."
 It was after breakfast on Sunday, during the hour before second chapel. Mr. Bennet had suddenly appeared in the junior day-room of his House with the contents of the morning's postbag, and everyone in the room had crowded round him.

Mr. Bennet waved them back, with a tolerant smile, and read out a list of names. Letters were passed from hand to hand, and reached their owners, sometimes after mild scuffles.

Jimmy Dunn was the first of the three chums to get one. He glanced at the handwriting, grinned, and thrust it into his breast-pocket. Then came Dick's turn, and he grinned and did likewise. It seemed that Billy was likely to be left out, but the last letter of the bundle turned out to be his, and the handwriting filled him to the brim with hope.

Jimmy winked at Dick.
 "Come on!" he said.
 Dick linked his arm in Billy's.
 "Up to the study. And we'll count the takings."
 They raced upstairs and burst into their room, Billy seizing a chair and proceeding to wait with it.

"Told you it'd be all O.K., didn't I?" Jimmy chuckled.
 "You open yours first, Dick."
 Dick slit open the envelope, and drew out the folded sheet of notepaper. He shook the letter, but the expected postal-order did not flutter out. He looked into the envelope, and then at his chums, with a blank expression on his face.

"Nothing doing!" he groaned.
 Jimmy whistled.
 "Don't think I quite like your uncle," he remarked.
 "What does he say?"

Dick read a few lines, and screwed up his face.
 "He says, when I want money, why can't I ask for it straight out, instead of throwing out hints. He says, if I'd asked him in so many words he'd have sent me a quid. That's all through the blessed artistic letter you made me write, you silly ass!"

"How was I to know what sort of relatives you've got?" Jimmy growled defensively. "The letter was all right for the right kind of person. Bet you I've got something out of my aunt!"

"Look and see, then."
 Jimmy looked, and did not see.
 "My hat!" he gasped.

"Your aunt seems to be eccentric, like my uncle," Dick chuckled bitterly. "What does she say?"
 "She—she advises you to go to the—the police about the Cheer-ohs, Dick. She says they'll protect you. She'd willingly send the ten bob, but she wouldn't let it fall into their hands for worlds, as she wants to see them punished. She thinks you're being blackmailed by a giddy secret society!"

"More of your clever letter-writing!" Dick chuckled.
 "Let's see if Billy's got two quid for those lovely verses you wrote."

Billy had already opened his letter.
 "There's something here!" he chuckled. "A postal-order! Oh, it's only for ten bob!"

"Better than nothing," Jimmy murmured feebly. "What does your godfather think about the spring poem?"

"He says it's the rottenest thing he's ever read," Billy answered, not without enjoyment, "and— Oh, lor!"

"Go on!" said Dick.
 "He says it's like my beastly cheek to send him such a thing, and such a letter with it. He says my request for two pounds is about as nerry as the rest of the letter. However," he winds up, "I willingly send you ten shillings, on condition that you don't send me any more poetry. It strikes me, Jimmy, that you're not such a giddy marvel at getting relatives to shell out as you jolly well think."

"Well, we've got ten bob from him. Even if he didn't like the anthem, he put something into the treasury."
 "Something!" Dick echoed. "Yes, ten measly bob! I got ten bob from home yesterday, which makes a quid in all. We're still a quid short. Where's it coming from?"

Very reluctantly, Jimmy relinquished all hope.
 "It doesn't look as if it's coming from anywhere," he admitted. "We'll have to chuck going to Cliffbury next Tuesday, that's all."

Billy was staring at his postal-order as if he hoped that it would miraculously double itself.

"All very fine," he growled, "but how are we to let the girls know?"

"That's all right," said Dick. "I'll write a note to Madge, and her young brother can give it to her."

"Can he?" snapped Billy. "I'd like to see him. Do you know what young Jackson is doing now? He is lying in bed in the infirmary, seeing yellow specks and drinkin' soda-and-milk. The effects of those eleven cream buns you made the poor little scug swallow! Cheery mess you've got us into, Dick, and no mistake. He won't be out of bed for a week."

They glared at each other, each indignant with the other two. For a minute it looked like civil war amongst the Cheer-ohs.

"If you hadn't got us to send off those idiotic letters, we should have raised the cash," Dick said to Jimmy.

"It was you who got us in the mess in the first place," Jimmy retorted. "Who asked the girls to come to Cliffbury on Tuesday? Who made young Jackson so beastly ill that he won't be able to get up to Miss Primmer's this afternoon?"

"Yes!" Billy agreed.
 "Oh, you shut up!"
 "I sha'n't! You've got us into a howling, awful muddle—"

"All right," Dick retorted; "and I'll get you out of it. I'll let the girls know that we can't come on Tuesday."

"How?"
 "Sha'n't tell you! But I'll manage it all right, you see."
 "But—" Billy objected.

Jimmy interrupted by getting up and thrusting his chair noisily back.

"Leave the rotter alone!" he said to Billy. "He's got some fat-headed idea of his own, and he won't tell us anything about it. If you can get us out of the soup, Dick, well and good. If not, you'll be summoned to appear before the Cheer-ohs' Tribunal on Tuesday next. Come on, it's nearly church-time. We'd better go and brush our hats."

Dick's Scheme.

DICK'S scheme to set things right was one of great daring.

Madge's brother was expected at Miss Primmer's school that afternoon, and the youngster was much too unwell to go. Dick, therefore, decided that he would pay the girls' school a visit in his place, and warn Madge that Tuesday's project was "off." Miss Primmer had never seen young Jackson, and though she must have seen Dick among the three or four hundred other boys, the odds were against her remembering his face.

During the long Sunday dinner, Billy and Jimmy tried hard to get Dick to tell them what he meant to do, but Dick sat silent, impervious to hints.

"You're dressed very doggily," Billy remarked over his pudding.

"Aren't I always, then?"
 "Where did you bag the geranium?"
 "Go and fish!"

"He's going for a walk afterwards," said Jimmy, winking.
 Mr. Bennet rang a little bell, and the boys stood up, to the accompaniment of a scraping of chairs.

"Look here," Dick hissed, while Mr. Bennet was waiting for silence before saying grace, "if either you chaps follows me, it's all off. See?"

Billy and Jimmy looked hard at each other, and as they came together in the crush round the dining-room door on the way out, the former said:

"Let the old idiot have his way! He's got something up his sleeve."

So, after spending a few minutes glancing at the papers in the library, Dick set out for the High School, and did not feel nervous until he was actually ringing the bell. The parlourmaid who came to the door regarded him in open-eyed surprise.

"Miss Jackson in?" he asked. "I think she expects her brother."

He was glad to have escaped telling an untruth, and the maid interpreted his words in the way he hoped she would.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "Will you, please, step this way?"
 Dick entered, hat in hand, and was beginning to hope that he would not have to encounter Miss Primmer when that very lady descended the stairs. She looked at Dick as she might have looked at a slug, served accidentally with the salad.

"Good-afternoon!" she said abruptly and stiffly. "Who are you?"

"Er—er—ahem!" said Dick.
 "Surely," gasped Miss Primmer, "you can't be Master Hubert Jackson?"

Dick made noises in his throat which meant nothing at all, but Miss Primmer had now taken his identity for granted, and, approaching him, grasped him by the hand.

"I'm very pleased indeed to meet you," she said. "Your dear sister Madge is a favourite with us all. Dear me, what

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a big boy you are for eleven! If Madge hadn't told me your age, I should think you were nearer sixteen or seventeen."

"A— a lot of people think that," Dick stammered.

"Well, come in here," said Miss Primmer cordially, "and I'll send your sister in to you."

She hustled Dick into the drawing-room, and hurried away, leaving him limp and breathless. But the most difficult part of the programme was, as he thought, already over, and he was feeling almost at his ease when he heard footsteps in the hall once more.

The door opened, and Miss Primmer and Madge came into the room, the new Cheer-oh Chum being pushed along in advance by her headmistress.

"There's your brother Hubert, Madge," said Miss Primmer. "How do you think he's looking?"

Madge, who had been expecting to see her real brother, gave vent to a little gasp, and stopped dead. Dick feared at first that she was going to cry out.

He approached her in hot haste, knocking a chair over on the way.

"Er—how do you do?" he said, holding out his hand.

Miss Primmer laughed.

"What ridiculous children!" she said. "Aren't you going to kiss each other?"

"Eh?" said Dick, and knocked over another chair.

"No, Miss Primmer," said Madge sedately. "We never do."

"Never," said Dick, shaking his head.

"But, surely——" said Miss Primmer.

"Her father wouldn't like it—I mean, my father—no, our father——"

"And very sensible, too," said the headmistress, who never contradicted what a parent said. "Well, I expect you two have a lot to say to each other, so I'll leave you for the present. Madge, you may bring your brother up to my room to tea at four o'clock."

She departed, and they stood in silence while her footsteps died away. Then Dick exploded in a series of chuckles.

"I bet you didn't expect to see me!" he said.

"No, I didn't," the girl answered. "Dick, what ever made you do it? Why did you come here?"

"Special message from the boys' branch of the Cheer-ohs."

"But—but there'll be an awful row!"

"Rats! She doesn't guess."

"No, not now," said Madge. "But what about next Sunday, when Hubert comes to see me instead of you? Do you think she won't be able to tell the difference?"

Dick's lips emitted a long, low whistle.

"Golly!" he gasped. "I never thought of that!"

"And I—I shall be expelled!" Madge faltered.

Dick squared his shoulders. Amongst themselves, the Cheer-ohs were equals, and always pulled together, but when there was trouble in the wind the boys generally did their best to take it all.

"Don't you worry," he said. "I—I'll speak to her. I'll make her see that it's all my fault. What a fathead I am! The other chaps are quite right."

"They're not!" Madge said unexpectedly. "And you're not a fathead!"

"Look here," Dick said. "I must fix it up with your young brother, and come here every Sunday instead of him. See? Then Miss Primmer 'ud never know."

"She'd be bound to find out after a time," Madge responded. "Think of the hundred things that might happen. Who—who's that?"

Someone had just rung the front-door bell, and the sound had made Madge start violently.

Dick crept to the bay window and looked out.

"Only an old buffer," he said reassuringly.

"Oh, I thought it might have been Hubert! If he'd come while you——"

"He can't," said Dick. "He's got a bilious attack. If he'd been all right I'd have given him a note to bring to you. Awfully sorry, Madge, but I had to let you girls know somehow or other. You see——"

The door opened, and Miss Primmer stood smiling on the threshold.

"Oh, children!" she cried. "Guess who's in the library!"

Madge drew a quick little breath, and Dick shuffled his feet. He felt just as he always did when Mr. Bennet picked up a cane and said, "Now, Brewster!"

"Can't you guess?" cried Miss Primmer, clasping her hands. "Why, your father's come!"

Madge turned as white as a sheet, and, bending her head, began to examine her finger-nails. Dick looked round the room, like a hunted animal, and did a double-shuffle.

"That's done it!" he gasped, under his breath.

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand new serial next week.)

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A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl, English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

J. Butler, Kerby House, Brantford, Ontario, wishes to correspond with a girl reader age 15-17. Will Miss D. Hollis write to him?

D. Kell, P.O. Box 181, North Bay, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Scotland.

Miss M. Porter, Hillgrove, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers.

V. George, 64, Christmas Street, Northcote, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers of THE GEM.

V. Grenning, Zillmere, North Coast Line, Queensland, wishes to correspond with readers, except those living in Australia, with a view to exchanging postcards.

Miss Lillian Iremonger, 8, St. Martin Street, Three Rivers, Quebec, Canada, wishes to correspond with a boy reader, age 18-20.

L. Baldwin, 17, Robert Street, Toronto, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader with a view to exchanging postcards, living in England or Scotland, age 15-17.

H. Elliott, 20, Cayuga Street, Brantford, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards.

G. Hunter, 185, Atlantic Avenue, Winnipeg, Canada, wishes to correspond with an English girl reader, age 16.

H. Raney, 42, Sisgar Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, or the British Isles, age 14-15.

Miss M. Walker, "Stirling," Petersham Road, Marricks-ville, Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with a boy reader interested in reading and sports. Miss K. Johns, of the same address, would also like to correspond with a boy reader.

Miss K. Kane, 15, Park Street, Coburg, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers in Ireland and Scotland interested in postcards.

R. Ellis, Solomontown, Port Pirie, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 16-17.

H. R. Wearing, 13, Rennie Street, Paddington, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 11-13.

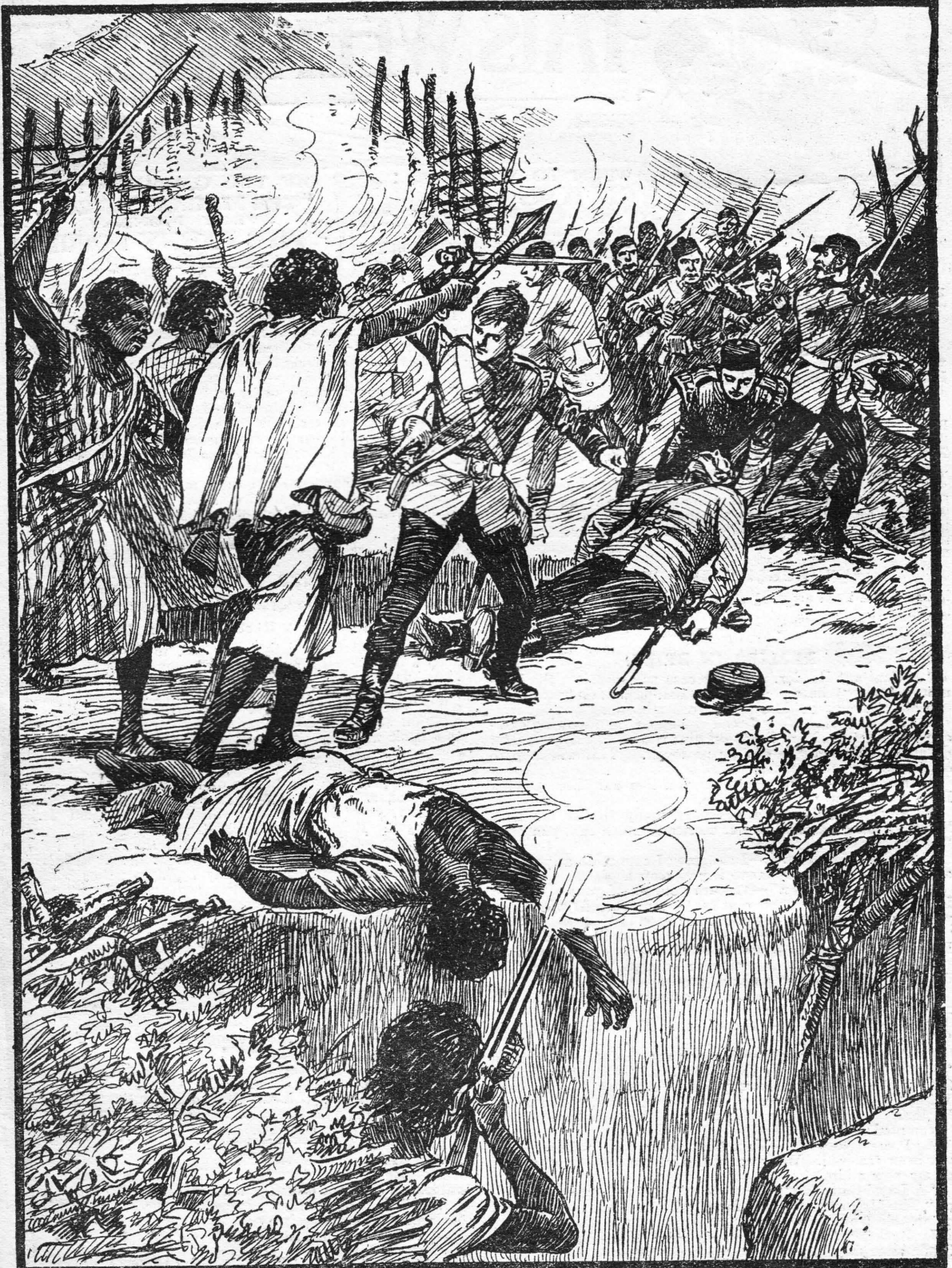
H. Marks, 42, Glenferrie Road, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 16.

L. Johnstone, Holton Street, North Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader living in the British Isles.

A. H. Bouny, Forrest Street, Coolgardie, Western Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 18.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

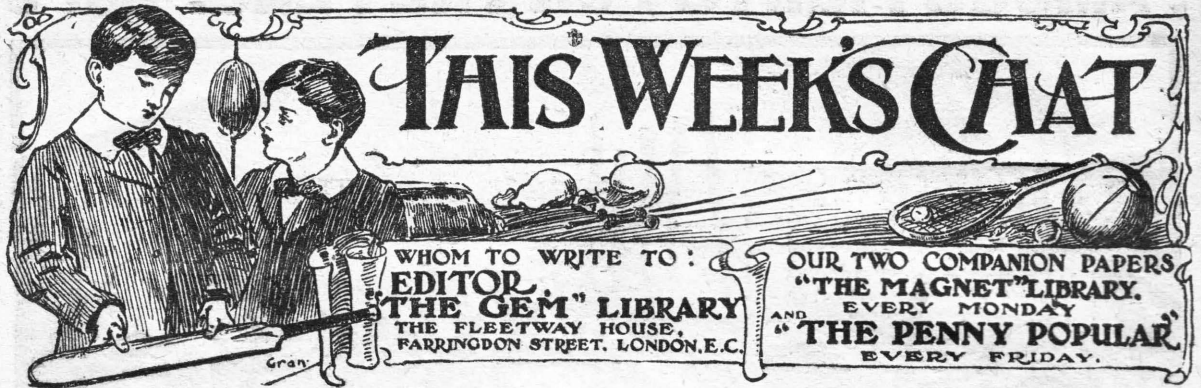
FAMOUS FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG. No. 9



Specially drawn for "THE GEM" Library by C. H. Blake.

It was during the Maori War, when the fierce natives defended the famous Gate Pah on April 29th, 1864, that Bugler Webb, of the 43rd Regiment, distinguished himself by an act of unselfish gallantry. Captain Poole was struck down by a Maori Chief who was about to deliver a second blow when Bugler Webb leapt forward and warded off the spear. A terrible duel was then fought between them, while a second bugler dragged the wounded officer away. Bugler Webb eventually felled the savage Maori, and no doubt his gallant action helped to demoralise the enemy, for they retreated and left the place in the hands of the victorious Britishers.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday,

"TAGGLES' BENEFIT!"

This is the title of the story which Martin Clifford has written for next Wednesday's number of "The Gem" Library, and it is one which all my chums will thoroughly enjoy reading.

Taggles, the trust porter, and victim of thousands of japes performed by juniors of St. Jim's, has a birthday. Taggles announces to the school that he is sixty-five years of age, and Tom Merry & Co., after a rousing meeting, decide to get up a testimonial on the veteran's behalf.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is instrumental in getting a first-rate ventriloquist down, and although he costs the swell of St. Jim's a substantial sum, the proceeds of a concert which he gives well repay him for his sacrifice, and the old St. Jim's porter comes off very well indeed.

"TAGGLES' BENEFIT!"

is one of the most amusing stories we have had, and you must not miss it.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

'A Constant Reader.'—In the case you mention, the batsman would not be out unless the ball had been touched by one of the fielding side after the other batsman had hit it.

F. W. (Mirfield).—Your friend should do the following exercise twice daily: With hands on hips rise on to the toes, then gradually sink until he can go no lower. This will help to counteract any tendency to knock-knees.

M. S. (York).—I am very glad you like our three papers. I am considering your suggestion.

H. Harding (Birmingham).—Very many thanks for your letter. I am glad you like our stories so much that you hope they will never conclude.

R. Gedge (Herne Bay).—I am sorry I cannot do as you ask, as the back-number exchange is now closed.

"A Glasgow Reader."—To cure yourself of your complaint I advise you to apply some ointment. Any chemist will advise you as to the best in your particular case.

G. R. H. S. (Surrey).—Very many thanks for your letter. I will bear what you suggest in mind.

J. M.—it is not my intention to enlarge "The Gem" to double its size—for the present, anyway.

E. C. (Newferry).—I am sorry I cannot supply you with the numbers you ask me for.

T. Higgins (Ireland).—The picture of Stott appeared in "Magnet," No. 252.

F. H. (Middlesbrough).—You ask me the titles of certain "Magnets." Well, here they are: 200, "Wingate's Folly," 201, "The Duffer's Return," 202, "Against His Father's Wish," 203, "By Order of the Form," 206, "Bolsover's Brother," 207, "The Schoolboy Money-maker," 208, "Tempted But True."

R. Prose (Norwich).—Your first letter has, unfortunately, not been received. Will you please let me have another one at my new address?

"A Loyal Canadian."—I am sorry that the first two numbers of "The Magnet" are now out of print, and are therefore unobtainable from this office.

J. Buckrall (Leeds).—Skinner's rascally conduct left the headmaster no alternative but to expel him.

C. James (Melbourne).—Very many thanks for your idea, and also the poem.

F. Wheeler (Southward).—No. 222 of "The Boys' Friend" Library, entitled, "Through Trackless Tibet," deals with the amazing adventures of Ferrers Lord and his renowned crew. "Stastruc."—You should write to the Variety Artistes' Federation, 18, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.

F. Dwyer (Blenheim).—I am sorry that I have no copies of "The Magnet" dating so far back as you are requiring.

"W. X. Y. Z." (Liscard).—Your criticisms of "The Magnet" stories certainly have the merit of being candid, but I am afraid I cannot promise to ask Mr. Frank Richards to alter some of his principal characters specially to fit in with your views. You must allow a hard-worked author some latitude, you know. I don't think many of my readers would agree with you that Bunter, Fish, Lord Mauleverer, and Harry Wharton "spoil an otherwise enjoyable tale"!

HOW TO WRITE A PICTURE-PLOT.—No. 8.

By a Successful Photo-Playwright.

Keeping a Record of your Plots.

In order not to send the same plot to the producer twice, keep a little register of all plots sent out, after this manner: Date despatched—Title of plot—Where sent—Price asked—Date returned—Price received—Comments. An ordinary exercise-book would answer your purpose admirably. In addition to furnishing a permanent record of your work, this book will help you to discriminate between the various companies—what they want, what they pay for it, and how long they usually take to reply or return script.

I shall give you the names of the leading American film producers, and when ready you can send in your scenarios to them, carefully observing all the instructions I have given you. Before concluding, let me impress upon you the importance of keeping in touch with the weekly issue of films, and seeing as many as possible at the picture houses. By this means, you will not only begin to notice what sort of thing the various companies produce, but you will be learning more than I can ever teach you by merely writing articles about scenarios. Count up the number of scenes in each picture you see, and make notes of each scene, recording the action therein. There is no better practice for writing plots than to criticise any film screened at the picture theatre, and then go home, and write it out, scene by scene, as well as you can remember. Out of curiosity, I counted the number of scenes in Vitagraph's comedy, "The Flat Above," length about eight hundred feet, and, to my astonishment, it registered forty-five! Most companies reckon about twenty to thirty scenes to the thousand feet. The following are the addresses of two of the leading American film producers:

Thomas A. Edison, Inc., 2326, Decatur Ave., Bedford Park, New York, U.S.A., want quick action comedy and drama. Strong plot essential. Anything from three guineas upwards paid.

Vitagraph Company of America, East 15th Street, and Locust Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., U.S.A. Good strong, wholesome plots are wanted. Split reel comedies of farcical nature. Pay from fifteen dollars to fifty dollars, etc., etc.

A full list of leading producers, together with the requirements as above, may be had from the Kinematograph Bureau, 10, Fernley Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham, for one shilling.