In this Issue:

"BROUGHT TO BOOK!"

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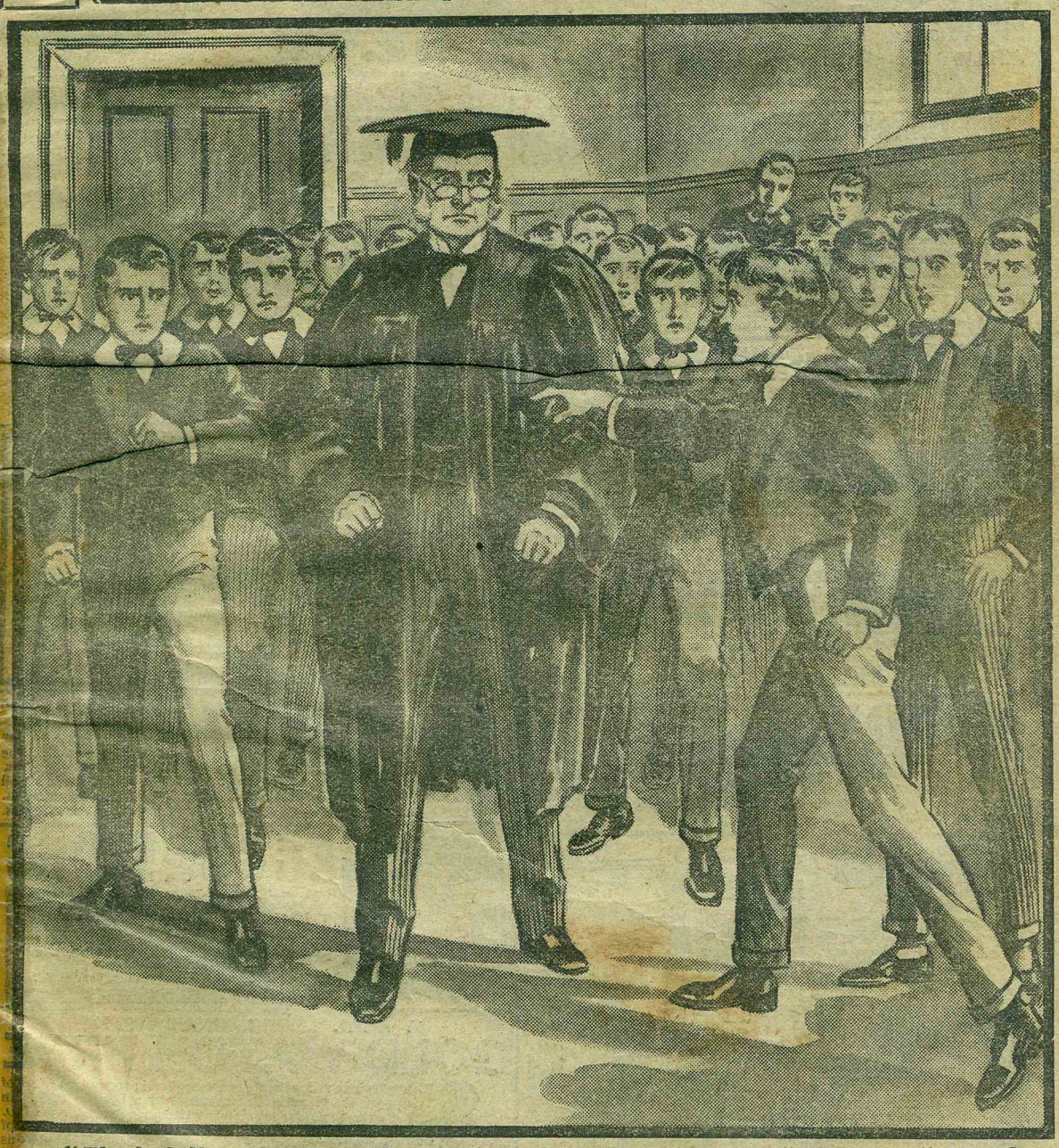

"That fellow is Clavering—my double!" cried Tom Merry. "It—it's a lie!" panted Clavering desperately. "I am Tom Merry—all the fellows know I'm Tom Merry!" *(An intensely exciting incident in the grand long, complete school-story of Tom Merry & Co. in this issue.)*

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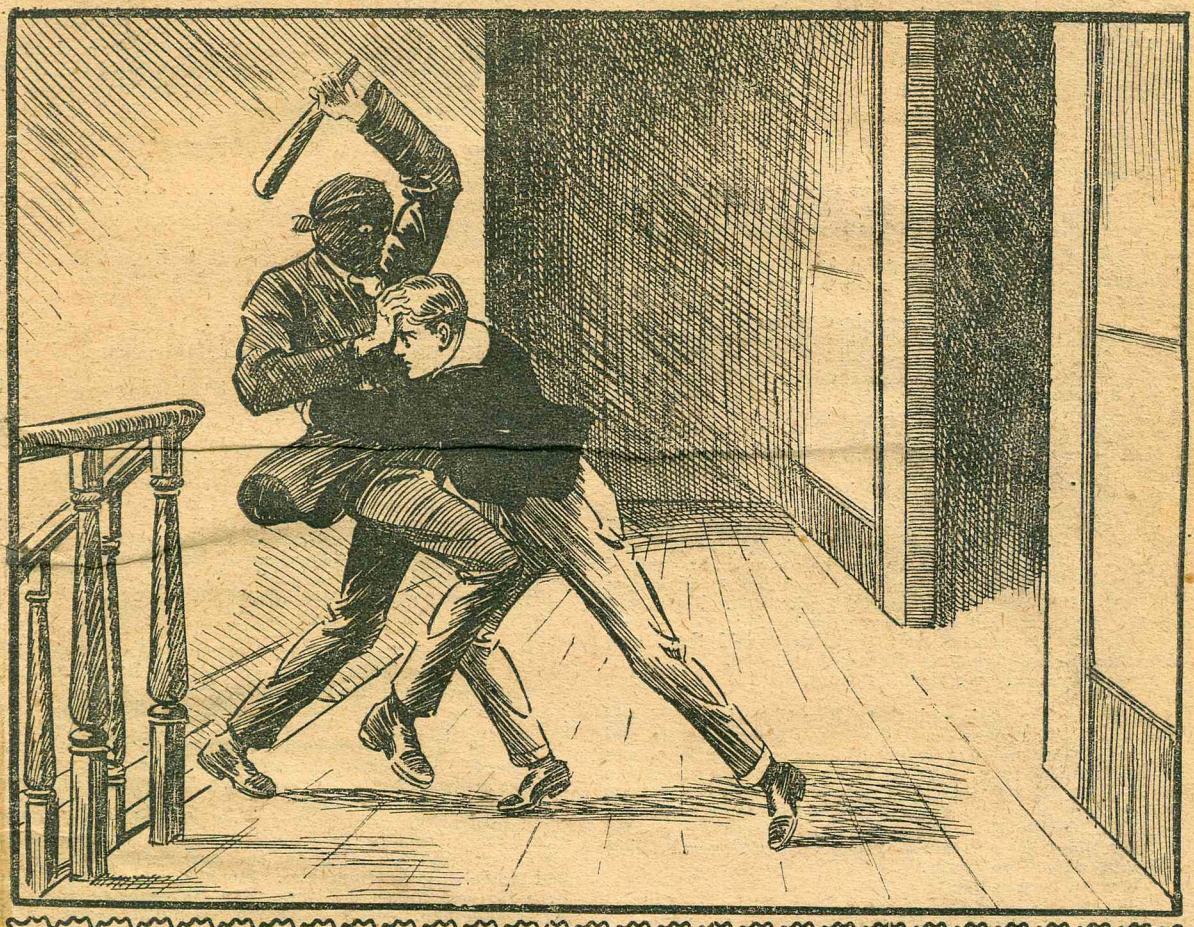

"'Ands off, you young fool!" panted the ruffian, as Tom Merry sprung at him fiercely. Bully as the man was, the junior's savage attack bore him backwards. Down the stairs was the way to freedom. Would the boy get past? *(See Chapter 5.)*

CHAPTER 1.

Staunch Pals.

THE Head of St. Jim's sat alone in his study.

It was growing late. Darkness lay upon the old quadrangle. The Head sat at his writing-table, and he held a pen in his fingers, but he was not writing. The pen was idle. The Head's brows were contracted in deep thought.

So deep was the reverie into which he had fallen that he did not hear a timid tap at the study door.

Tap!

The knock was repeated, more loudly. Dr. Holmes gave a little start.

"Come in!" he said.

The study door opened, and two juniors appeared in the doorway. Dr. Holmes glanced at them, and the deep frown upon his brow relaxed a little.

"You may come in, Manners and Lowther," he said kindly. "What is it?"

The two juniors entered the study. Monty Lowther closed the door. They came towards the Head's table, and stood there, flushing and hesitating. The Head's glance was very kind as it dwelt upon them.

"You wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," stammered Lowther.

"Yes-es, sir," murmured Manners.

Then they were silent again, their colour deepening; it was evident that what they had to say to the Head was not easy to utter.

Dr. Holmes smiled faintly.

"Well?" he said.

"You—you see, sir——" began Lowther, looking at Manners.

Next Wednesday:

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"It—that is—we——" said Manners, with a look at Lowther.

Then they stopped again.

"You have come to speak to me about Tom Merry, I suppose?" said the Head gently.

The two Shell fellows brightened up.

"That's it, sir," said Lowther eagerly.

"We—we want to ask you, sir!" stammered Manners.

Dr. Holmes held up his hand.

"I know that Tom Merry is your friend, and you are naturally concerned about him," he said. "But I am afraid I cannot listen to you. Merry has been sentenced to expulsion from the school. To-morrow morning he will be flogged in public, and expelled. The whole school knows the reason."

"Ye-es, sir, I know," said Lowther. "But—but he isn't exactly our friend now, sir. He's quarrelled with us—he's quarrelled with nearly every fellow in the House. But—but he was an old pal, and he was always a splendid chap until he—until he changed. We're not on speaking terms with him, now, sir. But——"

"But!" said Manners.

"But you wish to plead for him, all the same?" said the Head, with a smile.

"Well, sir, we know he's done wrong," said Manners. "All the House is down on him. We're down on him, for that matter. But—but couldn't you give him another chance, sir? I—I think he must be off his rocker. I—I mean he can't be quite himself, the way he has been going on lately. If he had another chance——"

"I'm sure he would be grateful for it, sir," said Monty Lowther eagerly. "He's had a lesson now, sir!"

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"I have learned many things about Merry that I did not know before to-day," he said. "I have received reports from his Housemaster, from his Form-master, and from the head prefect of the House. It is impossible for me to allow such a boy to remain in this school. He has deceived me grossly. I am afraid I can do nothing, my lads."

"I—I'm thinking of his guardian too," said Lowther. "Miss Priscilla Fawcett, sir. This will be a rotten thing for her."

A shadow came over the doctor's face.

"Merry should have thought of that," he said.

"I know, sir, but—but he didn't. And—and, really, I don't think he is quite himself, sir, this last week," said Lowther earnestly. "After the way he's turned out, most of the fellows think that he has been humbugging all along; but it isn't so, sir. We know that jolly well. There was nothing wrong with him up to a week ago."

"Can you be sure of that, Lowther?" said the Head, drumming uneasily on the table with his fingers.

"Quite sure, sir. We were his chums and his study-mates, and we know."

"It's since the affair with that fellow Clavering, sir," said Manners. "You know that fellow who's his double, sir, and he caused Tom a lot of worry by impersonating him, and getting him into rows. Ever since then Tom hasn't been like his old self. It seems to have got on his nerves, somehow, and made him act the giddy goat—I—I mean, it's changed him, sir. That's the only way I can account for it. Up to that time there wasn't a better or more decent fellow breathing than Tom Merry."

"You feel sure of that?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Ask any of the fellows—Blake, or D'Arcy, or Figgins, sir; they'll all tell you the same."

There was a pause.

"But Merry's conduct has been utterly outrageous," said the Head, at last. "His Form-master discovered a pack of cards in his pockets. He actually dropped them in Mr. Linton's presence. Kildare found him several times smoking in his study. This evening he was found under the influence of drink. Since then his study has been searched, and intoxicating liquor has been found there, and cards, and bridge-markers, and a box of cigars and cigarettes. I understand that you two juniors no longer share that study with him."

"Not for the past week, sir."

"I do not suspect you in any way of being parties to his conduct," said the Head; "but it is very difficult for me to believe that this wretched blackguardism he has fallen into is the work of only one week."

"But it is, sir," said Lowther. "There was nothing of the kind when we shared the study with him. We know that for certain. He must have got under the influence of some rotter, I should think. Anyway, there was nothing of the kind up to a week ago."

"Any of the fellows would tell you so, sir," said Manners.

"Then how do you account for this sudden change in his character?" exclaimed the Head.

"I can't, sir," said Lowther. "I don't understand it."

"It beats me, sir," said Manners. "It beats all the fellows. I can only think that he's not himself—that he's ill, or something."

"You should certainly know whether this is a change, or whether he has acted in this way before," said the Head musingly. "If I could take your view, it might make a difference to my decision. But——"

"We give you our word, sir."

"You are quite certain of what you say?"

"Quite, sir."

There was another pause.

"You may send Merry to me!" said the Head, apparently coming to a resolution. "I will speak to him, and see what can be done."

"Oh, thank you, sir! I'm sure that if you gave him another chance——"

"We will see. Send him here."

"Yes, sir."

And Manners and Lowther, their faces considerably brighter, left the study, leaving the Head plunged in deep thought.

Outside the study door the two Shell fellows exchanged glances of satisfaction.

"There's a chance," said Lowther. "If Tom has any sense he will get out of it this time."

"He doesn't seem to care whether he gets out of it or not," said Manners. "Still, he can't want to be sacked. Come on!"

Four juniors were waiting for them at the end of the passage—Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6. They were all looking very serious.

"What's the verdict?" asked Blake.

"The Head's going to see him," said Lowther. "There's a chance."

"Good!"

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with satisfaction. "It would be wotten for him to be kicked out, though he has acted like a feahful wottah."

Lowther and Manners went up to the Shell passage. The juniors of the School House were all looking glum and thoughtful. Fellows collected in groups in the passages, and talked in low voices. An expulsion was a serious matter, and the sentence had fallen upon Tom Merry, once the most popular fellow in the House.

His popularity, certainly, had gone. The change that had come over the captain of the Shell had surprised and disgusted all the School House fellows, and one by one his friends had dropped away from him. Manners and Lowther had been his best chums, but they were no longer on speaking terms with him. Study No. 6 ignored his existence. With the exception of Levison and Mellish, two rank outsiders, he had hardly a friend left. Yet when the sentence of expulsion from the school fell upon him, his old friends felt it as a blow. They no longer liked him, but they could not forget that they had been his friends, and they would all have done anything they could to save him.

The captain of the Shell was in his study—the study he had shared with Manners and Lowther, when the Terrible Three were inseparable chums. There the two Shell fellows found the junior they were in search of.

There was an odour of tobacco-smoke as Monty Lowther opened the door. The captain of the Shell was seated in the armchair, his feet on the fender, smoking.

Manners and Lowther exchanged a hopeless glance. The fellow was to be expelled from the school on the following morning; and here he was, breaking one of the most rigid rules of St. Jim's with utter recklessness. What had come over him? It seemed that he was no longer the Tom Merry they had known.

"Tom!" said Lowther quietly.

The junior in the armchair jumped up.

"Hallo! What do you want?"

"We've been to the Head."

"Well?"

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Kangaroo planted his foot behind Clavering with a powerful kick, and he staggered between the two rows of waiting juniors. "Run, you rotter!" "Run, sneak!" roared the angry juniors. Then the blows began to fall! Swish! Swish! (*See Chapter 4.*)

"There's a chance for you yet, Tom."

The captain of the Shell shrugged his shoulders.

"Rot!" he said. "I'm going to be sacked in the morning. The Head himself said so. It's all up. Have you been asking favours for me?"

"Yes."

"Then I'd rather you minded your own business!"

Lowther seemed to gulp something down with difficulty. Was this his old chum Tom Merry? The athletic form, the sunny blue eyes, the handsome face, were the same, but the character seemed wholly different.

"Well, we haven't minded our own business," Lowther said, keeping his temper with an effort. "We've asked the Head to give you another chance."

"Oh, rats!"

"Tom, think of Miss Fawcett! It would almost break her heart if you were expelled from the school," said Manners earnestly.

"Bosh!"

"Well, you're to go to the Head," said Lowther abruptly. "That's all."

The junior grunted discontentedly.

Manners and Lowther turned, and without another word left the study. The door slammed after them.

"He's not going," said Lowther, in a low voice. "The utter fool! He's throwing away his last chance!"

"The Head's waiting for him," said Manners uneasily. "He will be awfully ratty if Tom doesn't go!"

"We can't do anything more."

"I—I suppose not."

And the two Shell fellows, depressed and worried, went downstairs to the common-room.

They passed Levison of the Fourth on the stairs. Levison paused.

"Seen Tom Merry?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lowther shortly.

"He's got over the whisky?" grinned Levison.

"Find out!"

"Oh, keep your wool on!" said Levison coolly, as the Shell fellows walked away from him.

The cad of the Fourth looked after them and grinned, and then made his way to Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 2.

What Levison Knew.

THE junior who sat in Tom Merry's armchair, in Tom Merry's study, threw the stump of his cigarette into the fire, and lighted another. There was a sardonic grin on his handsome face.

He did not look like a fellow who was under sentence of expulsion from the school. His expression was satisfied, as though matters were going exactly as he wanted them.

Levison of the Fourth opened the door and looked in. His expression was sardonic, too, as if he were in possession of some joke that was unknown to the other fellows. The captain of the Shell looked round angrily.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"Oh, I've come to see how you're taking it!" said Levison, entering the study and closing the door after him.

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"Well, now you've seen, you can get out!"

"Thanks; I'm not going yet." Levison seated himself coolly upon the corner of the table, and regarded the Shell fellow with a sarcastic grin. "You're not very much cut up at being expelled from the school!"

"Mind your own business!"

"You want to be sacked—eh?"

The Shell fellow scowled.

"Don't talk like an idiot!" he said. "Of course I don't want to be sacked! But I've got it, all the same!"

"Liar!" said Levison calmly.

The other junior started.

"What? Do you want me to pitch you out of the study?"

"You can pitch me out if you like," said Levison calmly; "and I'll go straight to the Head and tell him that you want to be sacked, and why!"

"What—what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean, Reggie Clavering!"

The Shell fellow stared blankly at Levison, and a pallor as of death overspread his face. His eyes almost started from his head.

"Clavering!" he repeated. "Why—why do you call me Clavering? That—that's the name of the fellow who's like me—my—my double!"

"It's your name!"

"I—I'm Tom Merry!"

"Liar!"

The Shell fellow clenched his hands convulsively.

"Keep your temper," said Levison, eyeing him warily. "This isn't merely guesswork. I know!"

"You—you fool! What do you mean?" The Shell fellow seemed scarcely able to breathe. "You know I'm Tom Merry!"

"I know you're Tom Merry's double!"

"You—you're dreaming!"

"I'll tell you a little story," said Levison, with perfect coolness, and evidently enjoying the ill-concealed terror of the junior before him. "I've got rather a gift for finding things out, you know."

"I know you're a mean spy!" said the Shell fellow, between his teeth.

Levison laughed.

"Put it that way if you like. All the fellows have been surprised by the sudden change in Tom Merry—a regular model up to the past week, and since then the biggest blackguard in the school. I was as surprised as anybody; but I found out the truth by accident—I should never have guessed it. I was in the wood on Saturday afternoon, when you met your friend, the man you call Gerald Goring."

The Shell fellow's jaw dropped.

"I heard all that was said," resumed Levison.

"You—you're lying!"

"I'll prove it to you. You made your accomplice tell you all about it, because you wouldn't be left in the dark. There's a Mr. Brandreth, a rich South African mine-owner, who's made Tom Merry his heir, because he used to be a great chum of Merry's father when he was alive. Gerald Goring is the son of Mr. Brandreth's dead partner, and he was to be the old man's heir; but he was expelled from college for some disgrace or other, and then he was cut off. Tom Merry's name was put in the will instead of Goring's, but with the condition that if Tom Merry should turn out like Goring, he was to be passed over; then the money goes to Goring all the same. The old man is in bad health, and may die any time. If Tom Merry should act disgracefully, and get expelled from his school, Goring will be a rich man when old Brandreth dies. Haven't I got it right?"

The Shell fellow did not speak. He seemed scarcely able to breathe.

"Goring knew it was no use expecting Tom Merry to get sacked. Although he doesn't know anything about the will, he's not the kind of fellow to get into disgrace. That's where he made use of you. You were so like Tom Merry that you had been taken for him, and that put the idea into Goring's head. Somehow or other, he has managed to kidnap the real Tom Merry, and plant you here in his place. That accounts for the sudden change that has surprised the fellows. You came here, under Tom Merry's name, with the deliberate intention of acting as disgracefully as possible, and getting sacked. It was a jolly deep game. Everybody will believe that Tom Merry has disgraced himself, and been kicked out of the school. The real Tom Merry is being kept a prisoner somewhere, until old Brandreth dies. Dare you deny it?"

"I—I deny it! It—it's all lies!"

Levison laughed again. He was enjoying the terror of the impostor before him, as a cat might enjoy playing with a mouse.

"You can deny it if you like; but you know it's true, and that I know it's true. I tell you, I heard every word that you and Goring said in the wood!"

"You spying hound!"

"How you managed to change places with Tom Merry I don't know, but you did it. I fancy it must have been done in the night last week," said Levison. "Tom Merry was kidnapped, and you were planted here, in his clothes, and under his name. Nobody suspected the change—even I didn't, and I'm generally pretty sharp!"

"You—you spy!"

"May as well be a spy as an impostor and a cheat!" said Levison. "Mind, I don't care twopence for Tom Merry. He was always down on me, and I dislike him as much as you do. I knew all this on Saturday!"

"And you kept it dark till now?"

"Exactly. I let you run on," said Levison coolly. "I knew you were going to pretend to be intoxicated, and let the prefects catch you; that was the game. Under Tom Merry's name, you will be expelled from the school, after losing him all his friends here. You will go to his home under his name, and wear out Miss Fawcett's patience, and make her dislike her ward, too. When old Brandreth dies, the real Tom Merry will be released—he is to be stupefied with drink, and found intoxicated in the streets—and after that he may tell what yarn he likes about having been impersonated here, but nobody will believe him. You see, I know the whole game."

The Shell fellow's eyes were burning, and his fingers were working convulsively. It was evident that he could scarcely restrain himself from springing upon the spy of the School House.

The cunning plot for the ruin of the real Tom Merry had been brought to its culmination—and now all was threatened with failure—and the plotters with punishment, owing to Levison's discovery.

For a word from Levison would reveal the cheat.

He had only to tell the Head what he knew, and the whole scheme would be exposed at once. All Tom Merry's old friends, estranged by the insolence and rascality of his double, would rally round their old chum again, only too glad to discover that they had been deceived, and that Tom Merry was true blue after all. Nobody, hitherto, had suspected the daring impersonation, but a word would be sufficient to topple over the whole house of cards. Tom Merry would be searched for, and ultimately found, that was certain. And a charge of kidnapping and conspiracy would be laid against Reggie Clavering and his confederate; and already the young plotter seemed to see the prison gates opening for him.

"Keep your temper!" said Levison, with a feline smile. "No good going for me, you know; that won't help you!"

"You—you hound!" Clavering hissed out. "You've found me out, have you—well, you shall pay for it!"

"Hold on—I—oh!"

Clavering was upon him with the spring of a tiger.

In the Shell fellow's powerful grasp, the cad of the Fourth was whirled off the table, and went with a crash to the floor.

Clavering's clutch was on his throat.

The outwitted scoundrel was beside himself with rage, and a murderous ferocity blazed in his eyes Levison's face went white with fear as he looked up into the savage eyes above him. He choked in the grip of the junior, and struggled in vain.

"Stop it!" he panted. "You mad idiot—stop it! What are you going to do? Are you mad? Let me go!"

"You spy! You shall pay——"

Levison dragged his throat free with an effort.

"Hands off!" he panted. "Are you mad? I'm not going to give you away—I swear I'm not going to betray you! Hands off!"

"You—you——"

The study door opened, and Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, looked in.

"Tom Merry, you're wanted! Why—what——"

Tom Merry's double released Levison, and sprang to his feet. The cad of the Fourth lay gasping on the floor. Kildare eyed them sternly.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed.

Levison scrambled up. Clavering stood white and panting. It was all coming out now, and all was lost. He bowed his head as if for a blow, as he stood in anticipation of a torrent of denunciation from Levison.

But it did not come. Levison paused for a few moments, thoroughly to enjoy the terror of the junior who had attacked him. Then he spoke.

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES. ½d.

"It's all right, Kildare," he said. "Tom Merry lost his temper. It's all right!"

Clavering drew a deep, almost sobbing breath. Then he was not to be betrayed. Levison had always been Tom Merry's enemy; and in spite of the way Clavering had handled him, he did not mean to interfere.

"Very well," said Kildare shortly. "Merry, the Head sent for you some time ago. You are to come to his study at once!"

"I don't want to!"

"That makes no difference."

Kildare's grasp closed on the shoulder of the Shell fellow, and he was forcibly led from the study. Levison set his collar straight, and chuckled breathlessly. He had deliberately tortured the impostor, like a cat playing with a mouse; but he did not intend to betray him. Levison knew a trick worth two of that, as he would have put it. Levison was poor, and he was unscrupulous, and his little game was to fish in troubled waters.

CHAPTER 3.

Given a Chance.

DR. HOLMES looked sternly at the junior as Kildare led him into the study. The fellow whom all St. Jim's knew as Tom Merry wore a sullen scowl. He knew that there was a chance now that he would not be expelled from St. Jim's; and that chance was the last thing he wanted. If he were spared now, it meant that he had to do his cunning work over again. The Head little dreamed of the thoughts that were passing in the mind of the junior before him.

"I sent for you some time ago, Merry!" he said sternly. "Thank you, Kildare, you may go!"

The captain of St. Jim's left the study. The Shell fellow stood sullenly silent. Dr. Holmes regarded him attentively.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Your friends have been to me—Manners and Lowther."

"Yes, sir."

"They have put the matter in a somewhat new light to me. Your conduct has been disgraceful—utterly disgraceful, and worthy only of contempt and disgust. Yet, as I am inclined to believe that this change in your character has only come lately, and because you have previously had an excellent record in the school, I have decided to give you one more chance."

"I—I haven't asked——"

"I am thinking of your future, and also of your guardian, Miss Fawcett—a most estimable lady, whom I should be very sorry to wound. I think it possible that this lesson may not be lost upon you. Upon further reflection, I have decided to give you a most severe flogging, but to spare you expulsion from the school."

The Shell fellow gritted his teeth.

"I—I'd rather be expelled, and not flogged, sir," he muttered. "I—I don't want to be flogged!"

The Head smiled grimly.

"I dare say that is the case," he said. "But you should have considered that before you acted in a disgraceful manner. You will be flogged in any case. That was my intention, even if I had expelled you also. But the expulsion will be suspended; it will depend upon your future conduct. That is all I have to say to you, Merry. To-morrow morning, before the assembled school, you will be soundly flogged. And, in case of any further act of rascality, such as you have been guilty of, you will be expelled from the school. Now you may go!"

"I—I——"

"Enough! Leave my study!"

The junior turned and quitted the study. His rage was so great that he could scarcely speak. The thought crossed his mind that by insolence to the Head at that moment he might confirm the sentence that had been rescinded. But insolence to the Head required more nerve than he possessed, and he shrank from the severe caning that would certainly have rewarded him. Expulsion he wanted, but canings he did not desire.

He left the study, and in the passage outside he stood trembling with rage and clenching his hands savagely. He was to be flogged, and he trembled at the prospect, and he was to remain at the school, in the power of Levison! The scheme that had seemed so easy and facile was bristling with difficulties and dangers now. If Levison should chose to speak before the final step had been carried out he would not be expelled then—he would be handed over to the police. He felt sick with dismay and rage as he stood there in the passage, with throbbing brain.

"Tom! Is it all right?"

Monty Lowther hurried up to him, the eager question on his lips. In spite of all, Lowther could not forget that Tom Merry had been his best pal.

The junior turned on him savagely. It was to Manners and Lowther that he owed this!

"Hang you!" he muttered.

Lowther started back.

"Hasn't the Head let you off, Tom? I thought——"

Smack!

Full across Lowther's face came the Shell fellow's hand in a savage blow. Lowther staggered against the wall. Manners ran up the passage.

"Tom! What's the matter? Hold on, Lowther!"

Lowther's face was white, save where the mark of the blow showed crimson. His eyes were blazing.

"That's for your meddling!" hissed Clavering.

"Tom! Hasn't the Head——"

"Let me alone!"

The Shell fellow strode down the passage. But Monty Lowther's grip on his shoulder swung him back.

"No, you don't!" said Lowther, between his teeth. "I don't take that from anybody!"

"Let me go!"

"Monty, old man——" urged Manners.

"Do you think I'm going to let him smack my face?" demanded Lowther. "I don't care if he was twenty times my chum before he became a dirty blackguard. I'm not standing that! He'll come into the gym with me!"

"I won't!"

"You will. Come on!"

The Shell fellow struggled fiercely in Lowther's grasp. Half a dozen juniors came running up in alarm.

"Don't row here, outside the Head's study!" exclaimed Blake. "Do you both want to be sacked, you silly idiots?"

"By Jove! I believe that's his game!" Lowther exclaimed savagely. "Lend me a hand to get him away quietly! He's going to stand up to me for what he's done!"

"Quiet, Tom Mewwy, you'll have the Head out!" urged Arthur Augustus.

"Let me go!" yelled the Shell fellow, struggling furiously.

"He wants to get the Head here," said Lowther. "Lend me a hand, I tell you."

The juniors were all exasperated as well as Lowther. The evident desire of the captain of the Shell to bring the Head on the scene was the finishing touch. They grasped him on all sides, and he was swept off his feet and rushed away down the passage.

The Head's door opened. Dr. Holmes had heard the disturbance. But the crowd of juniors, with the struggling rascal in their midst, had vanished round the nearest corner as the doctor looked out. Dr. Holmes's door closed again.

"Bring the rotter into the gym!" said Lowther. "He's going to fight me. I've been fed-up with him for a long time."

"The gym's closed," said Blake. "It's close on bed-time, old man. Leave the cad alone till to-morrow."

"I'll fight him in the dorm, then," said Lowther, between his teeth. "Do you think I'm going to take a blow from that rotter?"

The Shell fellow struggled out of the grasp of the juniors.

"Bed-time, you kids!" called out Kildare down the passage.

And the juniors dispersed to their dormitories. Levison of the Fourth spoke to Tom Merry's double as they went upstairs.

"I'll talk to you to-morrow," he said. "You're not leaving?"

"No!"

"All serene, then—we'll talk business to-morrow."

And Levison whistled cheerily as he went into the Fourth Form dormitory. The captain of the Shell did not look cheerful. He was a prey to intense uneasiness and disquietude as he went into his dormitory with the rest of the Shell. Monty Lowther's grim look told him what he had to expect after lights out.

CHAPTER 4.

A Dormitory Ragging.

KILDARE came in to see lights out in the Shell dormitory.

The juniors had turned in—with the intention of turning out again as soon as the captain of St. Jim's was gone. There was to be a fight between Monty Lowther and his old comrade in the dormitory. That was settled. It was known now that the expelled junior had been granted a reprieve, if not a pardon, and that he owed it to the intercession of the old chums whom his conduct had estranged. His black ingratitude to them almost appalled the fellows.

It looked as if he wanted to be expelled; but that that could really be the case no one, of course, supposed. He

NEXT WEDNESDAY— "THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

had been saved by Lowther and Manners, and he had shown how grateful he felt. There was not a fellow in the dormitory who did not wish to see him soundly licked.

They were anticipating the scene after lights out. But they did not anticipate what was to happen before lights out. The captain of the Shell sat up in bed.

"Kildare!" he called out.

Kildare looked at him grimly.

"Well, Merry?"

"Lowther intends to fight me after lights out. I call on you as a prefect to put a stop to it."

Kildare started. His glance expressed almost incredulous scorn. There was a murmur from the Shell fellows.

Tom Merry had sneaked!

All his previous conduct was as nothing to this. He had sneaked to a prefect in order to get out of a fight he had brought on by his own savage temper. The juniors could scarcely believe their ears.

"Well, that takes the bun!" muttered Kangaroo in amazement. "Blessed if I would have ever believed it of him!"

"It's the giddy limit!" said Clifton Dane.

Lowther clenched his hands under the bedclothes.

Kildare's disgust and contempt were plain enough; but as a prefect he had only one thing to do. He looked inquiringly at Lowther.

"Is that true, Lowther?" he asked.

"Yes," muttered Lowther.

"Well, I forbid anything of the kind, of course. If you have any row with Tom Merry, you can settle it in the gym to-morrow with gloves on. There is to be no fighting here to-night. Do you understand?"

Lowther was silent.

"Come, Lowther, I must have your promise before I leave the dorm," said Kildare, "otherwise I shall have to report you. Give me your word."

"Very well," said Lowther, between his clenched teeth, "I won't touch him!"

"That's all right."

And Kildare put out the light and quitted the dormitory. There were a few moments of silence after he had departed. Then the storm broke!

"Sneak!"

"Cad!"

"Funk!"

"Coward!"

"Rotter!"

Every fellow in the dormitory had something to say. The epithets that were rained upon the captain of the Form from all sides might have made any decent fellow squirm. But they did not seem to have any effect upon their object. He was heard to yawn. Monty Lowther sat up in bed.

"Tom Merry," he said in a low, concentrated voice, "you used to be my chum. I've spoken up for you to the Head. I'm ashamed that I ever had you for a pal. I'll never speak a word for you again. And I'll lick you to-morrow till you can't stand."

"He's not going to wait till to-morrow!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "The dirty cad isn't going to be sacked, after all; and we're going to take the law into our own hands. We don't allow sneaking in the Shell!"

"No fear!"

"Rag the rotter!"

"I've promised not to touch him to-night," said Lowther.

"But we haven't," said Gore.

"You stay in bed, Monty, old man," said Kangaroo, jumping out. "We'll look after that rotten sneak!"

"If you touch me——" began Clavering.

"We'll touch you fast enough!" chuckled the Cornstalk. "Light a candle, somebody."

The captain of the Shell sprang from bed, and made for the door. But Harry Noble was before him. He ran into Kangaroo, and Kangaroo's powerful grasp closed upon him. He was swung back from the door.

"No, you don't!" said Noble coolly.

"Help!" yelled the junior.

Kangaroo's hand was clapped upon his mouth the next moment. His yell died away in a choked gurgle.

"Pretty specimen, isn't he?" said the Cornstalk contemptuously. "And that's the chap we made captain of the Form! My hat!"

"He jolly well won't be the captain any longer!" said Gore. "We'll stop that!"

"Yes, rather!"

"We'll hold a meeting of the Shell to-morrow and drum him out," said Kangaroo. "The New House chaps have to have a voice in that. All the Shell must give him the sack together. But he'll have a ragging now to go on with."

"Hear, hear!"

Clifton Dane had lighted a candle, and set it up on a washstand. The Shell fellows were all out of bed now and surrounding their victim, with the exception of Manners and Lowther. The latter had given Kildare his word, and Manners, disgusted as he was, did not want to take a hand against his old chum. But the rest of the Shell—the School House portion of the Form—were unanimous. Even Skimpole, the meek and mild, was joining with the rest.

The captain of the Shell stood in the midst of a threatening circle. His hands were clenched, and his eyes glittering, but his face was white.

"You've sneaked, you cad!" said Kangaroo. "Now you've got to go through it. Understand? And if you try to make a row, we'll gag you."

He gripped the junior just in time as he opened his mouth. A gurgle died away under the Cornstalk's heavy hand.

"Give me a sponge here!" said Kangaroo grimly.

Gore grinned and handed him a sponge. Kangaroo jammed it coolly into the prisoner's mouth. He tied a towel round the head to keep it there. Clavering clutched at the towel, and immediately another towel was tied round his wrists, securing them behind his back.

"Sorry if you don't like it," said Kangaroo politely. "But there's only one way of dealing with a sneak. You're not going to get the prefects or the Housemaster here, not if we know it!"

"Now bump him!" said Gore.

"Too much row," said Kangaroo, who had constituted himself master of the ceremonies. "We don't want Kildare back again with a cane. We'll make the rotter run the gauntlet. Form in line."

"Good egg!"

The Shell fellows formed up quickly enough. They planted themselves in a double row, each fellow armed with a knotted towel, or a slipper, or a book. Kangaroo marched the victim towards them.

"Now run!" he said.

The captain of the Shell stood still. He could not speak, but his eyes were burning with rage and hatred.

"Will you run?"

Clavering gurgled.

"No? Then I'll help you!"

Kangaroo planted his foot behind the prisoner with a powerful kick, and he staggered between the two rows of waiting juniors.

Then the blows began to fall.

Swish, swish! Whack, whack! Swish, swish!

"Run, you rotter!"

"Run, you sneak!"

"Help him along!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kangaroo kicked again, and the rascal ran. It was better for him to run now, for the blows were descending from both sides like rain. Every junior was anxious to get in a slash or two, and there were yells from some of them who received too hasty blows intended for the rascal who was running the gauntlet.

"Pile in!"

"Give him socks!"

"Hurrah!"

Clavering ran unsteadily, with his hands tied behind him, lurching from side to side, and ducking in vain efforts to escape the blows that rained on him. He came out at the end of the line at last, gasping and gurgling, and rolled over on the floor.

"Make him run through again!" shouted Gore.

"Hold on! Cave!" rapped out Kangaroo.

There was a footstep in the passage. Bernard Glyn blew out the candle and threw it under a bed, and the juniors dived for their beds like rabbits for their holes. There was only one fellow out of bed when the door opened. It was Tom Merry's double, writhing and wriggling in his bonds.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, stepped in and turned on the light. His glance was amazed as it dwelt on the wriggling figure on the floor.

"Merry!"

Gurgle—gurgle!

"What does this mean?"

Deep snores came from some of the beds. Mr. Railton smiled slightly, and crossed over to the bound junior and released him. The Shell fellows lay palpitating—waiting for the thunderclap, so to speak. Mr. Railton was very much down on a dormitory rag. But the thunderclap did not come. Perhaps he knew that the juniors had good reasons for that ragging.

"You had better get to bed, Merry," Mr. Railton said quietly.

The ragged junior spluttered with rage.

"They made me run the gauntlet! They ought to be punished! I've been ragged! They were all in it—Noble and Dane, and Glyn, and——"

Mr. Railton's lip curled.

"Noble!" he said quietly.

Kangaroo sat up in bed, resigned to his fate.

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"Yes, sir?"

"You have been ragging Merry?"

"Yes, sir. He's a sneak and a beast, and a disgrace to the House!" said Kangaroo. "I'm ready to be licked, sir. I was the ringleader."

"Oh, rot!" said Clifton Dane. "We were all in it, sir."

"You will take a hundred lines each, and let there be no further disturbance here to-night," said the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir."

"Get into bed, Merry!" Mr. Railton could not suppress the contempt in his tone. "You will not be disturbed again."

"They ought to be caned, they ought!"

"That is for me to decide. Get to bed at once, or you will be caned!"

The captain of the Shell sullenly crawled into bed. Mr. Railton turned off the light and left the dormitory. He knew that there would be no further ragging that night.

"Well," murmured Kangaroo, "we got off cheap that time! I expected a licking."

"Railton knows the rotter ought to be ragged!" growled Gore.

"The sneak!"

"The cad!"

"The rotten outsider!"

And the Shell fellows, debarred from any further ragging, continued to tell their Form captain what they thought of him till they grew sleepy. They dropped off to sleep one by one, the victim of the ragging being the last to slumber. He was aching from the punishment he had received, and he was troubled with fears and apprehensions for the morrow. In the morning a flogging awaited him, and after that there was Levison, the unscrupulous cad of the Fourth, who had only to raise a finger, to speak a word, to wreck all his carefully-laid plans, and hand him over to the punishment he had richly earned. It was not surprising that Reggie Clavering, as he lay there, aching and sleepless and apprehensive, anathematised Gerald Goring, whose cunning and greed had led him to play the part of Tom Merry at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

A Bid for Liberty.

AND while Tom Merry's double was playing—with so much discomfort to himself—the role of the captain of the Shell at St. Jim's, where was Tom Merry?

In those very moments, while Clavering was suffering the punishment of his sins at the hands of the raggers, the real Tom Merry was pacing a room with barred windows and bolted door—a prisoner.

Tom Merry had changed during the week he had been a prisoner in the lonely house on Luxford Hilly.

At first he had hoped for release or for escape. A dozen plans had been formed in his mind for outwitting his gaoler, but formed in vain.

Twice a day a masked man brought him food and drink.

That was the only link he had with the outer world.

The close confinement of the locked room had changed him. His face was pale, his health was suffering from the want of exercise.

But worse than the confinement was the worry that preyed on his mind.

He had been stolen from St. Jim's in the hours of darkness; he had awakened from the drugged sleep, to find himself here. Since then he knew nothing of what had happened at the school.

That he owed his imprisonment to his mysterious enemy, Gerald Goring, he was certain—to Goring, and to Reginald Clavering, his double, who had caused him so much trouble earlier by impersonating him.

But that Clavering was even now impersonating him at St. Jim's, taking his place in the old school, and his name, Tom Merry never dreamed. The boldness, the reckless daring of the plot made it impossible to suspect.

Tom Merry believed that he was missed from the school, that he must be searched for, and each weary day he hoped for rescue.

His hope was faint now, but it did not die. If he had known that his double had taken his place at the school, that he was not missed, that he was not searched for, his hope of rescue would have been very faint indeed. And his despondency would have been deeper if he had been able to know that, while he was held a helpless prisoner, his double was alienating his friends, and covering his name with disgrace.

Fortunately for him, he could not know that.

"I've got to get out of this!" he muttered again and again, as he paced the narrow prison. "Where am I? What are they doing it for? What does it all mean?"

He pressed his hands to his throbbing brow.

Escape was his thought—and it was impossible. The barred window was impossible to pass, and the bars, placed at a distance from the glass, made it impossible for him to reach the panes to break them. The panes were of ground-glass, and he could not see beyond them.

More than once he had thought of trying conclusions with the masked man who brought him his food. But the man was burly and powerful, and he never came to the room without a bludgeon in his hand, which he was quite ready to use if necessary. A struggle with him would have been hopeless.

But Tom Merry was getting to the pitch of desperation now.

He flung himself upon the bed at last, but it was long before he slept. He was thinking of St. Jim's—thinking of his friends there. Would he ever see the old school again? He had been a prisoner for a whole week now—it seemed like years to him.

He slept at last, and woke when the morning sun was streaming through the ground-glass of the window.

He rose, with a new and desperate determination in his heart. When the gaoler came again he would fight for his liberty. It was better to fight and be beaten than to endure this imprisonment without a struggle. He felt that he had no chance, but he was desperate now.

There were footsteps outside on the landing at last. Tom Merry clenched his hands, his eyes gleaming. The moment was at hand. He heard the grating of the bolt as it was withdrawn, the click of the key turning in the lock. The masked man appeared, his face covered with a cloth tied round the back of his head, pierced for sight and breathing. He had a tray in his hands, and his cudgel hung by a loop or thong from his waist. It was only a boy he had to deal with, but he was never off his guard.

"'Ere's your grub," he said, as he set the tray on the table, keeping between Tom Merry and the door. "Now, then, keep your distance! Don't play the fool!"

Tom Merry panted.

"Will you let me go?"

There was a chuckle under the cloth mask.

"Not if I know it! Eat your breakfast, and be thankful that you git it, young shaver! You'll be let go all in good time, I reckon!"

The man backed towards the door, never taking his eyes from the junior. Tom Merry stepped to the table and took up the jug of water—the drink provided for him. The man was stepping backwards from the doorway, when Tom suddenly hurled the jug.

Crash!

"You young 'ound!"

The masked man raised the cudgel just in time. The jug crashed on it, and broke, and fell in a score of fragments to the floor. The water splashed over the rascal. At the same moment the desperate junior sprang upon him.

"'Ands off, you young fool!"

Tom Merry closed with him savagely. Burly as the man was, for a moment the junior's fierce attack bore him backwards. They reeled together through the doorway, out upon the landing. On the verge of the stairs they struggled. Down that narrow staircase lay the way to freedom, and if Tom Merry could have gained a start, the burly ruffian would not have had much chance of overtaking him. But the sinewy arms were wound round the junior, and, in spite of his desperate efforts, he was whirled off his feet and dragged back through the doorway.

"Let go!" hissed the ruffian, breathing hard from his exertions. "I'll brain yer if you don't let go!"

He freed his right hand, grasping the cudgel. Tom Merry clung to him, struggling with all his strength. The cudgel circled in the air, and a savage blow was struck.

Then Tom Merry's fierce grasp relaxed.

He staggered back into the room, his hands catching helplessly at the air, and fell like a log to the floor.

The masked man leaned on the door-post, panting for breath.

"He would 'ave it!" he muttered.

The fallen junior did not stir. He had been stunned. The ruffian bent over him, lifted him, and placed him on the bed.

Then he quitted the room, locking and bolting the door behind him.

For a long time the hapless junior lay motionless on the bed, scarcely seeming to breathe. His senses came back at last, and he raised himself dazedly on his elbow, looking wildly round him. His head was aching and throbbing. He ran his hand through the curly hair and felt the bump there where the cudgel had struck. He groaned. He had made his bid for liberty, and he had failed. He was still a prisoner, helpless, in the hands of his enemies.

CHUCKLES, 1/2D. THE CHAMPION COLOURED PAPER. EVERY SATURDAY.

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CHAPTER 6.
The Flogging.

ST. JIM'S was in a buzz of excitement that morning.

The order had gone forth for the whole school to assemble in Big Hall after prayers to witness the flogging of the captain of the Shell.

Seniors and juniors crowded in from both Houses.

When the school was assembled there was only one fellow who was missing from his place. Tom Merry was not to be seen in the ranks of the Shell.

The Shell fellows whispered to one another. The Head was expected to enter at any moment. Taggles, the porter, whose duty it was to "hoist" the junior, was ready at his post. But the condemned junior was not there.

"Where is he?" Kangaroo muttered. "Isn't he coming?"

"I saw him going into his study," said Gore, with a grin. "Perhaps he isn't coming. I fancy he'd rather be sacked than flogged. And if he refuses to come---"

"He'll be fetched," said Dane.

"The Head may change his mind and sack him instead," Kangaroo remarked. "It's queer, but it really seems as if he'd prefer that. I can't understand him."

Whatever might be the condemned junior's motive, certainly he was not there. Kildare glanced over the Shell, looking for him.

"Where is Tom Merry?" he asked.

"In his study, I think, Kildare," said Gore.

Kildare frowned.

"He should be here. Go and tell him to come at once, Gore."

"Right-ho!"

George Gore left the hall, and at the same moment the Head entered by the upper door. Dr. Holmes's face was very grave. He glanced at the table where the birch lay, and then glanced over the assembled school. The buzz died away into respectful silence. It was very seldom that the school was called together to witness a flogging, and the fellows all realised that it was a serious occasion.

"Merry!"

The Head's voice, low but deep, was heard in every corner of Big Hall. There was no reply, and no one stirred.

"Merry!" repeated the Head. "Come forward!"

"He isn't here, sir," said Kildare awkwardly. "I've sent for him."

Dr. Holmes frowned. The junior had been ordered to be in his place, and he had evidently defied that order.

"Very well, Kildare," he said quietly.

Gore came back into the hall. He came alone. Kildare turned to him sharply.

"Well, where is Tom Merry?" he asked.

"He says he won't come."

There was a gasp from all the fellows. Dr. Holmes's frown grew darker. Perhaps at that moment he regretted his decision to allow the junior to remain at the school. But he was not a man to change his mind lightly. Tom Merry was to be flogged, and not expelled, and the Head's decision did not waver.

"You had better go, Kildare," he said quietly. "You will see that Merry comes immediately. Take Darrel with you."

"Yes, sir."

The two prefects left the hall. There was a grim and uncomfortable silence. The Head stood like a statue, his face expressing no emotion. Tom Merry was keeping the Head and the whole school waiting! It was, as Figgins whispered to Blake, the giddy climax.

In a few minutes footsteps were heard outside the door. Kildare and Darrel came in, with the recalcitrant junior between them. The fellows who had expected to see a struggle were disappointed. The Shell fellow walked quietly between the two seniors, each of whom held him by the arm. Certainly resistance would not have availed him much. His face was dark and sullen.

Kildare and Darrel marched the junior up the hall to where the Head stood waiting. Then they fell back, and left him there.

Dr. Holmes fixed his eyes upon the junior with a glance that made him shrink.

"You were ordered to be here, Merry," he said quietly.

The junior was silent.

"Why were you not in your place?"

Sullen silence.

"You have chosen to add insolence to your wicked conduct," said the Head. "It is almost incredible that you, Merry, who seemed until quite lately a credit to the school, should act in this unheard-of manner. Do you wish to make me regret that I have decided not to expel you?"

"I'd rather be expelled than flogged," said the junior sullenly.

"That would be a coward's choice. I have given you the

opportunity, Merry, to make an attempt to recover the good name you have lost, to regain the position you have recklessly sacrificed. Remove your jacket."

The junior did not stir.

"He must be dotty!" murmured Blake, in amazement.

Levison of the Fourth grinned. He alone guessed the motive of the sullen junior. Clavering was trying to provoke the Head to expel him, after all. He had not the nerve for resistance; but he had courage enough for sullen defiance and disrespect.

"Do you hear me, Merry?"

The Head's voice was not loud, but it seemed to the assembled school like the rumble of distant thunder.

"Yes."

"Then obey me!"

"I won't!"

"What!"

"I won't!" said the junior deliberately.

Dead silence.

The St. Jim's fellows could not believe their ears.

"It's the sack now," murmured Lowther to Manners. And that opinion was general.

The Head's brow was like a thundercloud. Never had it happened to him before to be defied by any boy belonging to St. Jim's. He made a sign to Taggles.

"Remove his jacket," he said quietly.

Taggles laid hands upon the junior. For a moment it looked as if the latter would resist, and two or three of the prefects made a move forward. But the junior's courage failed him, and he submitted quietly.

Then Taggles hoisted him, and the Head picked up the birch.

Then came the flogging.

The St. Jim's fellows had seen floggings before, but seldom or never a flogging so severe as that.

The junior squirmed and struggled and yelled as the blows descended upon him like rain. The punishment was no more than he deserved. He had, as the fellows said, asked for it. But it was very severe.

Twenty strokes were laid on, and each of them was hard and heavy. By the time the castigation was finished the wretched junior was sobbing and shrieking.

It had been severe enough; but every lip was curling with contempt. However bad a licking was, there was no excuse for a fellow in the Shell blubbing in public in that cowardly manner.

Taggles set him down at a word from the Head.

The punished junior stood gasping and weeping with pain.

"Now, Merry," said the Head quietly, "you have had your punishment. I trust that it will be a lesson to you, and that I shall not have to repeat it. But I shall not hesitate to do so if occasion should arise. You will now beg my pardon for disobedience."

The insolence had been taken out of the junior by that time. He would gladly have defied the Head; but he knew that it would not lead to expulsion now—it would lead only to a further flogging.

"I beg your pardon, sir!" he stuttered out.

"Very well. The matter is now ended. Dismiss!"

The Head left the hall by the upper door.

The boys dispersed.

Two only of them lingered to speak to the weeping, writhing junior. They were Manners and Lowther. Even yet their patience was not worn out. Lowther forgot the blow he had received the previous evening, as he saw the captain of the Shell in his present plight. He came towards him—a little doubtfully.

"Buck up, Tom!" he said awkwardly.

The junior turned upon him furiously.

"Let me alone, hang you!"

"I——"

"I hate you! I hate the whole place, and everybody here! Let me alone, you cad!"

"Tom——" began Manners.

"Oh, hold your tongue!"

The junior strode away, scowling savagely and gritting his teeth. Manners and Lowther looked at one another. Lowther's hands were clenched hard. Only the fact that the captain of the Shell had just been flogged kept Lowther's hands off him.

"What do you think of him?" muttered Lowther, between his teeth.

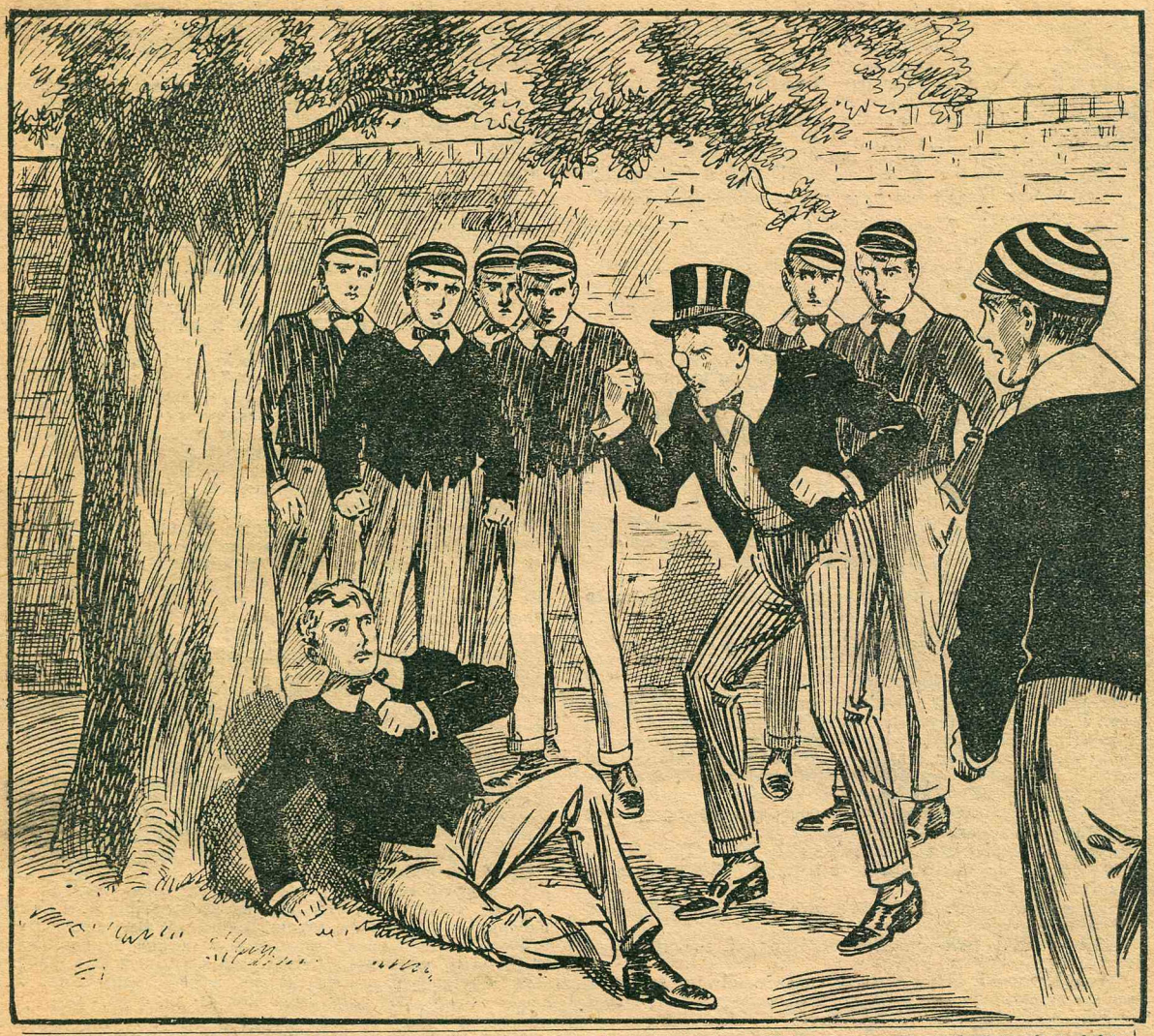
Manners shook his head.

"I'm done with him," he said.

"And I'm done with him," said Lowther. "I've said it before, but this is the finish. I wish we'd let him be sacked. The cad, the rotter, the utter outsider! The sooner St. Jim's is rid of him the better."

And they went slowly from the hall.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES, ½d.



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed to the attack, hitting out furiously. A terrific upper-cut carried Clavering right off his feet, and he crashed to the ground. "I'm done!" he gasped. "Wats! Get up, you wottah!" panted D'Arcy, dancing round him. "I haven't thwashed you yet!" *(See Chapter 9.)*

CHAPTER 7.

The Meeting.

IN the Shell Form-room that morning, the flogged junior sat with a white face and trembling lip.

Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, passed him over lightly in the Form work. He knew that he was in no condition for it, and he was lenient.

But from the Shell fellows he received no sympathy.

The most reckless fellow in the Form had a great respect for the Head, and the sullen junior's defiance of their headmaster alienated all sympathy. There was not a redeeming trait in the fellow's character, that even his chums could see. He had proved himself to be a rotter through and through, and no one had a good word to say for him, or a word at all to speak to him.

When the Form was dismissed after morning lessons, no one addressed a word to the punished junior.

He quitted the Form-room by himself, and went out into the quadrangle, his face black and sullen, his eyes glinting under his bent brows. He was still feeling the ache of his punishment; he was likely to feel it all that day. Kangaroo had intended to call a meeting of the Shell that day to "sack" Tom Merry formally from his position of captain of the Form, but he let it go. As the Cornstalk remarked, with contemptuous pity, the poor rotter had had enough just then.

Levison of the Fourth joined the outcast as he was going down to the gates. The Shell fellow looked at him savagely.

"Going out?" asked Levison, with a smile.

"Mind your own business!"

"Give Goring my kind regards."

The Shell fellow clenched his hands.

"I'll talk to you presently," said Levison. "No; I'm not going to follow you. You can cut off."

And he strolled away, whistling.

The Shell fellow tramped out of the gates and down the road towards Rylcombe. In spite of what Levison had said, he looked behind him several times, but he was not followed.

Levison had spied on him before, and had learned all that he cared to know, and he did not intend to risk meeting Clavering's confederate. Gerald Goring would be a more dangerous customer to tackle than Clavering; Levison instinctively realised that. He intended to give the older rascal a wide berth.

The Shell fellow entered the wood by the footpath, and plunged into the trees. In ten minutes or so he was in a secluded glade, and there a man was standing, leaning against a tree, smoking a cigar, and waiting for him.

It was Gerald Goring.

Goring put up his eyeglass, and looked curiously at the white-faced junior.

"Well?" he said laconically.

"Well?" growled the junior.

"I have been waiting; I thought you'd probably come," said Goring. "You were to come here, and tell me if all went well. I can see that something has happened. You've been flogged, I suppose?"

"Yes!" snarled Clavering.

"Well, it's all in the game. You mustn't mind being hurt a little, considering what there is at stake."

"You didn't get it—and I did."

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Goring smiled, and twisted his black moustache.

"Well, it's over now," he said

"It's not over."

The man with the black moustache started.

"Not over! What do you mean? I had the note you wrote me last night. You said you were to be expelled this morning."

"So I was, but the Head let me off."

"Let you off! You fool—you fool!" hissed Goring, his coolness forsaking him for a moment. "Why did you let him?"

"Do you think I could help it?" snarled Clavering. "Those rotters—Tom Merry's old pals—interceded for me. I didn't want them to—I didn't know till afterwards. Goodness knows I've done enough to choke them off! I think I've choked them off pretty thoroughly now—but the harm's done. The Head flogged me, and didn't expel me. I've got it all to do over again."

Goring gnawed his moustache savagely.

"What infernal luck!" he said. "Of course, we might have foreseen something of the kind. Tom Merry was a model schoolboy—until you took his place. I suppose it's natural that the Head should want to go easy with him. Well, it only means a little more time. You can soon feed him up."

"I haven't told you all yet!" growled Clavering, seating himself on a log, and lighting a cigarette.

"What more is there?" Goring's eyes scanned the junior's face. "Malediction!" he broke out suddenly. "You don't mean that anything is discovered?"

"Yes."

"What! You crass fool, you have not allowed them to suspect that you are not Tom Merry?"

"No, I didn't; but one fellow knows."

"Knows you are not Tom Merry?" gasped Goring.

"Yes."

"You—you told him?"

"Should I tell him? Don't be an ass! He spied on me when I came to meet you last Saturday. He listened in the trees there, and he heard all you said to me. He knows the whole story now—about old Brandreth in South Africa, and his will, and what Tom Merry is to be disgraced for. He knows that I'm not Tom Merry, and guesses from that that Merry has been kidnapped, and is being kept a prisoner somewhere."

Gerald Goring's face was quite pale now. He glanced round uneasily, as if in fear of a listener. Clavering burst into a savage laugh.

"It's all right now. I've taken care that I'm not followed this time," he said.

"But—but the fellow must have suspected something, or he wouldn't——"

"Yes, he would. He's a spy by nature—always watching and listening and sneaking," said Clavering. "He's that kind of chap."

"And now he knows—all?"

"All!" said Clavering, with a nod.

"What kind of a boy is he?"

"A rotter clean through!"

Goring drew a breath of relief.

"That's better. We can manage him, then. If it had been one of Tom Merry's friends——"

"Tom Merry's friends wouldn't have spied and listened. There's no danger in that quarter. But this fellow——"

"What is his name?"

"Levison. He is in the Fourth Form."

"He hasn't given you away yet?"

"No."

"He must have a reason for keeping his tongue quiet," said Goring. "I suppose he wants to make something out of it. Is that it?"

"I suppose so. He told me last evening that he knew, but I haven't spoken to him about it since. Of course, he's on the make, or he would have given us away already."

"He's not a friend of Tom Merry's?"

"Not likely. He hates him!"

"All the better. Then he isn't concerned about what happens to Merry in any way?"

"Not in the least. He's only thinking of what he can make out of the thing without risk to himself. That's the kind of fellow he is."

"We can thank our lucky star that he is that kind of fellow," said Goring. "It's awkward, but we can keep his mouth shut. I suppose he can keep a secret, if it's to his advantage?"

"He could be as close as an oyster if he liked. But it will have to be made worth his while."

"How is he off for money?"

"Poor as Lazarus, I believe!"

"Good! Then we can deal with him. He will try to screw money out of you to keep this dark," said Goring, his eyes glittering.

"That's his game, of course."

"Then it's safe. Let him have some money; and once he's taken it, he's made himself a party to the conspiracy. If he betrayed us after that, he would have to own up that he was an accessory, and that he had blackmailed you. You can stand him a fiver."

Clavering's eyes opened.

"He's thinking of quids, not fivers," he said.

"That's the idea. Fivers have numbers on them, and quids don't," said Goring coolly. "Once he has passed a banknote taken from you, he can never deny it afterwards. It can be traced by the number, and that will be proof against him."

"By 'gad!" said Clavering "I never thought of that! Give me the fiver, and I'll plant it on the cad, and after that——"

"After that he will be as much in our hands as we are in his," said Goring. He took out his pocket-book, and extracted a five-pound note. "I got this from Joliffe, at the Green Man. I've got the number safe. Once Master Levison has passed that note, he will have to hold his tongue, or convict himself of conspiracy and blackmail."

Reggie Clavering chuckled as he put the note in his pocket. It tickled him very much to think of catching the cunning Levison in that way.

"That's settled," said Goring. "And now about our plans. You will have to try again, and the Head won't let you down easy a second time. You must make it something deadly serious—something he can't pardon. Half-measures are no good, and the blacker you make things for Tom Merry, the safer it will be for both of us. Remember, there's a fortune of fifty thousand pounds at stake. Tom Merry must be expelled from St. Jim's—for theft!"

Clavering shifted uneasily.

"I don't like the idea—it's too risky."

"It's the only way," said Goring firmly. "There mustn't be a chance next time of the Head pardoning you. It must be too serious for that. You will be guilty of theft, and you will confess when you're caught. Nothing easier. And it must be done soon. The whole game is risky enough, and there may be suspicion at any minute. Levison knows already—others may guess something. It's impossible to think of every point and make everything secure. It's the only way, Reggie."

Clavering nodded sullenly.

"I suppose so."

"And we must not risk meeting here again," said Gerald Goring, with another glance round at the silent trees. "We've been spied on once, and it might happen again. Write to me when it's all right, and we'll meet at a distance—on Wayland Moor, say, at the ruined house there. It's lonely enough, and miles from here."

"All right."

"Now get back to the school."

And the two rascals parted.

The plot was nearing its climax now, and ere long the name of Tom Merry would be branded with black shame, never to be eradicated—unless—— But what could happen now to baffle the conspirators? Gerald Goring, as he walked back to Rylcombe, thinking it over, could think of nothing that could defeat that rascally plot, and he smiled with satisfaction. He was very near now to the prize he had plotted and schemed for—very near! And to the unhappy boy whose name was to be branded, whose life was to be shadowed by undying shame, the plotter did not give a thought.

CHAPTER 8.

Levison's Whack.

TOM MERRY'S double came in to dinner with the rest of the School House fellows. There was a cloud upon his face. That was natural enough under the circumstances, and the other juniors did not guess the thoughts that were passing in his mind.

The imposture had been so easy. The St. Jim's fellows were so far from suspecting that he was not really Tom Merry that Clavering had been quite confident till now. But the thought that Levison of the Fourth knew the truth gave him a new uneasiness. He could not help looking at fellows to see whether there was suspicion in their glances. He could not help fancying that eyes were fixed upon him with distrust. More than ever, he wished that the ordeal was over, that the grim comedy was played out and he was safe outside the walls of St. Jim's.

Nobody spoke to him when he came out after dinner. It had not been openly suggested to send him to Coventry,

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but the fellows seemed to have agreed upon it tacitly. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with him, and they made it plain enough.

The only exception was Levison. He joined the Shell fellows in the quadrangle, with a mocking smile upon his keen, sharp face.

"Ready to talk business?" he asked, dropping upon the oaken bench under the old elms, where the junior was seated in gloomy thought.

"What do you want?"

Levison smiled cheerfully.

"Can't you guess?" He cast a cautious look round. "I've held my tongue. One good turn deserves another. You and your precious pal stand to make a big thing out of this. It's no business of mine about Tom Merry—he's no friend of mine. But it's got to be a case of sharing out, or else——" He paused.

"Or else?" asked Clavering."

"Or else all St. Jim's will know jolly soon that you are——"

"Hush!"

Levison laughed mockingly.

"I'll hush all right if you make it worth my while," he said. "I don't deny that I'm on the make. I'm as poor as a church mouse, and I've got expensive tastes. My pocket-money isn't half enough for me. I have to raise the tin somehow, and this is the easiest way. Don't be a hog. You stand to get lumps of money, and when you get it, my son, I'm coming in for my whack. I warn you of that. And I'm going to have a few quids to go on with. You've got plenty of dibs. Shell out!"

"If you'll hold your tongue I'll make it five pounds," said Clavering.

"Good enough! And when that's gone, you'll make it five pounds again," said Levison coolly. "I'll be reasonable, but I mean to have my share. I'm running a certain amount of risk in knowing this and not telling. I'm going to be paid for the risk. Where's the quidlets?"

Clavering took the banknote from his pocket.

"There you are!"

"I'd rather have it in cash."

"I haven't any cash. I suppose a fiver's good enough?"

Levison looked at him hard.

"A fiver's good enough," he agreed. "I don't doubt that it's a good fiver, but I want it in the form of sovereigns."

"Well, Mrs. Taggles will change it for you at the tuckshop."

"No, she won't!"

"If you ask her——"

"I'm not going to ask her," said Levison calmly. "You're going to ask her, my son. Do you think I'm a baby? I've got sense enough not to leave a trail behind me like a snail. You can go to the tuckshop and change that fiver—it's yours. You can hand me the sovereigns afterwards. Sovereigns don't leave traces behind."

Clavering looked at him with suppressed rage and hatred in his glance. It was not so easy to pin down the black sheep of the Fourth as Gerald Goring had imagined. Levison was a match for him.

"I'm waiting," said Levison.

"You can have that fiver or nothing," said Clavering sullenly.

"Then I'll have nothing," said Levison, rising from the bench. "And I'm sorry to say that I've got a painful duty to perform now." He turned away.

"What are you going to do?" muttered Clavering, turning pale.

Levison made a gesture towards the School House, where Manners and Lowther and Kangaroo could be seen talking together.

"I'm going to call them," he said. "They'll be glad to hear that you are not Tom Merry, considering how you have been acting lately."

"Hold your tongue!"

"Rats!"

Levison walked away. Clavering jumped up, his face full of fear. He dared not risk the exposure, as the cad of the Fourth knew very well.

"Levison! Come back!"

The Fourth-Former paused.

"What do you want?" he asked coolly.

"I—I—I'll change the note," stuttered Clavering.

"I'll give you five minutes to do it in," said Levison. "If you're not back here with the quids in five minutes, you know what to expect."

"Wait for me," muttered Clavering, almost choking with rage. Levison nodded, and the Shell fellow hurried away to the little tuckshop in the corner of the quadrangle. He came back in less than five minutes.

Levison glanced round, and stepped in the shadow of the trees to receive the five sovereigns. He slipped them into his pocket and grinned.

"Thanks!" he said carelessly. "And after this, my son, don't play any rotten tricks to catch your uncle. You might as well try to catch a weasel asleep. And when you see your pal Goring again, you can tell him, from me, that I shall want a whack in the loot, or there will be trouble. See?"

Clavering muttered something indistinctly, and turned away. Levison strolled jauntily towards the School House, and met Mellish and Gore and Crooke.

"Coming to the tuckshop?" he asked airily.

"Hallo! Somebody left you a fortune?" asked Gore curiously.

"My pater's stumped up pretty well," said Levison. "I've had a remittance."

"I thought your pater was down on his luck?" said Crooke.

"Luck's turned," explained Levison coolly. "I hear that I'm going to get a decent allowance in the future. I can do with it. Now, who says ginger-pop?"

"Ginger-pop!" said the three juniors together immediately.

And they accompanied Levison to the tuckshop very willingly. Levison threw a sovereign on the counter with a princely air.

"My treat!" he said. "Order what you like!"

"My hat! You're going it strong!" said Mellish. "Mine's jam-tarts!"

And Levison was treated with most marked respect by his friends after that. A fellow who could change sovereigns in that airy way at the tuckshop was worthy of respect—from their point of view, at least.

After lessons that day Levison sauntered down to Rylcombe and dropped in at the Green Man to see Mr. Joliffe. Whenever Levison was in funds, he had a fancy for backing horses, and Mr. Joliffe was always ready to oblige his young friend in that way—a fact that accounted for Levison being so frequently out of funds.

Levison grinned as he saw Gerald Goring smoking a cigar in the inn garden. He wondered what Goring would have said if he had known that it was his money Levison had come there to lay on Bully Boy. The cad of the Fourth walked back to St. Jim's in a mood of great satisfaction. Mr. Joliffe had solemnly assured him that Bully Boy was practically certain to win, at four to one, and Levison had the happy prospect of changing four pounds into sixteen in a couple of days. The only drawback to that happy scheme was the unfortunate circumstance that, when the race was run, Bully Boy came in seventh, and Levison's four pounds vanished for ever, instead of coming back in the shape of sixteen sovereigns.

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CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus is Wrathy.

"BAI Jove! What's the mattah, Wally, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked the question in quite an anxious tone. He had suddenly come upon his minor in the School House, rubbing his head, and very nearly on the point of blubbing. D'Arcy minor would have fiercely resented any suggestion that he could possibly blub under any conceivable circumstances whatever, but all the same, he was very near to it now.

"That wottah Knox been bullyin' you, kid?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"No!" growled Wally.

"Is it Cutts of the Fifth, the awful wottah?"

"'Tain't Cutts."

"Then what's the matter? You've got quite a big bwuise on your head!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's wrathfully. "I ordah you to tell me who it was, Wally, and I will go and give the wank wottah a feahful thwashin'."

"You can't," grunted his minor disrespectfully. "Tom Merry could make rings round you, Gus."

"Was it Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes; the beast lammed me over the head with a cricket-stump!" gasped Wally. "Made me see stars for a minute! I only just chipped in because he was bullying Curly, and he lammed me as if he wanted to brain me, the horrible hooligan!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We'll make him sit up for it," said Wally ferociously. "He'll find that he can't handle the Third Form in this way, the rotter. I used to like Tom Merry, but he's turned out the beastliest bully in the House—worse than Gore ever was. And he used to hammer Gore for bullying the fags."

"He is a wank wottah," said Arthur Augustus indignantly. "He is wathah big for me, I know, but I'm goin' to thwash

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him, all the same. I wegard it as bein' up to me as a D'Arcy. Come and see me do it, Wally!"

"Look here, Gussy, you can't handle him——"

"Wats! Come on!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched off indignantly in search of the captain of the Shell. It was Wednesday, and a half-holiday, and most of the juniors were thinking of cricket. The School House juniors were to play Figgins's team from the New House, and Kangaroo was captaining them. Tom Merry had dropped out of his old place as junior cricket captain. One of the things that helped to disgust the juniors with their former captain was the fact that he had "chucked" cricket.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake, as D'Arcy joined a crowd of School House juniors outside the House. "What's the row, Gussy? Wherefore that ferocious frown? Who's going to be slaughtered?"

"Tom Merry! Where is the wottah?"

"What's Tom Merry been doing now?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Look at Wally!"

The juniors inspected Wally.

"Looks much the same as usual," commented Manners. "He wants a wash, and he's wasted a lot of ink in ornamenting his collar. Also his tie wants putting straight."

"You silly chump!" began Wally.

"Look at his head!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"Nothing in that!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at that fearful bump on his nappah. Tom Merry did that with a cwicket-stump."

"Great Scott!"

"The brute!"

"The rotter!"

"And I'm goin' to thwash him for it," said Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy to have to thwash a fwiend of yours, you Shell chaps."

"He's no friend of mine," said Lowther shortly.

"Nor of mine," said Manners.

"The chap who'd treat a fag like that wouldn't be owned as a friend by any decent fellow," said Kangraoo. "That licking he had yesterday doesn't seem to have done him any good. He's asking for more."

"Yaas, wathah, and he's goin' to get it," said Arthur Augustus. "You fellows can come and see fair play."

"What about the cricket?"

"Lots of time to thwash that wottah. We don't play for an hour yet," said Arthur Augustus, "and as he's not playin', it doesn't mattah how much I hammah him. Anybody know where he is?"

"He's in the quad," said Blake. "Look for him, chaps. He ought to have a jolly good hiding for that. Better leave it to me, though, Gussy."

"Wats! I wefuse to leave it to anybody. It's up to me to thwash him for lammin' my minah with a beastly cwicket-stump."

"Now, Gussy, be reasonable!"

"I wefuse to be weasonable. I mean I wefuse to discuss the mattah. I'm goin' to give him a feahful thwashin'. Where is the wottah?" Arthur Augustus jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and surveyed the quadrangle. "Bai Jove! There he is!"

Arthur Augustus rushed towards the elms, where he had caught sight of the captain of the Shell. The other juniors rushed after him. There was no stopping the swell of St. Jim's when he had made up his mind; but they felt extremely doubtful about the result of the "scrap" between him and Tom Merry. True, the Shell fellow had shown many symptoms of "funk" lately; but he had always hitherto had the reputation of being a very great fighting-man, and certainly more than a match for the elegant Fourth-Former. Jack Blake consoled himself with the reflection that, if Gussy were licked, he would proceed to wipe up the ground with the captain of the Shell afterwards.

"Tom Mewwy, you wottah!"

The Shell fellow jumped up, eyeing the crowd of juniors uneasily.

"You have been waggin' my minah," said Arthur Augustus. "You have tweated him in an outwageous mannah. You have lammed him on the nappah with a cwicket-stump. You might have bwained him, if——"

"If he'd had any brains," remarked Reilly of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Weilly——"

"He cheeked me!" growled the Shell fellow. "I'd do it again, too."

"I wathah thing you won't, aftah the lesson I'm goin' to give you," said Arthur Augustus. "Hold my jacket, Blake. Pway take care of my monocle, Digby. Now, you wottah, come on!"

The Shell backed away.

"I'm not going to fight you," he said sullenly.

"You wotten funk, you are weady enough to lam a fag with a cwicket stump. Now put up your hands and be thwashed."

"I won't! I——"

"Funk!" yelled the juniors.

The Shell fellow glanced round him with a white face full of hatred and rage. But he did not put up his hands.

"I warn you," said Arthur Augustus, in a suffocating voice, "that you are not goin' to sneak out of it like that, Tom Mewwy. I am goin' to hit you. Put up your beastly paws."

And Arthur Augustus rushed to the attack, hitting out furiously. The Shell fellow put up his hands then, and fought like a wildcat; but it did not serve him. A terrific upper-cut carried him right off his feet, and he crashed on the ground. Arthur Augustus danced round him.

"Get up, you wottah! Jump up, you cad!"

The captain of the Shell did not move.

"I'm done!" he gasped.

"Wats! I haven't thwashed you yet! Get up!"

"I won't!"

"Rotten funk!" growled Blake. "Let him alone, Gussy. You can't hit a chap who won't hit back. Let him alone!"

"But I haven't thwashed him——"

"He's got a prize nose, at any rate," grinned Kangaroo. "Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, the Shell at St. Jim's don't want a coward and a bully for captain. After the House match there's to be a meeting of the Form, and Tom Merry will be sacked from the captaincy of the Shell. That right?"

"Right!" chorused the Shell fellows.

"Good. You hear that, Tom Merry? After the match you're to turn up in the common-room, to take the order of the sack."

"Hang you!" groaned the junior on the ground.

"If you don't come you'll be fetched, and if you're fetched you'll very likely get hurt," said Kangaroo; and then the juniors turned their backs upon the Shell fellow, and walked away in contempt.

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CHAPTER 10.

The House Match.

KANGAROO and his merry men arrived on the cricket ground ready for the match with the New House. Figgins & Co. were already there, in great form, and in great spirits. They intended to beat the School House hollow, and they had more chance than usual, now that the enemy were deprived of the services of their old captain and best batsman. The loss of Tom Merry was a very serious one to the School House junior team.

Kangaroo caught sight of the captain of the Shell as he came out of the pavilion. He wondered whether Tom Merry wanted to play, after all, and his brow clouded at the thought. The once popular junior was so heartily disliked now, that it was doubtful whether any of the eleven would consent to play with him; yet Kangaroo, as skipper, realised what an advantage it would be to have that reliable bat at his service. He considered a moment or two, and then walked over to the captain of the Shell.

"Are you thinking of playing, Tom Merry?" he asked.

"Of course he isn't!" called out Bernard Glyn. "And if he is, he can't. I jolly well won't stay in the team if he's in it, Kangy."

"Same here," said Blake emphatically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Shell captain looked round with a bitter sneer.

"I'm not thinking of playing," he said. "I've chucked cricket, and I don't intend to take it up again. I'm here to see you licked by the New House, that's all. It will be rather amusing."

"You uttah wottah!"

"Oh, get out," said Kangaroo contemptuously, and he turned his back on his Form captain. "I might have known that you didn't want to do anything that a decent fellow would do. And you won't see us licked, if I can help it, you cad."

"Wathah not!"

Kangaroo tossed with Figgins for choice of innings, and the School House went in first to bat. The captain of the Shell stood leaning idly on the pavilion, watching them. Some of the fellows were surprised to see him there. After the way Tom Merry had turned out, they had not expected to see him take any interest in the old game at all.

His interest did not last long.

While Kangaroo and Jack Blake were batting, the Shell fellow turned and went into the pavilion. It had been crowded before the match began, but now there was no one there, and the junior had it to himself.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES, ½d.

"Soon fed-up with watching cricket!" Figgins remarked to Fatty Wynn, with a sniff, as the field crossed over.

"He's gone!" said Fatty, glancing towards the pavilion.

"He's gone into the pav. Smoking, very likely!"

Kangaroo heard the remark, and frowned. If the outcast of the Shell started smoking in the cricket pavilion, the Cornstalk meant to have something to say to him about it. But just then Kangaroo was too busy to think of Tom Merry.

Blake was getting the bowling now from Fatty Wynn, and Fatty was showing all his old form. The New House fellows in the crowd—and their name was legion—cheered Fatty loudly as Blake's bails came down.

"How's that?" chuckled Figgins.

"Out!"

Blake made a grimace, and carried out his bat. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came on in his place, and stood with a Harrow straddle to receive the bowling. He received only one ball, however—it knocked his middle stump out, leaving the wicket looking quite toothless.

"How's that?" shrieked the New House.

"Bai Jove!"

"What price ducks' eggs, Gussy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus tucked his bat under his arm, and walked off the field with his noble nose high in the air. He refused to answer impertinent queries as to the market price of ducks' eggs.

Monty Lowther came in, and lived through the rest of the over. Then Figgins bowled to Kangaroo, and the Cornstalk piled up runs; but at the last ball of the over there was a yell from the New House fellows:

"Well caught! Oh, well caught, sir!"

The ball was in Kerr's hand.

Kangaroo grinned ruefully, and went back to the pavilion, and nodded to Manners to go in and take his place. The innings went on, Manners and Lowther keeping their respective ends up manfully against the New House bowling.

"Wathah hard luck on us, deah boys!" Arthur Augustus remarked. "I had fully intended to make a century, so that Kangy could have declared, without givin' you fellows the twouble to bat at all!"

"Go hon!" murmured Blake.

Kangaroo went into the pavilion. He had not forgotten Figgins's remark. Kangaroo was feeling annoyed. The New House were getting the better of that innings, and more than ever the School House missed Tom Merry's steady bat at the wickets.

That Tom Merry should have turned out such a "rotter" was bad enough, but that he should have thrown up cricket at the beginning of the season was the most exasperating thing of all—at least, it seemed so to Kangaroo at that moment. If he found the fellow smoking in the pavilion, he meant to talk to him with extremely plain English.

He heard a movement in the dressing-room, and looked in.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed.

The Shell fellow was there, and he swung round suddenly, with a startled exclamation.

He had been standing close to where the Cornstalk junior's jacket was hanging on a peg. He stared blankly at Kangaroo.

Noble looked puzzled. There was no tobacco-smoke in the room, and he did not see why the fellow should be so startled.

"I—I thought you were batting."

"I'm out," said Kangaroo. "I thought perhaps you were smoking here, Tom Merry, as you've made that one of your favourite amusements lately. And if you had been, I was going to pitch you out on your neck!"

"I—I wasn't smoking."

"I can see you weren't. What the deuce were you doing, then? Nothing to stick in here for, that I can see!" said Noble, puzzled.

"Find out!"

Kangaroo cast a glance about the room, wondering what was the cause of the Shell fellow's look of confusion. He suspected some jape on the cricketers; but their belongings did not seem to have been meddled with.

The other was watching him like a cat. Kangaroo shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and walked out. After a few minutes the captain of the Shell followed him, and strolled away towards the School House.

Kangaroo & Co. soon forgot all about him. The cricket claimed all their attention. The School House wickets were going down fast; and as it was a single-innings match, they had no chance of making up lost ground in a second innings. Fatty Wynn was at the top of his form, and he made hay of the sticks. In a little more than an hour the School House team were all down for fifty.

"Rotten!" was Jack Blake's terse but expressive comment.

Then the New House side batted, and they made the fur fly. Figgins swiped like Jessop and Hayward rolled into one, and Redfern knocked the ball everywhere. When the New House score reached fifty-one, the side had still three wickets to spare. Figgins & Co. smiled blissfully as they came off the field.

"Three wickets and a run!" grinned Figgins. "Who's cockhouse of St. Jim's at cricket—what?"

"New House!" chuckled his followers.

But the School House fellows looked glum. They had had bad luck, and it was as much as anything due to losing their best man, Tom Merry. If Tom Merry had been kept out of the match by detention or by being crocked, it would have been different. But to be deprived of his services because he had chosen to become a rotter, instead of playing the game—it was no wonder that the feelings of his House fellows towards him were very bitter indeed. Kangaroo's brow was dark as he put on his jacket in the pavilion.

The meeting of the Shell was to be held after tea to "sack" Tom Merry from the position of Form captain, and Kangaroo was greatly inclined to throw in a ragging as well.

"Better luck next time!" said Lowther, as cheerfully as he could.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake suddenly.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Who's been monkeying with my jacket?" growled Blake, feeling in the pockets. "I left my pater's letter in this pocket. Some silly ass has been joking!"

Kangaroo started.

"Nobody's been in here, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Tom Merry has!" said Kangaroo.

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps the wottah has moved your lettah for a sillay joke, deah boy. I wegard it as a wotten twick to meddle with a chap's cowwespondence!"

"It's not only the letter," said Blake, with a worried look. "There was a postal-order for a quid in it. Anybody's welcome to the letter, but I want the quid!"

"Gweat Scott!"

Kangaroo's jaw set squarely.

"Feel in your pockets, you chaps, and see if anything else is missing," he said; and he set the example himself.

He uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Missed anythin', Kangy, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

"My purse. I keep it in this inside pocket—here! It's gone!"

"Anythin' in it?"

"Three pounds."

"My hat!"

"I cashed a postal-order this morning with Mrs. Taggles," said Kangaroo. "I may as well mention that Tom Merry was in the tuckshop, and saw me do it!"

"Tom Merry!"

"Yes," said Kangaroo grimly; "and he was in this room while we were playing cricket. I came in and found him here. He looked startled and scared, and I thought there might be some jape on, but I couldn't see anything wrong. But now——"

The School House fellows gazed at one another aghast. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy closed the door quickly. Every face was dark and serious now.

"It's impossible!" said Lowther at last, in a low voice. "He's turned out an awful rotter—a bully and a blackguard, and all that—but a thief—impossible!"

"It can't be!" said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah, it does seem imposs," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "I can't quite believe it, even of him. It's imposs, Kangy, deah boy!"

"It looks like it to me, anyway," said Kangaroo grimly.

"But, sure, he's not short of money," said Reilly.

"How do we know? He's taken to smoking, drinking, and gambling. We know that. Money soon goes when you play cards and make bets on horses!"

"That's twue enough."

"Better keep it dark, anyway," said Blake uneasily. "It means the sack, short and sharp, for him if this gets out!"

"Jolly good thing, too—and the sooner the better!"

"Give him a chance," said Lowther, who was very pale. "Give him a chance, Kangy. He—he may have done it for—for a lark!"

"Fellows don't handle other fellows' money for a lark," said Kangaroo. "But I don't want to shout it out from the housetops. If he hands the money back, we'll say no more about it, if only for the good name of the House!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!" said Kangaroo. "We've got to have a meeting in the common-room, and he's got to be there. Better get it over!"

And the School House fellows, in silence, with gloomy faces, followed the Cornstalk. After the way Tom Merry

NEXT WEDNESDAY— "THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

had turned out, they would have said that nothing he did would have surprised them. But this! The evidence was all against him, and yet it was impossible—surely impossible! But one thing was certain—if Tom Merry had added dishonesty to the list of his rascalities, his career at St. Jim's was at an end; for that there could be no pardon.

CHAPTER 11.
Proof of Guilt!

THE Shell crowded into the junior common-room in the School House. The New House portion of the Form—a third part of the Shell—had come over to attend the meeting. The deposition of the Form captain was a matter that concerned them all, School House and New House fellows alike. And it was a matter upon which they were all in agreement. The fellow who had become the outcast of the school still held the position of captain of the Shell, to which he had been elected long before almost unanimously. He was to hold it no longer. The Shell were determined upon that. Several of the Fourth had come in to see the proceedings, but they, of course, were not taking part.

All the Shell were there now with the exception of Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Tom Merry. Kangaroo and Dane had gone to fetch the Form captain, who had refused to turn up of his own accord. They came into the common-room with the unpopular junior walking between them. His face was sullen, but he made no resistance. Tom Merry—the Tom Merry of old—might have been expected to resist, but the juniors had already grown accustomed to regarding him as a funk, and they were not surprised to see him walk in quietly between Kangaroo and Dane.

There was a murmur as he came in. Kangaroo closed the door of the common-room. His face was grave and hard.

The outcast of the Shell looked round sullenly.

"You know what you're wanted for," said Kangaroo abruptly.

"I know you're going to play the fool in some way, that's all," answered the junior sullenly. "Get it over, and let me get out. I'm fed-up with you."

"We shall take our own time," said Thompson of the New House, "and if you give us too much lip you'll get a ragging into the bargain."

Kangaroo glanced round at the crowd of juniors.

"Gentlemen of the Shell, you are called together to decide whether you will have Tom Merry any longer for your Form captain! You all know the kind of rotter he is. The whole House is ashamed of him."

"Hear, hear!"

"He is a bully, and a cad, and a rotter, and a thorough blackguard," pursued Kangaro; ; "but you all know it! Hands up for sacking him from the captaincy of the Form!"

Every right hand went up.

"Unanimous" asked Kangaroo.

"Yes, rather!"

The Cornstalk looked at the captain of the Shell. His face was sullen, and his manner expressed nothing but insolent impatience.

"You hear that, Tom Merry?" said Kangaroo steadily.

"I hear it."

"You are no longer captain of the Shell, or junior House captain! We've done with you!"

The junior shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to be captain of the Shell or junior House captain! I'm fed up with it. I've got other things to do."

"Such as smoking cigarettes, or drinking whisky-and-soda?" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"That's my business."

"Well, you understand, now—you're not captain of the Shell. We've finished with you, and it's a good riddance."

"I suppose I can go now, if you've finished playing the fool?" said the junior insolently.

"Not just yet," said Kangaroo, stepping between him and the door. "There's another thing got to be settled yet."

"Well?"

"I found you in the cricket pavilion this afternoon while we were playing. What were you doing there?"

There was a hush in the room now. Every eye was fixed upon the deposed Form captain. Not all the fellows knew of the theft in the pavilion; and those who were not in the secret looked on in wonder. The accused junior flinched, and his eyes dropped before Kangaroo's steady glance.

"I—I—what was I doing?" he stammered.

"Yes. What were you doing?"

"I—I suppose I've a right to go into the cricket pavilion if I choose?"

"Nobody denies that. But what did you go in for?"

"I don't choose to say."

"Then I will say it for you," said Kangaroo grimly. "You went in to go through the pockets of the jackets that were left there!"

"Oh, my hat, draw it mild!" ejaculated Thompson, and there was a murmur from the fellows who had not been in the pavilion.

"I know what I'm talking about," said Kangaroo quietly. "After the match, I missed my purse, and Blake missed a letter containing a postal-order."

"Great Scott!"

"I ask this fellow what he has done with them," pursued the Cornstalk, his eyes grimly on the flushed and uneasy face before him. "He has taken the money. I don't intend to say anything to the Housemaster about it. But he has taken the money, probably to pay some filthy gambling debt; and he's got to hand it back. Then the matter can drop, so far as I'm concerned. I don't want to make it public."

"Wathah not," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously. "For goodness' sake, don't let's have a wotten scandal!"

"You hear me, Tom Merry? Will you hand back what you've stolen?"

"I—I didn't— "

"Then what were you doing in the pavilion?"

"I—I—I——"

"Enough said!" rapped out Kangaroo. "No good piling on lies. We don't believe them. If you want the matter kept dark, hand back the money at once."

"Not much use trying to keep it dark," said Gore, with a grin. It'll be all over the school in an hour."

"Let the rotter be shown up," said Crooks. "We don't want a thief in the School House."

"I sha'n't take any step in the matter," said Kangaroo. "It isn't my business to act the policeman. But the rotter's got to give the loot back. Will you hand it over, Tom Merry?"

"I—I've not got it."

"If you don't hand it over, we shall collar you and search you."

"Don't act the giddy goat, Tom," said Monty Lowther huskily. "We're willing to believe that you did it for a lark."

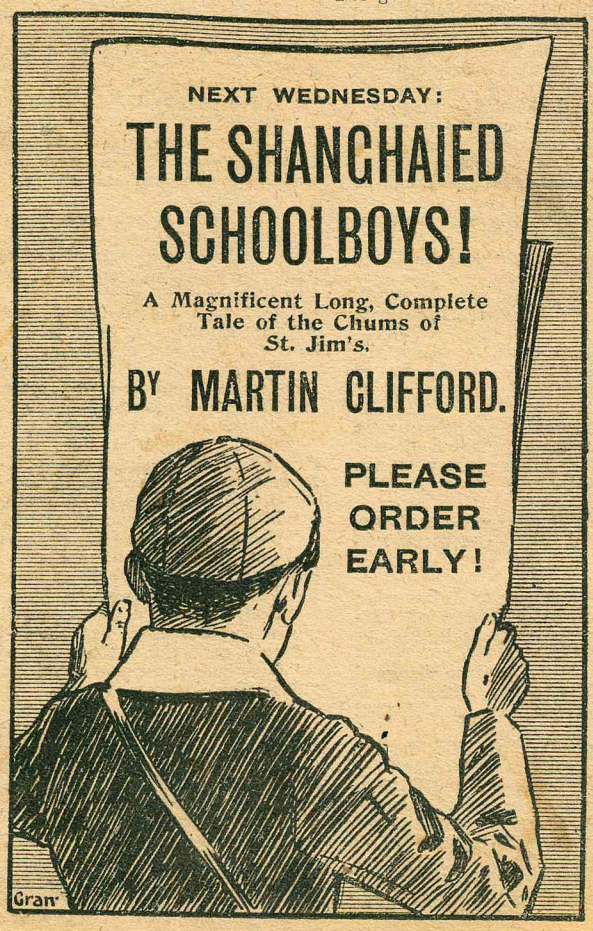
"Are we?" said Gore, with a sniff. "Speak for yourself."

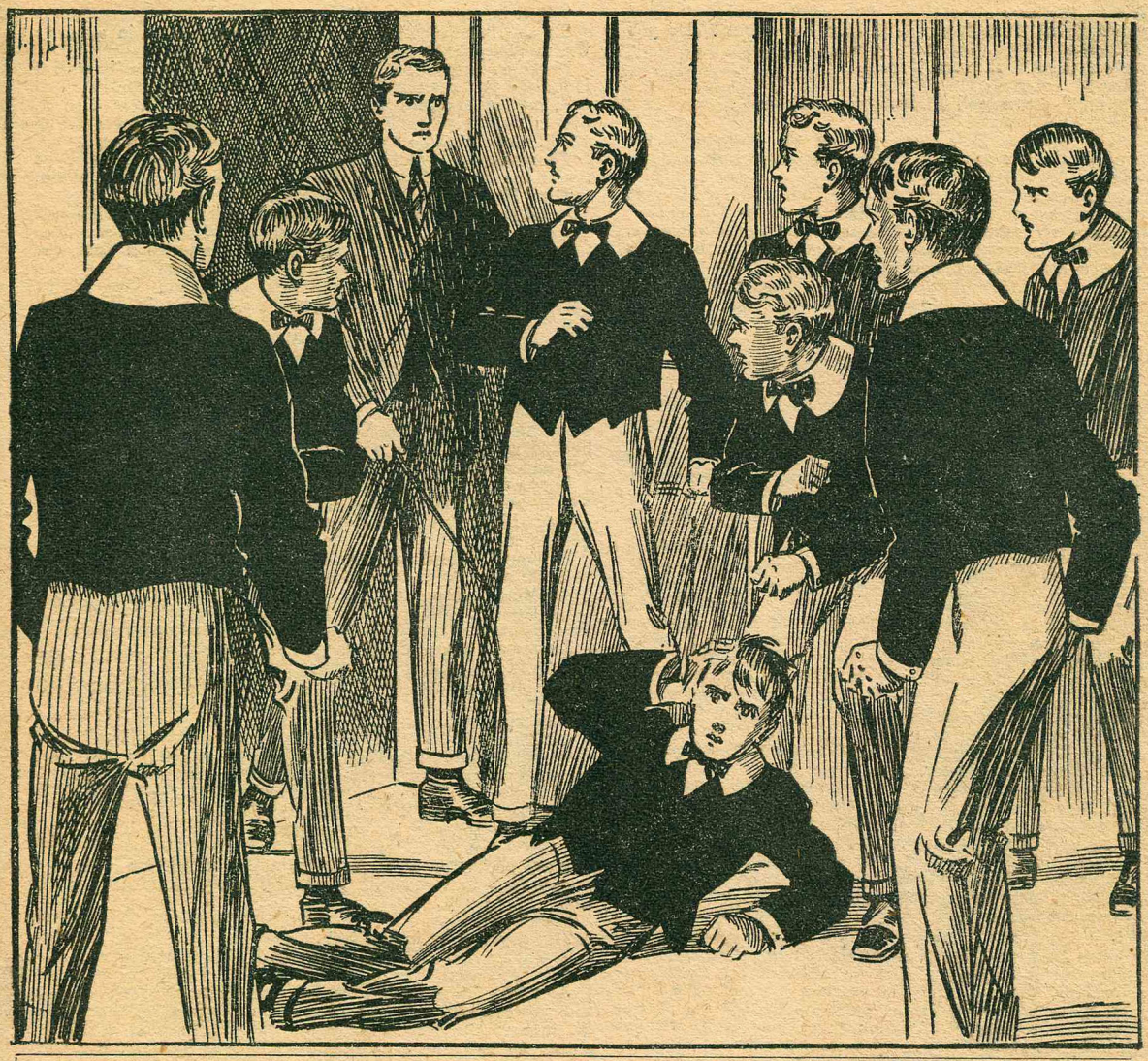
"Shut up, Goah! It's bettah not to have a wotten scandal!"

"Oh, rats!"

"For the last time," said Kangaroo. "Will you hand it over, Tom Merry?"

The junior cast a hunted look round him, and made a





"Bump the cad!" snorted Kangaroo. "Bump him until he tells us where Blake's postal order is!" Clavering was roughly seized, and bumped hard on the floor of the common-room. "Help! Help!" he roared. The door was thrown open, and Kildare strode in! (*See Chapter* 11.)

sudden rush for the door. It was as open a confession of guilt as could have been wanted. There was no chance of his escaping, however. Three or four fellows were in the way, and they grasped him at once, and swung him back into the middle of the room.

"Let me go! Let me go!" shrieked the junior, struggling. "I—I——"

"Hold him!" said Kangaroo grimly. "You go through his pockets, Skimpole, as none of the stuff belongs to you. He might be capable of pretending that we planted it on him, if we search him."

"Certainly," said Skimpole.

And while the outcast of the Form writhed in the grip of Dane and Glyn and Gore, Skimpole went through his pockets, blinking apologetically through his big spectacles as he did so. There was a sudden exclamation from Kangaroo as Skimpole's bony hand brought a little leathern purse to light.

"That's mine!"

Skimpole handed it to him. Kangaroo opened it; the money was inside. There was a loud buzz from the crowd of fellows in the room. It was proof positive, and now there was grim condemnation in every face.

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "that settles it, deah boys! The awful wottah is a thief, after all!"

Monty Lowther bit his lip hard. This was the fellow who had been his best chum—the fellow he had liked even better than Manners, whom he had known longer. The shame and humiliation of it cut him to the heart. But there was no compassion in his breast now for the wretched junior. The old friendship was dead now. He could not feel a spark of pity for a thief.

Skimpole turned out another pocket. A letter, plainly addressed to Jack Blake, was revealed. Blake took it quietly, without a word, and looked into it.

"Is the postal-order there?" asked Kangaroo.

"No; it's gone."

"What have you done with Blake's postal-order, Tom Merry?"

"Hang you!"

"You've got to hand it back. Where is it?"

"Find out!"

"We'll find out fast enough," said Kangaroo savagely. "Bump the cad, and keep it up till he tells us what he's done with Blake's postal-order."

"Yes, rather."

The junior struggled violently in the grasp of the angry Shell fellows. But he struggled in vain. He was swept off his feet, and bumped hard on the floor of the common-room.

"Oh!" he roared. "Ow! Help! Help! Help!"

"You fool!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Do you want to bring the prefects here? Do you want this to get to the Head?"

"Let me go! Help! Help!"

"Well, if he asks for it, he can have it. Bump him again!"

Bump!

"Help, help!" shrieked the junior.

The door of the common-room was thrown open, and Kildare strode in, his face angry, and his hand gripping a cane.

"What's this row about?" he demanded sharply. "What are you ragging Tom Merry for? Let him alone! Do you hear?"

"He's a thief!" shouted Gore.

"What!"

"Dry up!" murmured Blake.

But Gore did not dry up.

"He's a thief! He's been picking the pockets in the pavilion, and he won't say what he's done with Blake's postal-order!"

"Good heavens! Is it possible?" Kildare fixed his eyes upon the outcast of the Shell. "Tom Merry, is this so?"

The junior struggled from the hands of his Form-fellows. He did not reply, but his silence was enough. And Kildare's face grew as hard as iron as he looked at him.

CHAPTER 12.

Free at Last!

"WHEN will he come?"

The prisoner in the house on the hill muttered the words to himself again and again as the light faded from the barred window of the room.

The sun, that had gone down upon such a strange scene at St. Jim's, seemed to sink with maddening slowness to the lonely lad in the prison chamber.

For Tom Merry was waiting—waiting for night, waiting for his captor and gaoler.

His first bid for liberty had been a failure. He still bore under his curly hair the mark where the cudgel had brutally struck. But he had determined upon a second attempt, an attempt yet more desperate.

He had shrunk at first from the idea of using violence towards this man who was acting as his gaoler in the lonely house. Open violence he could not use—the man was always on his guard. And to lie in wait for him, to strike from behind, revolted Tom Merry, though the man was a kidnapper and a gaoler, and was keeping him from freedom. But he had resolved to banish his last scruple now. Since that savage blow had stunned him, and he had lain a whole day with aching, throbbing head, Tom Merry felt himself justified in using any means against his brutal gaoler. If he could have obtained a weapon, he would probably have used it without scruple in his present mood, and it would have gone hard with the masked rascal. From the moment he recovered his senses after that stunning blow the imprisoned junior had had only one thought—to get the better of the masked man by any means in his power, even at the risk of causing him serious injury. He was desperate.

His first need was a weapon. Nothing had been placed in the room that could serve as a weapon; but Tom Merry's ingenuity was equal to that. If he broke a leg from the table or chair, the gaoler would observe it the moment he entered—his eyes were never at rest—during the day; but after dark it was different. After dark the man came with a lantern in his hand, and it was not so easy for him to observe a detail in the room. When the sun was down, and dark shadows were thickening in the lonely room, Tom Merry wrenched a leg from the chair, and propped the chair against the table, so that it was concealed as much as possible.

He had a weapon now. Certainly it was no match for the gaoler's bludgeon, as he was no match for the burly man himself. But he did not mean to encounter the rascal openly. That was asking for defeat and failure.

He arranged the bolster and pillow in the bed to give it the appearance of containing a sleeper. He had spent most of the day lying down, and he had been lying down during his gaoler's last two visits, affecting to feel the result of that stunning blow on the head more than was really the case. The rascal would probably expect to find him in bed—at all events, would not be surprised to see the form of a sleeper there.

But the sleeper would be a dummy. Tom Merry would be concealed behind the door when it opened, his club in his hand.

If luck befriended him, he would get in one stunning blow before the man knew what was happening to him, and that was Tom's only chance.

If he failed, he knew that he would have to resign himself to imprisonment so long as Gerald Goring and his confederates chose to keep him there.

If he succeeded, he was free. He was pretty certain that there was no one else in the lonely house save the masked man who guarded him. Sometimes he believed there was no one in the house at all save himself, but then the lock and the bolt held him a prisoner in the garret. But the masked man always came in time to give him his meals. On some occasions he had been the worse for drink, but never off his guard.

"Will he never come?"

To the impatient junior the sun seemed slow in setting; the masked gaoler seemed later than usual.

Darkness descended over the earth, from the lonely garret faded the last vestige of the light of day. Tom Merry stood in complete blackness. But his eyes were accustomed to it, and in that he would have an advantage over his enemy, who would come in from the light outside, lantern in hand.

There was a sound of footsteps at last, a gleam of light under the door. The gaoler was ascending the garret stairs.

Tom Merry's heart beat harder.

It all depended upon the next few minutes now. He had taken off his boots to be more silent. The boots stood in full view beside the bed, to aid the impression that the junior was asleep there.

Silent, white, but firm and full of resolve, Tom Merry drew behind the door, the improvised club firmly gripped in his hand.

Even now it seemed long ere the man came. Probably he had been out, probably drinking. His footsteps were slow and heavy as he mounted the narrow staircase.

Tom Merry waited.

Strangely enough, in that moment of strain and excitement his thoughts wandered to St. Jim's, to the old school he had not seen for a weary week.

What were the fellows doing now?

It was time for evening preparation. Manners and Lowther would be in the old study, grinding away, without their chum. Little did Tom Merry dream of what was in reality passing at St. Jim's in those moments.

A hand fumbled on the door.

All thoughts but of the desperate business in hand left Tom Merry. His attention was concentrated on the door.

He stood in black darkness, broken only by a ray of light that penetrated the keyhole and a dim gleam under the door.

There was a grating sound as the bolt was withdrawn.

Tom Merry's heart beat almost to suffocation.

The moment was at hand. His grip tightened upon his weapon. There was a repugnance in his breast, his whole nature recoiled from lying in wait for an enemy to strike him down without warning. But he remembered the brutal blow, the callous brutality with which the ruffian had used his weapon upon an unarmed boy, and all scruples vanished. And it was his liberty he was to strike for!

He set his teeth and waited, implacable.

He knew the risk he was running. If his first blow failed he would not have time for another. Then he would sink stunned under the crash of the cudgel, to be thrown insensible on the bed, to wake with throbbing brain, as he had waked before.

Click!

The key turned in the lock.

The door opened, and the lantern light gleamed into the room. As usual, the masked man stood for a moment and looked into the room before entering. But the opened door hid the ambushed junior from his sight. His glance went at once to the bed. He made out the form of a sleeper there, he saw the boots beside the bed, and not a doubt crossed his mind.

He entered the room, his hand outstretched to set the lantern upon the table.

Then Tom Merry, his teeth set, his eyes glittering like diamonds, sprang.

His weapon swept through the air, and came with a crash, with all the force of his arm behind it, upon the head of his gaoler.

The masked man uttered a gasping cry and whirled round, clutching at the cudgel that was hanging by a loop from his wrist.

For one sickening moment Tom Merry thought that his blow, terrible as it was, had failed, and that all was lost.

But it was only for a second that the man kept his feet.

Then he pitched over heavily, crashing on the floor at the feet of the junior, with one faint groan, and then he was silent.

Tom Merry stood with thumping heart, almost choking. His weapon was ready to strike again if the rascal moved; but he did not. The minutes passed. Still he lay motionless at the feet of the junior.

And then a new dread invaded the junior's breast. He had feared at first that he had struck too lightly, but now—if he had struck too hard! He shuddered at the thought. He bent over the man and dragged the cloth from his face. A still and insensible face met his view—a rough, stubbly, brutal face he had never seen before. But he drew a breath of relief. The man was breathing, his heart was beating. He had not struck too hard.

Not too hard, for he could see that the man was already recovering from the blow. In a few minutes his senses would return.

But those few minutes were Tom Merry's.

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He closed the door, though the deep silence of the house made him pretty certain that there was no other occupant below. Then he twisted his handkerchief and tied it round the thick, sinewy wrists of the gaoler. He knotted it as tightly as he could, and rose again with a breath of relief.

That was the beginning. He had the upper hand now, and he was safe. More leisurely now, he took a sheet from the bed, and tore it into strips, and proceeded to bind the insensible ruffian hand and foot. The rascal's eyes opened while he was still so engaged. He glared dazedly at Tom Merry. Tom met his glance with a grim smile.

"The tables are turned now, you hound!" he said.

The ruffian made an attempt to rise, but sank back again. He looked down at his bound limbs, and understood.

"You—you young 'ound!" he panted. "Let me go!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Let me go! I tell yer——"

"You will stay here till the police come for you, you scoundrel!" said Tom, tying the last knot, and then rising to his feet. His heart was light now. He knew that the house must be empty save for himself and his gaoler, or the rascal would have called out for help.

Tom Merry put his boots on, the bound ruffian watching him with glaring eyes the while, pouring out a torrent of threats, promises, pleading. Tom did not even listen to him. He finished lacing his boots, and put his cap on, and moved to the door, taking the lantern. Then a deluge of savage abuse burst from the writhing ruffian on the floor. Tom Merry did not heed. He stepped out of the room, closed the door, and locked and bolted it on the outside. The gaoler, now a prisoner, was doubly secure now. It would take him hours to struggle out of his bonds, and then the lock and the bolt would keep him as secure as they had kept Tom Merry.

The savage voice was still shouting imprecations as Tom turned the key in the lock.

On the landing lay the tray which the masked man had not yet taken into the room when he was struck down. Tom Merry hastily thrust the bread into his pocket. He was hungry, but he would not stay to eat then. He did not intend to lose a second in getting out of the house. There was a chance that other enemies might come, and he would run no risks.

He hurried down the garret stairs. Below were several rooms evidently unused, and one room, with an open door and a fire burning, where the gaoler had had his quarters. The lonely house had been taken by Gerald Goring solely for the purpose of keeping the kidnapped junior prisoner. Tom understood that. He opened the house door, and the free wind smote upon his face for the first time since he had awakened to find himself a prisoner. He ran out of the house, closing the door behind him.

He was free!

Where he was he had not the faintest idea. A mile, or a hundred miles from St. Jim's—he could not tell. Round him was the darkness of the night. The few stars in the sky glimmered upon a lonely hillside, with a dim track outside the ragged, unkept garden that surrounded the house. Tom Merry left the garden behind him, and followed the path down the hill—whither he knew not, but he was free!

CHAPTER 13.
Guilty!

IN the common-room in the School House at St. Jim's a dead silence reigned.

Kildare's eyes were fixed upon the miserable junior who was known to all St. Jim's as Tom Merry, whose real identity only Levison knew.

The crowd of juniors stood round, with grim faces, silent. The deposed captain of the Shell was the centre of all eyes.

His guilt had been proved up to the hilt, and little did any of the juniors dream that that was his object—that the theft had been committed, and the discovery made, simply as part of the dastardly scheme of Tom Merry's double and his confederate.

Clavering was acting his part well.

Probably the scorn, the bitter contempt in all the faces round him, cut through his thick skin a little, and made him feel some sensation of shame, which added to the appearance of guilt he was deliberately assuming.

Kildare broke the silence at last:

"I am waiting for your answer, Merry," he said quietly. "You are accused of having committed theft in the cricket pavilion."

"We found the things on him," said Gore.

"Whose property was it?" asked Kildare, glancing round. "You understand, of course, that this matter must be taken before the Head?"

"I don't want to say anything," muttered Blake.

Kildare looked at him sharply.

"You have had something stolen, Blake?"

"Ye-es."

"What was it?"

"A letter with a postal-order in it."

"Have you found it on him?"

"We've found the letter."

"And the postal-order?"

"He's still got that," said Blake reluctantly.

"That's what we were bumping him for, to make him say what he'd done with it," said Gore. "He ought to be made to give it back."

"Has he stolen anything else?"

"Kangy's purse and cash in it. But we've taken that back."

"What have you to say, Merry?"

The junior was sullenly silent.

"You say that he still has your postal-order, Blake?"

"I suppose he has. We found the letter in his pocket, but the postal-order had been taken out of it."

"Of course he's got it," growled Gore, "unless he's cashed it already!"

"Well, my name was on it," said Blake. "He couldn't cash it without filling in my name, and that would be——"

"Forgery!" said Gore. "Well, he must have intended to do it, or he wouldn't have taken the postal-order. He didn't take it for fun, I suppose?"

"Have you that postal order about you now, Merry?"

Sullen silence.

Kildare strode towards the sullen junior, and dropped a hand upon his shoulder.

"Come with me," he said briefly.

"Are you going to take him to the Head?" asked Blake breathlessly.

"Yes."

"I—I say, Kildare, he—he'll be sacked!"

"And the sooner the better!" said Kildare sternly. "Do you want to keep a thief in the school?"

"No fear! But——"

"Pewwaps it's bettah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "If he stayed heah now he would have a weally awful time."

"He won't stay," said Kildare grimly. "There's no danger of that. The Head won't let him stay in the House another night after this. There's a train from Rylcombe this evening, and he will take it if I know anything about the Head. Come! You had better come, too, Blake."

"All right," said Blake resignedly.

The sullen, silent junior was led from the common-room, with Kildare's grasp on his shoulder. Jack Blake followed them. Then a buzz of voices broke out in the room. All the fellows knew that it was the finish. The blackguard of the Shell had escaped justice once—the Head had pardoned him—but it could not happen again. To a thief taken red-handed Dr. Holmes could show no mercy, especially after the junior's previous conduct. He would not be allowed to pass another night under the roof of the old School House.

Not a word did the wretched junior speak as he was taken to the Head's study. Kildare was grimly silent too. He knocked at the Head's door, and Dr. Holmes's voice bade him enter.

Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, was with the Head, and both the masters looked surprised as Kildare walked in, his hand on the shoulder of the sullen junior, with Jack Blake following.

"What is this?" asked the Head.

"A very serious matter, sir," said Kildare. "I thought it best to bring Tom Merry to you at once."

"Is that junior in trouble again?" asked Dr. Holmes, his brow darkening in stern lines. "I warned you, Merry, what you might expect. What has he done, Kildare?"

"He is a thief, sir."

"What!"

"A thief!" repeated Mr. Railton.

Kildare explained. The Head and the Housemaster listened in grim silence. Then Dr. Holmes spoke.

"Merry, do you deny this?"

"What's the good of denying it?" growled the junior.

"Then it is true?"

No reply.

"You have Blake's postal-order about you, I understand," said the Head. "Kindly hand it over to Blake at once."

The Shell fellow made no movement.

"Call in the page, and let him be searched," said the Head briefly.

Toby, the School House page, was called in. He was instructed to search the junior, and he went through his pockets as Skimpole had done, but without success. The postal-order did not come to light.

"'Tain't 'ere, sir," said Toby.

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"What have you done with it, Merry?" said the Head. And then, as the sullen rascal did not reply, he went on: "You understand, of course, that this is the end of your career her? You will not be allowed to remain at St. Jim's another night. I shall send you home in charge of a prefect, and wash my hands of you. You have brought disgrace enough upon this school. Yesterday you were flogged. I shall not, therefore, flog you again; but unless you hand over Blake's property I shall cane you severely."

"It—it's in the lining," muttered the junior.

"Produce it."

The Shell fellow opened his waistcoat and showed a cut in the lining. From the lining he produced a crumpled postal-order that had been hidden there. He handed it to Toby, who passed it to the Head.

"This postal-order is payable to J. Blake," said the Head. "That is your property, Blake?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. You may take it."

Jack Blake took the postal-order, and, with a last half-commiserating and half-scornful glance at the Shell fellow, he left the study. Dr. Holmes's eyes were fixed upon the shrinking junior.

"Merry," he said, in a deep voice, "I will not dwell upon the heinousness of your conduct. You have gone from bad to worse, as if you were deliberately seeking to sink to the lowest depths possible. Such an utterly unprincipled boy, I am glad to say, I have never known before. Tell me. Why did you do this?"

"I—I was in debt!"

"What kind of debt?"

"I—I'd lost money on horses," muttered the junior. "I—I've had bad luck the whole term!"

"The whole term!" said Dr. Holmes sternly. "Then this blackguardism has been going on a long time, and is no new thing, as your former friends believed and assured me?"

The junior was silent.

"You have been gambling, and you have stolen money to pay the debts incurred," said the Head. "You confess that?"

"Ye-es."

"Very well. You will be expelled from this school in the presence of your schoolfellows this very night," said the Head. "I will not suffer so base and unscrupulous a boy to remain one night longer in this school. The reason of your expulsion will be explained to all St. Jim's, in your presence, and if you have a sense of shame left, you may feel ashamed of yourself then. After that, you will be sent home in charge of a prefect, who will deliver you into the hands of your guardian, with a letter from me explaining the circumstances. May I ask you, Kildare, to take charge of this wretched boy, and conduct him to his home?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Kildare.

"Very well! Take him now, and let him pack his box. And will you, Mr. Railton, assemble the school in an hour's time, in Hall, to witness the expulsion of Tom Merry."

"Quite so, sir!"

And Kildare led the condemned junior out of the study. A few minutes later all St. Jim's knew that Tom Merry was to be expelled in public that evening, and that he was now packing his box under the eye of the captain of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 14.

Goring's Defeat.

"My hat! Who's that?"

Tom paused in the darkness of the hill-path.

In those very hours, while the false Tom Merry was bringing to a climax the record of his ill-doing, the real Tom Merry had won his fight for freedom, and was tramping down the hill with a light heart, the house that had been his prison swallowed up in the darkness behind him. Tom still held in his hand the improvised club with which he had felled his gaoler, keeping it as a weapon till he was sure that he would have no further need of it. The hill-path stretched before him; in the distance he could see the lights of a town now, and for that town he was tramping as fast as he could go, when a step on the path in the darkness before him startled him.

Probably it was only some casual passer; but Tom Merry was on the alert. If Gerald Goring should visit the lonely house, to make sure that his prisoner was safe—as he probably did at intervals—a meeting was possible. It was not likely; but Tom Merry was on his guard lest the unseen wayfarer whose footsteps he heard should prove to be an enemy.

A tall figure in an overcoat loomed up in the darkness, and Tom caught a gleam of an eyeglass, and then he knew.

It was Goring!

He remembered the monocle the rascal had worn, on the occasion when he had seen him in company with Reggie Clavering.

Tom Merry halted, his hand gripping his weapon hard, behind him. He looked round once, but there was no cover. The hillside was bare of all but grass. And the man had heard his footsteps too; his ears were equally keen. Tom could see that he had quickened his pace.

There was no avoiding the encounter, and once again it was to be a struggle of a boy against a man; but Tom Merry's hand, concealed behind him, held the weapon that had served him well before. He hardly regretted the meeting. This was the man who had kidnapped him, who had kept him shut up in a prison-chamber for a week or more. This was the scoundrel to whom he owed all that he had suffered. He would not easily be recaptured by him. He would be killed first, he resolved, as he set his teeth, and waited.

There was a sharp exclamation from Gerald Goring—it was Goring. It was that evening he had chosen to visit the lonely house to assure himself that the prisoner was still safe, though he did not doubt it, for that matter. And he had come, in time to meet the escaping junior on the lonely hillside, far from help! Tom Merry's freedom was not won yet.

"Clavering!" Goring exclaimed, as he saw the junior's face in the starlight, "what are you doing here? Why have you left school?"

Tom Merry started.

Goring, so sure was he that his prisoner had not escaped bolts and bars and gaoler, fancied for the moment that it was Clavering who stood before him. Tom Merry understood the mistake. But what did Goring's words mean? Had Clavering, then, been at the school—been at St. Jim's?

"You young idiot!" Goring went on passionately. "I told you not to come here. And why are you away from the school? You have not been expelled yet. I told you to write, and to meet me on Wayland Moor when you were expelled. Are you mad to run risks like this? Have you——" He broke off as the truth burst upon his mind, and he understood. "By Heaven, Tom Merry!"

"Yes, you scoundrel, Tom Merry!" said the junior, his hand still hidden behind him to conceal his weapon. "Tom Merry, yes, Gerald Goring, you kidnapping scoundrel!"

"You—you have got loose, but I am in time!" panted Goring.

He sprang like a tiger at the junior.

Tom Merry's hand came from behind him then, and his club came with a crash fairly across Goring's face.

The man staggered back with a yell of pain.

Right across the handsome face was the mark of the blow, and for a moment Goring was dazed, and bewildered with pain.

That moment was enough for Tom Merry.

He dodged past the reeling scoundrel, and ran.

Down the sloping path on the hill, with a speed he had never shown on the running-track at St. Jim's, the junior dashed.

Goring spun round in the path. Dazed and dizzy as he was, he realised that his prisoner was escaping—that the success or failure of his whole cunning plot hung now upon a threat. He dashed in pursuit.

Tom Merry heard the heavy footsteps crashing on the path behind him. He ran his hardest, and he had little fear. He was the best sprinter at St. Jim's, and quite prepared to hold his own in a race, even against a grown man. His long confinement in the lonely house had told upon his strength; but the danger behind him, and the freedom that lay before him, seemed to lend him wings. He ran down the hill-path like a deer. Behind him Gerald Goring came panting—a good dozen yards in the rear. And the distance between them was increasing.

Ahead of him now Tom Merry could see the lights on a road, and closer and closer the lights of the unknown town. Once on the high-road he would be safe. There help would be within call. Goring realised that, too, and only fifty yards lay now between Tom Merry and the point where the path entered upon the high-road. There was a lamp at the corner, and Tom was already dashing within the radius of its light. Within sight now were the outlying houses of the little town.

Gerald Goring, his face white and desperate, halted, groping in his pocket.

"Merry!" he shouted. "You hear me? Stop—stop instantly, or I swear I will shoot you dead!"

A revolver glimmered in his hand.

There was too much at stake for the kidnapper to hesitate or scruple at that moment. Tom Merry heard him, but he did not halt. That the scoundrel would fire he had no doubt—not to kill him, perhaps, but to disable him, and render his capture certain. At the risk of staining his hands with murder, Gerald Goring meant to secure his prisoner—at the risk of a rope about his neck. He was utterly desperate now.

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Once more his voice rang out in warning:

"Stop!"

Tom Merry dashed on. But he was swerving now as he ran—zigzagging on the path, to render the aim of the scoundrel behind more difficult. In the uncertain light it was not easy to hit a dodging figure, and at that moment Gerald Goring's nerves were not so steady as usual.

Crack!

The sharp report of the revolver rang over the silent hill. Tom Merry saw the dust knocked up only two feet from him. He caught his breath for a moment, but he ran on. He was right in the light of the roadside lamp now, and he heard the crack of the revolver behind him again. He made a desperate leap into the high-road. There was a sharp "plonk." The bullet had struck into a telegraph-post within a foot of him.

Then Tom Merry was speeding down the road towards the lighted town.

Goring muttered an oath, and ran on again. The junior had disappeared into darkness again. At the next lamp——

A big, heavy market-cart came lumbering along the road. Tom Merry dodged round it, and ran on swiftly. He was close to the town now. He was passing dotted houses along the high-road. Lighted windows gleamed upon him as he passed with an assurance of safety. Surely the desperate scoundrel would not dare to keep up the pursuit now! Tom Merry glanced back. The figure of Gerald Goring, running hard, was in full view in the lighted road, but the revolver was out of sight now. That the scoundrel dared not use again.

Tom Merry made a desperate spurt, and ran on into the town. He stopped, panting, outside a lighted shop. He was safe now. There was a policeman within sight, and never had the hunted junior been so glad to see the familiar blue uniform. He looked back—his pursuer had disappeared. The sight of the policeman, so comforting to Tom Merry, had had quite a different effect upon the man with the black moustache. The desperate flight and pursuit were over. Goring had disappeared into the darkness, with curses upon his lips, desperation in his heart.

Tom Merry remained a few minutes, resting, till he had recovered his breath. Then he walked on further into the town, as calmly as he could. He did not know where he was, but that it was easy to discover. Indeed, now that he looked about him, the street was familiar. He remembered that he had cycled through the town once or more, when on a long spin with his chums. He was within measurable distance of St. Jim's, then; and soon he remembered the name of the town—Luxford, twenty miles or thereabouts from the old school.

And the evening was yet early—ere long he would be back at St. Jim's. His eyes danced, his heart throbbed at the thought. Back at St. Jim's—among his old chums—home again! He was eager to get to the school, more eager than ever since he had heard the mysterious words that had dropped from Gerald Goring's lips, in the surprise of meeting him. Clavering was at St. Jim's—Clavering was to be expelled—evidently in Tom Merry's name. The junior was amazed, but a dim glimmer of the plot was dawning upon his mind. He remembered how Clavering had impersonated him before, and had been exposed in that rascally attempt to disgrace him. He understood now why he had been kidnapped from St. Jim's in the hours of darkness that night a week ago. Clavering had taken his place there—under his name! It was clear enough now—the whole mystery, which had baffled and troubled him, was clear.

Clavering was at St. Jim's—and known as Tom Merry there! The daring of the impersonation almost dazed Tom as he thought of it. And what had Clavering been doing—in his name, in his place?

Tom could guess.

His brow became dark, his eyes glinted as he thought of it. As soon as he reached St. Jim's there would be a grim reckoning for his double!

He paused at the railway-station. He remembered that he had no money. Outside the station were a couple of taxicabs. Tom Merry stopped at the nearest; the driver detached himself from the station entrance.

"St. Jim's—near Rylcombe—as fast as you can go!" said Tom Merry.

The taxi-driver stared.

"That's a good twenty miles, sir," he said.

"All right—I'm in a hurry—go your hardest, and I'll give you double fare!" said Tom, jumping into the taxi.

That was enough for the chauffeur. The taxi glided away, and in a few minutes was racing at top speed along the high-road for Wayland. Tom Merry sat in the taxi, resting, and munching the bread he had placed in his pocket. His heart was beating fast. He was safe from Goring now—safe from his enemies—speeding back to St. Jim's as fast as the taxi could race. Wayland town appeared, and was passed, and the taxi rushed on to Rylcombe, through the old familiar lane. Through Rylcombe they went, and down the lane to St. Jim's, with racing wheels and hooting horn. The drive had been swift—swift enough even for Tom Merry's eager impatience.

The gates of St. Jim's loomed up. The taxicab came to a halt outside the gates. Tom Merry jumped out, and rang furiously at the bell.

CHAPTER 15.

Face to Face.

MEANWHILE, school had assembled in Big Hall.

In the passage a box lay packed and corded. It was Tom Merry's box, which his double was to take away from St. Jim's with him. In Kildare's charge he was to depart, to be handed over to Miss Priscilla Fawcett at Huckleberry Heath, with an explanatory letter from the Head of St. Jim's.

In the Hall the condemned junior stood waiting for his doom.

The impostor was pale, but he did not look as Tom Merry might have been expected to look under that heavy sentence.

Indeed, some of the fellows, as they looked at him, seemed to read relief in his face, as if he were glad that it was all over.

As a matter of fact, there was relief in Clavering's breast. The universal contempt of St. Jim's pierced even his thick skin. He was glad to get away from scornful eyes; he was glad to have the difficult part he was playing come to an end; he was glad to know that soon he would be safe outside the school.

But only Levison of the Fourth guessed his true feelings.

Levison grinned as he looked at him. He had carried out the scheme to a successful end; but Levison knew his secret, and he was still in Levison's power. Whether he was at St. Jim's, or away from St. Jim's, he would still be under the thumb of the unscrupulous cad of the Fourth.

But Clavering was not thinking of Levison now. He did not even notice him in the crowd of juniors.

The Big Hall of St. Jim's was packed.

Silence fell upon the assembly as the Head entered.

Dr. Holmes's face was grave and set.

He had an unpleasant task to perform, but the utter rascality of the condemned junior made it less unpleasant to him. He could not find in his heart a single throb of pity for the junior who had disgraced himself, his House, and his school.

In the ranks of the Shell, Manners and Lowther stood silent and grim.

A week before they would never have dreamed that it could come to this—that their chum Tom Merry would be expelled from the school, and that they would be glad to see him go.

But it had come to that.

They did not pity him; they had no regret that he was going—they would be glad when he had shaken the dust of St. Jim's from his feet.

All eyes were upon the junior who was to go. His own eyes sought the floor; he could not meet the glances of the St. Jim's fellows.

If there was one glance that had something of compassion in it, it was that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"It's wuff!" the swell of St. Jim's murmured to Blake. "Wathah wuff! He used to be such an awf'ly decent chap, you know."

Blake grunted.

"Then he's changed," he said. "But my belief is that he was spoofing us all along. Fellows don't change so suddenly as all that."

"Howevah——"

"Silence!" called out Kildare.

And there was a hush.

"Tom Merry"—the Head was speaking—"come forward!"

Clavering advanced towards the Head, his eyes still upon the floor.

Dr. Holmes looked at him fixedly.

"Tom Merry! Two days ago you were sentenced to be expelled from this school, for conduct that was abominable and inexcusable. I pardoned you—I gave you one more chance, considering the good record you had hitherto borne among us. That record, as it now appears from your confession, was a lie and a deception. While you were keeping up appearances, and deceiving your masters and even your schoolfellows, you were leading in secret a life that was unsuspected. Is that true?"

"Yes."

The junior's voice was low, but all the fellows heard it.

"You smoked, you drank, and you gambled. Is that true?"

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"Yes."

"Finally, you have stolen money from your schoolfellows, to satisfy debts contracted by gambling. Is that true?"

"Yes."

The junior muttered the word sullenly, his eyes still on the floor. There was a low murmur in the crowded Hall—a murmur of disgust and scorn. Dr. Holmes raised his hand, and the murmur died away.

"I am not surprised, my boys, that you express your contempt for this wretched lad," said the Head, in his cold, clear voice. "I regret—I am ashamed—that such a boy has ever been sheltered within the walls of this school! Had I had the faintest inkling of his true character, I need not tell you that he would never have stayed here. I can only say that I am thankful that the truth has come to light—that by his own recklessness the boy has betrayed himself. This night he will leave the school he has disgraced, never to return!"

There was a moment's pause.

In that moment a sound of hurried footsteps was heard outside. Some of the juniors turned their heads towards the door. Dr. Holmes frowned.

He resumed quietly:

"Tom Merry, you are expelled from this school! Go!"

The junior turned to move down the Hall towards the door. At the same moment the door was flung violently open, and a breathless junior rushed in.

There was a gasp from all the fellows.

All eyes were upon the new-comer. Clavering's eyes fell upon him, and he stopped, rooted to the floor.

The breathless junior paused—face to face with him!

And all the fellows craned their heads forward to look, for, with the exception of the clothes they wore, the two juniors were exactly identical in appearance—they were doubles!

"My hat!" gasped Jack Blake. "It's Clavering—Tom Merry's double!"

But Blake was referring to the new-comer. The truth had not dawned upon him.

But Tom Merry's voice rang out loud and clear—the voice the St. Jim's fellows knew of old—that voice of which every tone told of truth and honesty.

"I am Tom Merry!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What cheek!"

"Rats!"

Everybody was speaking at once. Dr. Holmes raised his hand for silence, but he raised it in vain. The Hall was in a tumult!

And in the midst of the tumult the impostor stood, white as death, with starting eyes and despair in his heart.

CHAPTER 16.

Light at Last!

TOM MERRY had reached St. Jim's in the nick of time.

He had jumped from the taxi-cab and rung peal upon peal on the bell at the gate, wild with impatience. But Taggles was slow to come. The old porter came down to the gates at last, and blinked at the junior through the bars.

Taggles almost fell down as he saw the face outside.

"Master Merry!" he gasped."

"Open the gate—quick!"

"But—b-b-but——"

"Quick!" shouted Tom Merry, shaking the bars of the gates in his impatience. "Let me in, Taggles! Don't you know me? I'm Tom Merry!"

But Taggles only stared at him stupidly.

"You—you're in the Big 'All! You're being expelled!" he stuttered. "I mean, I s'posed you was! 'Ow did you come 'ere?"

"Let me in!"

A light broke on Taggles.

"You ain't Tom Merry!" he said deliberately. "You're that cove wot is like 'im! I know you, Master Reggie Clavering! You git off! You can't fool me! None of your tricks on an old bird!"

And Taggles walked back to his lodge, chuckling as he heard the junior outside the gate yell furiously after him.

"Taggles! I tell you I'm Tom Merry! You fool! Come and open the gate!"

Taggles went into his lodge and slammed the door.

Tom Merry panted. The taxi-driver was eyeing him curiously.

"Look 'ere, sir——" he began. He was thinking of his fare.

"Wait!" said Tom Merry shortly.

He ran along the school wall, jumped, and caught with his hands. In a minute he had clambered over—in a familiar spot where more than once he had broken bounds in the old days.

He dropped into the quadrangle.

Taggles' words had set him on fire with impatience. He was supposed to be in Big Hall, being expelled from the school at that very moment. Taggles had taken him for Clavering, and if Clavering once departed from St. Jim's, expelled, Tom realised how difficult it would be for him to prove that it was not he—the real Tom Merry—who had been driven forth in disgrace. The whole of the iniquitous plot was clear to his eyes now. He was only just in time! Minutes were precious now!

He picked himself up and raced across the quadrangle. Lights were gleaming from the stained windows of Big Hall.

He rushed madly into the house. Toby, the page, was in the passage. He started back at the sight of Tom Merry, his eyes growing round with amazement.

"Master Merry! But you—— Oh lor'!"

Tom Merry did not heed him. He rushed on to Big Hall. He reached the heavy oaken doors, and threw them savagely open. The Head's voice reached his ears through the door. He knew that he was only just in time.

Only just in time—but in time!

Face to face he met the scoundrel who had taken his name and disgraced it. Face to face they stood in the centre of the crowded hall, masters and boys looking on in amazement—face to face at last! And Tom Merry's clear voice rang out above the din:

"I am Tom Merry!"

There was a hubbub of voices. The Head was speaking, but he could not be heard. The prefects shouted for silence, but in the din their voices were lost. Only one voice rang out, clear and like a trumpet-call—a voice strengthened by desperation:

"I am Tom Merry! Manners—Lowther—you know me! Stand by a pal! I am Tom Merry! That scoundrel is my double! He is Clavering! I am Tom Merry!"

Monty Lowther gave a wild shout.

"Tom!"

He raced across the hall to the new arrival. He knew the truth now. He knew that clear, true voice. Manners followed him fast.

"Tom—Tom, old man!"

There was a revulsion of feeling in the crowd. At the first blush they had taken this for some new reckless stroke on the part of Tom Merry's double, but a moment's reflection enlightened them. Tom Merry's double was Tom Merry's enemy, they knew that. He would not have appeared there at the moment when Tom Merry was being expelled. It had been his object, in his previous impersonation, to get Tom Merry expelled. He would have let well alone if he had been Clavering. The conclusion was obvious. The new-comer's claim was true. He was Tom Merry, and the expelled junior, the blackguard despised by the whole school, was Clavering—the double, the cheat, the impostor!

"Tom Merry!"

"Bwavo! It's Tom Mewwy!"

"Collar that scoundrel!"

"Tom, old man!" Monty Lowther was gripping his old chum's hand. There were tears in his eyes and streaming down his cheeks. His voice was broken by a sob. "Tom! Oh, Tom!"

"You know me, Monty?" panted Tom Merry. "Manners! You know your old pal?"

"Yes—yes! It's you, Tom! It's really you! But—that fellow—we believed——" Manners stammered, scarcely knowing whether he was on his head or his heels. "He's been pretending to be you! Where have you been?"

"I've been a prisoner for a week——"

"Oh!"

"Silence!" shouted the Head angrily, forcing his way through the crowd of juniors who thronged round Tom Merry. "Silence, I say!"

The hubbub died away.

"Now," said the Head, fixing his eyes upon the dusty, breathless junior—"now, you say that you are Tom Merry?"

"Yes, sir," panted Tom.

"And this——"

"That fellow is Clavering—my double."

"It—it's a lie!" panted Clavering desperately. "I am Tom Merry! All the fellows know I am Tom Merry!"

"Liar!" howled Lowther. "We know you now! Liar, blackguard, gambler, thief, coward! We know you are not Tom Merry!"

"Silence!" said the Head, pressing his hand to his brow. "Silence! This is amazing! Boy, you say you are Tom Merry? That this boy had played your character here, taken your name, your place?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then where have you been?"

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Every Saturday.

"I have been kidnapped—a prisoner. I escaped this evening. I can tell you where I have been imprisoned—a lonely house near Luxford." Tom Merry spoke quickly but clearly. "I have been there a week—a prisoner. I shall guide the police there to-morrow. They will see that it is true. But I'll prove easily enough that I am Tom Merry! Ask me any question you like, Mr. Linton!" Tom Merry swung towards the master of the Shell, who was regarding him dumbfounded. "You are my Form-master. Ask me any question about the Form work we were doing last week! I'll answer it! Ask me what you said to me in your study last Thursday week—the day you called me in because I had put rats in Cutts's hat-box! Ask me how many strokes you gave me when you caned me! I'll answer!"

Mr. Linton gasped.

"That is well said, sir!" he exclaimed, turning to the Head. "If this boy can answer such questions, he is Tom Merry."

"True."

"Ask him first," said Tom, pointing to the cowering cheat. "Ask him first, and see what he says. Then I'll answer."

Mr. Linton fixed his eyes on Clavering.

"If you are Tom Merry, I caned you last Thursday week for a trick upon Cutts, of the Fifth Form. How many strokes did I give you?"

There was a hush of silence. Clavering's throat was dry, his eyes were wild. How could he answer that question—concerning an incident that had occurred nearly a week before his imposture began at St. Jim's? He could only answer at random, hoping that his answer would be the correct one.

"Two," he gasped.

"False!" shouted Tom Merry exultantly. "You caned me four times, sir—two on each hand."

"That is true," said Mr. Linton.

"Ask me any other question you like—you, sir," said Tom, turning to Mr. Railton. "You gave me an impot last Saturday week. Ask me what it was, and how many lines? I'll answer! And ask this fellow!"

"I will ask this fellow first," said Mr. Railton. "Clavering—I firmly believe you to be Clavering now—what was that imposition? How many lines were imposed?"

Clavering tried to speak, but he could not. The imposition might have been Cæsar or Virgil. The lines might have been anything from fifty to two hundred. He was fairly caught. Tom Merry had proved his case.

"I—I forget!"—he stuttered, white to the lips.

Tom Merry laughed contemptuously.

"I don't forget," he said. "You gave me fifty lines from Virgil, sir, from the Second Book of the Ænid."

"That is correct," said Mr. Railton, with a nod.

"It's proved!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Besides, we know, sir! We ought to have thought of it before! We ought to have known that Tom Merry wouldn't have acted as this scoundrel has done! We ought to have known him better!"

"Yaas, wathah! I beg your pardon, Tom Mewwy, deah boy!"

"What-ho!" chirruped Wally. "Why, I ought to have guessed, when the rotter lammed me on the napper with a cricket-stump, that he wasn't the genuine article. I'm blessed if I know where my brains were!"

"A rotten funk, too!" howled Blake. "We all knew that Tom Merry wasn't a funk, and yet we never guessed! Asses!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally ought to have tumbled. I am weally quite surpwised at myself."

"Clavering!" The Head's voice rang out. "You confess that you are not Tom Merry—that you have deliberately imposed yourself upon this school as Tom Merry for the wicked purpose of disgracing and ruining him?"

The wretch was silent. What could he say?

"He is guilty!" said the Head. "Secure him! What he has done is a crime against the law, and I shall see that he has no opportunity of repeating his infamous conduct. He goes from here to prison."

Clavering gave an inarticulate cry as the fellows closed round him. They were only too willing to seize him. With a sudden spring, he broke through the circle of juniors and darted towards the door. The attempted flight was a full confession of guilt, but he knew that denials would not serve him now, and he was thinking only of escape. But there was no escape for him.

The crowd closed on him like a tide. Fifty hands clutched at him and seized him. He was dragged back, torn, breathless, almost sobbing with terror, to the Head.

"Do not hurt him," said Dr. Holmes. "Only secure him. Mr. Railton, will you oblige me by telephoning to the police-station in Rylcombe? Ask them to send a constable here at once. Clavering, why have you done this? The least you can do is to explain why you have sought to injure a lad who never harmed you?"

"Let me go! Let me go! I will tell you everything!" panted Clavering. "I will confess. It was Goring put me up to it. I'll tell you all! Only let me go!"

Clavering broke into a torrent of pleading, and then it all came out. The whole story of the iniquitous plot—of the will made by Mr. Brandreth—of the condition in it concerning Tom Merry—of the fortune that would come to Gerald Goring if Tom Merry was expelled and driven from St. Jim's in disgrace. In the wild hope of obtaining mercy, the wretched, terrified impostor confessed all.

"Wretch!" exclaimed the Head indignantly, when the broken, terrified voice had died away at last. "Wretch! You dare to ask for pardon after what you have done! I have no doubt you were a tool in the hands of a greater scoundrel, but that is little excuse for you. Kildare, will you see that he is kept securely until the police come?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Kildare, with emphasis.

And he led the cowering, trembling rascal away.

Dr. Holmes held out his hand to Tom Merry.

"I am sorry, Merry," he said simply, as he shook hands with the captain of the Shell. "I am sorry, but I cannot blame myself, for I, as well as all the school, believed that that wretched impostor was yourself. What he did merited expulsion, and more, though I was far from knowing the true extent of his wickedness. Such a thing could never happen again. That wretched boy will be in the hands of the law for many years to come, as he fully deserves. Boys, Tom Merry has returned among you, and I need not say that there is not a single stain upon his honour. Every wretched action for which he has been condemned by the school was performed by that unscrupulous scoundrel, for that is what I must call him. Tom Merry is stainless. I am only too happy that the truth has been proved before it was too late!"

And the Head retired.

There was a roar of cheering as the juniors surrounded Tom Merry.

"Jolly glad to see you back again, Tommy!" exclaimed Figgins, thumping the Shell fellow enthusiastically on the back. "Oh, it's simply ripping!"

"And we'll have a gorgeous feed to celebrate this," said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah! I've got a fivah!"

"Then you can go and pay the taxi-man at the gate," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I had a taxi from Luxford, and there's pounds to pay—double fare for backing-up. Go and pay him, Gussy, and I'll settle with you later."

Arthur Augustus hurried away to satisfy the taxi-man, who was growing decidedly impatient by that time.

While the juniors of both Houses, in a happy and excited crowd, were celebrating the triumphant return of Tom Merry, Reggie Clavering was taken away from the school by Police-constable Crump, of Rylcombe; and he spent that night in a cell. Only one fellow at St. Jim's regretted it, and that was Levison, who was quivering with inward terror of what Clavering might say. But the juniors gave no thought now to Clavering or to Levison, either. They were rejoicing with Tom Merry, and Tom Merry was rejoicing with them.

. . . . . .

The affair caused much excitement while it lasted. The police searched for the accomplices of Reginald Clavering, and found them. Trimble, the ruffian who had acted as Tom Merry's gaoler in the lonely house, was found as Tom had left him. Goring had not even paused to see the man, or ascertain what had happened to him, ere he fled. Goring, realising that all was up, had fled at once from Luxford; but he fled in vain. He was arrested at Dover while seeking to escape across the Channel.

After the trial, which followed in due course, Gerald Goring went to penal servitude for three years, and Trimble for two; while Clavering, whose youth saved him from the same fate, was placed in a reformatory, there to remain for a lengthy time. Tom Merry's enemies had paid dearly for their plot, and at St. Jim's, Tom Merry, restored to his old friends, soon forgot about the terrible experience he had been through.

Tom Merry was the hero of St. Jim's once more, and Levison, for his share in the matter, escaped with no punishment but the contempt of his schoolfellows. Clavering had told all he could, but there was no proof, and Levison's denials saved him. But many of the fellows suspected that Reggie Clavering had told the truth in that matter, at least. They knew Levison! But the cad of the Fourth was safe from punishment—excepting for the scorn of his House—and that, perhaps, was punishment enough. And the plotters, at least, had been Brought to Book!

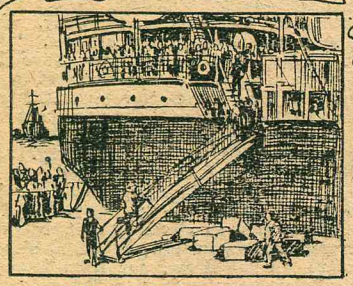
THE END.

(Another splendid long complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next Wednesday, entitled: "The Shanghaied Schoolboys!" by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of the GEM in advance.)

NEXT WEDNESDAY— "THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

HOW TO GET ON IN CANADA!

BY A SUCCESSFUL EMIGRANT.



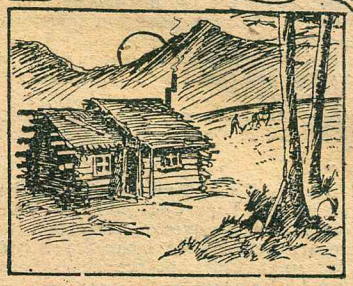
OFF TO CANADA

THIS WEEK:

Farming in Canada.

The "Free" Grant of Land.

The Demand for Farm Labour.



A HOMESTEAD IN ALBERTA

It would be interesting to know just what proportion of emigrants who leave the Old Country to seek fortune in Canada come out with the intention of taking up farm-work. Certainly, from the conversations I have held with scores of British emigrants on board ship and in the Dominion, I should judge a very large majority. And no wonder so many desire the life of the homestead and ranch when we consider the inducements held out to them by the Canadian Government and the railway and steamship companies.

You have only to apply to any emigration bureau or Canadian steamship office to have showered upon you literature which would make a Chancellor of the Exchequer sigh to give up his salary of £100 a week, and go and grow wheat and mangold-wurzels under the blue sky of Western Canada. On the covers of some of the pamphlets thrust into your hand you will see pictures of bronzed, sturdy men standing up to their necks in golden wheat, and evidently contemplating what they will do with all the money they are going to make when the crop is marketed. Fine—splendid! You envy the possessors of such land, and wonder as to the price of it.

But you turn over a page of one of the booklets, and, staring you in the face, is the stupendous announcement that the Canadian Government is offering a *free* grant of 160 acres of land to emigrants. And you feel like rushing off at once to take advantage of so generous an offer. But stay one moment, my chums. Whereas I fully recognise the advantages that accrue from a life on a Canadian homestead, there is another side to the question, and, being unbiassed, it is my intention to tell you something about that also.

In my opinion, the word "free," as used in connection with this grant of land, is a misnomer, for, under the usual circumstances, at least £100 besides some knowledge of farming is required to carry out the conditions imposed by the Government. These conditions must be adhered to before you can secure the "patent" to the homestead—that is, before you can really call it your own. They consist of residing for six months each year for three years on the land, cultivating a proportion of it, and building a habitable house.

To make entry for a 160-acre grant, or "quarter section," as it is called, you have to apply in person to the local land office for the district in which your choice is situated, and pay a fee of ten dollars (£2). It is related that a witty Irishman, describing the entry for the "free" land to a friend, said: "It's loike this, Moike. You bet the Canadian Government ten dollars that you can shtick to a 'quarter section' for three years, and fulfil all the conditions; and, be jabers, the Government just bets you a hundred-and-sixty acres of land that you can't!"

It is not within the scope of these articles to give full particulars respecting the grant of land referred to, but further information can be obtained from the Assistant-Superintendent of Emigration, 11-12, Charing Cross, London, S.W., or by sending to the Canadian Government agent at any of the following addresses: 48, Lord Street, Liverpool; 139, Corporation Street, Birmingham; 16, Parliament Street, York; 81, Queen Street, Exeter; 54, Castle Street, Carlisle; 107, Hope Street, Glasgow; 26, Guild Street, Aberdeen; 17-19, Victoria Street, Belfast; 44, Dawson Street, Dublin. I understand that gentlemen at these addresses will be pleased to give intending settlers letters of introduction to Government agents in Canada, and these should be well worth while applying for.

It is suggested in many of the pamphlets advertising the Dominion that emigrants intending to take up land should work with an established homesteader for a time to gain a knowledge of Western farming conditions. This is, indeed, good advice. In the summer-time no difficulty should be experienced in securing work on a farm, and during the haying and harvesting seasons the demand for hands is especially great, and the greenest "tenderfoot" gets a chance.

If you are strong and willing, you should be able to command ten dollars (£2) a month, with free board and lodgings, for your services to commence with. I have known farmers offer inexperienced men as much as three and a half dollars (12s. 8d.) a day and board during an exceptional heavy harvest. Should you thoroughly understand the management of horses, you will have unlimited opportunities.

Some fellows are totally unfitted for farmwork, and many young Britishers hasten on to homesteads in Western Canada without a proper consideration of the conditions to be faced and their own qualifications for the life. That the life is healthy is undeniable; that it offers splendid opportunities to the right man is also admitted, but there are other things to be borne in mind.

Among these is the fact that the life can quickly prove so irksome as to become unbearable to some people, especially those who have been bred in towns. To me it has always seemed that, even though you be working with dozens of other fellows, there is a solemn loneliness about the great, rolling prairies that gets on your nerves.

Again, there are the mosquitoes, which I have never yet seen referred to in a Government pamphlet, by the way. "Pooh!" I hear you say. "Who's scared of mosquitoes?" But wait, my chums. There are mosquitoes, and *mosquitoes!* The former, the variety we see in Britain, are small, both in numbers and size; but the latter, the Canadian brand, are twice as big, breed in their millions, and are as ferocious as tigers! At least, this has been my experience. Sometimes men working on the open prairie wear nets and scarfs over their heads to defend themselves from attack, and I have actually known cases of people leaving a district on account of the scourge.

Again, on some homesteads the water supply is impure, and, for protection against typhoid fever, every cupful has to be boiled, and allowed to cool before being drunk. This can, indeed, prove a discomfort in the hot, dry weather.

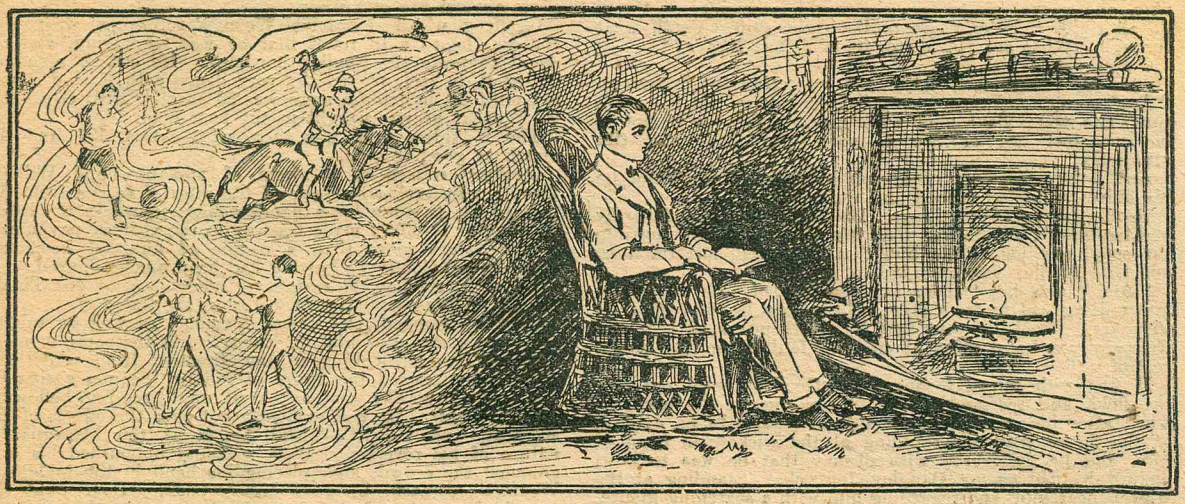
To endure the rough living and hardships of Canadian farm-life, you need a good physique, plenty of grit, and much of the British doggedness of character. With these qualifications, work on a homestead should be meat and drink to you, for it brings you into handgrips with Nature, the fight in which such a character finds a thrilling and peculiar joy.

As the question of farming in Canada is such an interesting topic to so many young Britishers, I shall have something more to say about it in next week's article. I will also describe the life of solitude that is led by many men on their homesteads far from civilisation, and the effects that so often result from the loneliness of such an existence.

FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE, is the principal character in one of the complete stories contained in CHUCKLES, ½d.

OUR GREAT NEW SERIAL.

PLAYING THE GAME!



A Splendid Tale of School, Sport, and Adventure.

By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

INTRODUCTION.

Geoffrey Foster, one of the most popular members of Grovehouse School, is elected to fill a vacant place in the school cricket team. His victory earns him the enmity of Bangley Jeffcock, who tried means fair and foul to secure the coveted position for his chum Weames. Together they plot to ruin Foster. The latter's father, who controls a company with Jeffcock senior, is made responsible for the failure of the company, and a warrant is issued for his arrest. The charge preferred is that Major Foster made use of the company's money for his own purposes. After saying good-bye to his son, Major Foster flees the country. A trumped-up charge of robbery is brought against Geoffrey, and he is expelled from the school. After seeing his mother at his uncle's house, Geoffrey sets out for fame and fortune. Chance brings him in contact with the Belvidere Cricket Club, who ask Geoffrey to play for them. This Foster does, and succeeds in distinguishing himself. He later gets a situation at Grice & Mortimer's, where, by a strange coincidence, Patrick Mulready, who was Major Foster's orderly, is also employed. One day Mulready comes back to the office the worse for drink, and, after a lecture from Geoffrey, is sent home.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Match with Madley—Geoffrey Meets Some Old Grovehouse Chums—Weames' Blackguardly Behaviour—Jeffcock Eager for Revenge.

It seems as if Geoffrey was bound to meet with acquaintances of his old schooldays. On the Saturday immediately following Mulready's appearance at the office Geoffrey journeyed with the Belvidere Cricket Club to Madley, in Surrey, where they were to play a powerful Madley eleven a one-day match.

The success that the Belvidere had achieved since Geoffrey Foster had joined their ranks had obtained for them such a reputation, that Madley, having this vacant date, honoured them by writing to their secretary asking for a match. The request was eagerly complied with. Belvidere had lost but one match, and that unluckily, since Foster's coming, and had won the rest; and it was by no means a certain walk over for Madley, despite the fact that their ranks had been strengthened by the inclusion of some notable public schoolboys. Belvidere had been looking forward to the match with great eagerness, and when they alighted from the brake that had conveyed them from Madley Station to the cricket-ground, a fresh green field covered with beautiful grass, as level as a billiard cloth, and surrounded by towering elm trees—there was not one amongst them but was determined to do his best to win.

There were two pavilions, or, rather, dressing-rooms, shall we call them, in the ground—one used by the local coal club, the other being intended for the use of the visitors.

To the latter the visiting eleven were shown by the Madley secretary, and as Geoffrey was passing a tall, well-built youth clad in flannels and sweater, and wearing a panama hat upon his head, who was reclining with legs stretched out in front of him, and hands in pockets upon a seat, he heard an exclamation of surprise.

It was followed by one word—"Foster." And as Geoffrey, hearing his name mentioned, stopped, William Hewitt, the captain of Grovehouse, rose and held forth a hand in greeting.

"My dear boy," he said, "I can't say how glad I am to see you again. But who ever thought of meeting you with the Belvidere? You are surely not the new cricketer who has been revolutionising the team, are you?"

Geoffrey smiled.

"It is good to see you, Hewitt," he said. "I had a sort of idea you would be ashamed to know me again."

"Ashamed!" said Hewitt reproachfully. "After what you bore unflinchingly at Grovehouse? How can you say that, Foster? I wish Jellotson were here to hear you?"

"How is Jellotson?" asked Geoffrey.

"Oh, mad on fighting—or, rather, boxing I should say. He's joined the National Sporting Club, and thinks of nothing else, unless it be golf and Sandhurst. He's going in for military training, and will be drafted into a cavalry regiment as soon as he has passed his exams. I'm going there, too, and perhaps an old enemy of yours, Bangley Jeffcock, will study at Sandhurst too. We are all thinking what a glorious thing it must be to be a soldier just now, Foster. What do you think of it?"

"Well, I suppose it is British," said Geoffrey, smiling.

"Hark at him," said Hewitt, addressing the remark to the clouds. "Thinks it's British. Ah, well, my dear old chap, I wish you were coming with us, that's all. And now a word as to Grovehouse. Bertha Morgan gave you a rose, didn't she? Have you got it still, you ungrateful rogue?"

Geoffrey coloured.

"Yes," he said. "It isn't likely I should part with that."

"Well, she broke her heart over your going," said William Hewitt, giving Geoffrey a keen glance. "And the school wasn't the same after you left. I was glad when the term ended, and I could go down. So was Jellotson. The only ones who seemed glad you'd gone were Jeffcock and Weames and young Talbot. The cricket went to pot. We might just as well have hung our bats up in the club-house. I was heartily sick of it all. Adams wouldn't stay in the old study he had shared with you, and moved out the very day after you left."

NEXT WEDNESDAY— "THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"It's good to think I was so kindly remembered," said Geoffrey, with a swelling heart. "Especially as I was expelled, and such awful charges were brought against me."

Hewitt smiled.

"Ah, well," he said, "those days are all dead and gone now, and we've got to face the world, youngster. You'll do all right. You're made of the right stuff. You'll wear through. What are you doing for a living, Foster?"

Geoffrey told him.

"Well, it's honest, anyway," was Hewitt's comment. "And now go and change, my lad, for you've not too much time, and you'll have your work cut out, for you've got to bowl against one or two of your old schoolmates this afternoon."

And before Geoffrey could ask him who these might be his old captain had turned and walked away.

Geoffrey changed his things. He had to hurry, and hardly had he dressed for the fray than Mortimer came running into the small pavilion telling him that Grice had lost the toss, and that Madley was to bat.

"And," said he, "there are a couple of jolly big chaps going in against us for a start. They must be old colleagues of yours. Well, do your best to get them out, Foster. I dare say you know more about their faults than any of the rest of us."

It was with mixed feelings that Geoffrey went out into the field, and received the ball from one of the umpires. Then after he sent down a couple of trial balls he glanced at the figure that was standing at the wickets in front of him, and he discovered with dismay that he was to bowl against his old enemy Bangley Jeffcock. Standing at the wicket near him, and regarding him with a searching glance, was William Hewitt.

"All right, Foster," said the latter encouragingly. "Don't you mind about Jeffcock. You're a better man than he. Bowl him out!"

It was a strange thing for a Madley man to say of a comrade, and the umpire wondered.

It was time for Geoffrey to bowl now, but Jeffcock, who had meanwhile recognised Foster, was taking a long time about his centre, being inclined to disbelieve the umpire when the latter signified correct.

But at last he was ready, and Geoffrey, who nerved himself to bowl as he had never bowled before, sent one down which almost beat the bat.

Jeffcock betrayed that he was ill at ease. As a matter of fact, his blood boiled within him to think that by coming down that day to play for Madley he had forced himself to face the lad he hated. So inwardly enraged was he that he lost his head, and a roar from the fieldsmen went up as with his second ball, which broke right in from the off, Geoffrey shattered the stumps, and sent the bails flying.

"Bravo!" said William Hewitt. "Another one to you, Foster. I always said you were a better man."

Jeffcock retired, white with anger. He whispered to a youth who, bat in hand, met him on his way to the wickets.

"It's Weames, another old enemy of yours," said Hewitt. "Get that swerve of yours on again, Foster."

Weames took his stand at the wicket just vacated by Jeffcock. He glowered out of his weasel eyes at Geoffrey, and flourished his bat as if promising dread execution. He was very careful, too, in marking his crease. He might just as well not have taken the trouble. He played the ball Geoffrey sent down, which looked easy enough, but somehow it curled up the bat to his shoulder, and glanced off that, spinning, into the air. The batsman watched it in dismay, and as he saw the gloves of the wicket-keeper close round it his face was a picture.

He was caught off the first ball he had received.

His discomfiture when he retired was complete.

But the next man in was not to be caught so easily. He played with skill and determination, and he and Hewitt made a stand, not being separated until the late Grovehouse captain had scored 46. Hewitt was the first to go. Madley, on the whole, did very well with their innings, being all out for a score of 152.

A quarter of an hour later Belvidere went in to try and win the game.

Mortimer and Grice were the first pair at the wickets. They did well, and carried the score to 42 before Mortimer was out. Geoffrey went in next. He held his head erect, and tried to look unconscious of the presence of his old enemies as he took his place to the wicket. But he could not be, for Weames was bowling. Geoffrey set his lips, and, smack! he sent the ball back with terrific force straight at Weames. The latter, foolishly enough, tried to catch the ball. It was travelling at a tremendous pace, and, misjudging it, Weames caught it in the pit of the stomach, and with a groan of agony toppled face downward upon the grass.

He was hurt, and after a while they helped him to his feet and led him to the pavilion. Weames would field and bowl no more that day.

Despite the serious nature of the accident, William Hewitt could not help smiling. Foster was making a very good show against the opposition.

Geoffrey, who had watched Weames' retirement with some concern, heard with relief that he was recovering, and set about to paste the Madley bowling. He cut it, sliced it, pulled it, in fact, played the very deuce with it, and it was not until his individual score was 50 exactly, with Grice still in, 37, that he was caught in the long field.

The Belvidere total was then, with extras, 123, and the match as good as won.

Geoffrey retired to a storm of applause, and William Hewitt, who took advantage of the interval to run from the field to the pavilion for a handkerchief, joined in the hand-clapping as Geoffrey made his way to the visitors' pavilion.

There were more than a couple of hundred spectators present, and Geoffrey's batting had been much admired.

But as he reached the seats a cry suddenly arose of "Thief! Thief! Here comes Geoffrey Foster, the thief."

Geoffrey stopped, and changed colour, as well he might, and people stared at him in dismay. At the same moment William Hewitt, looking in the direction from which the sound came, espied the figure of Sidney Weames sitting on the back of a garden seat so that all might see him bellowing out the words. He had evidently got over the effects of the accident, and Hewitt's blood boiled at the blackguardly nature of his revenge. With a bound he pushed his way amongst the crowd, and, placing his hand in the middle of Weames' stomach, he gave him a push. Over went the surprised young cad, his legs shooting up in the air, and vaulting over the back of the seat after him, Hewitt espied a cricket bag lying on the ground beside the young cub. He turned the things out of it, and as Weames was struggling to rise he opened wide the mouth of the bag, shoved Weames' head into it, and closed it hard against his neck.

Weames struggled, fought and kicked, but Hewitt held on until he ceased to shout and wriggle. Then he opened the mouth of the bag and released his victim.

"Promise to behave yourself, you young blackguard," he cried, "or I'll give you some more of the same physic."

Weames was speechless with rage.

"It's you, is it, Hewitt?" he cried. "All right. I'll remember you for this—Foster too. I sha'n't forget."

"I don't want you to," said Hewitt blandly, "Now then, will you promise to behave yourself on the field, or shall I get you expelled from the Madley Club?"

"I'll leave Foster alone, if that's what you mean," growled Weames; and, content with what he had done, Hewitt returned to the field. There was not much more time left for play, but during the half hour that followed there was some crisp and merry batting by the Belvidere, who won the match with five wickets in hand.

At the conclusion of the game Weames joined Bangley Jeffcock.

"Jeff," he said, "I've got some news for you. I've been

trying to find out what Foster is doing, and I have succeeded. He's a clerk in Grice & Mortimer's offices in the City."

Jeffcock's eyes lit up with a devilish fire.

"Oh, is he?" he cried. "Then don't you worry, Sidney. I can see a way to our revenge. My dad deals with Grice & Mortimer. I know Grice. I'll make a call there. Besides, there's a chap working there as messenger who'll help us to get our own back. Before many days are over I'll bet you a fiver Geoffrey Foster is turned out of the place in disgrace."

The Missing Petty Cash—Jeffcock as Good as His Word—Dismissed from the Office—Patrick Mulready Confesses—Geoffrey's Pardon.

The cricket season was over. Football was in full swing. The fogs and damps of early winter had come suddenly, ousting the sun of autumn, and during September and October there was a lack of that tropical sunshine that sometimes thinks fit to usher in the winter pastime and prolong the cricket season beyond its usual limits.

Geoffrey had played his last game with the Belvidere Cricket Club, a week after the match with Madley. He had seen nothing since of Hewitt, or of Jeffcock and Weames. They had gone out of his life again just as suddenly as they had come into it.

The boy's days were passed in close attention to his duties, and his evenings in study, for he was anxious to increase his knowledge beyond the bounds that had been set on it at Grovehouse School, and the world, he began to see, was the real and only master.

Apart from family trouble, there was only one other thing that disturbed Geoffrey's peace of mind, and that was an occasional shortage in the petty cash, which was given over into his hands for him to manage.

At first odd sixpences and shillings went. Then the sums missing increased to half-a-crown. Geoffrey was a very careful lad. He made a note of every penny that was spent, and yet, at times, when he would cast up accounts, he would find himself well out at the end of the week.

He did not know what to think about it. Whom could he suspect?

The office-boy and Patrick Mulready were the only two who might by chance be able to get at the cash-box. And this he was always careful to lock, and to put away in his desk when he left the office for lunch, or for any other purpose.

But one afternoon, in counting over his money, Geoffrey found that there was half-a-sovereign gone. It was a serious loss, and one which it would not pay him to replace. Smaller amounts he had made right out of his own pocket rather than make trouble about them. But this he felt he could not replace, and, with a serious air, he knocked at Mr. Grice's private office door and entered.

Mr. Grice looked up.

"Well, what is it, Foster?" he asked impatiently.

Geoffrey had noticed that lately Mr. Grice had been less affable towards him than formerly, and he had often wondered at the cause. He did his work better than ever, and had done everything in his power to win his employer's regard.

"There's a shortage in the petty cash account, sir," said the youngster, "to the extent of half-a-sovereign."

"Ah!" Mr. Grice contracted his brows. "Are you quite sure, Foster?"

"Certain, sir."

"Do you suspect anyone?"

"No, sir; though it seems to me that it can be only one of two in the office who have taken the money."

"Only one of two," said the solicitor quickly. "There are not three, are there, Foster?"

The implied suspicion of himself made the boy blush to the roots of his hair.

"Have you missed any money before?" asked Mr. Grice, after a moment's pause.

"Small amounts once or twice, sir. I thought I might have made a mistake at first, and put the money right out of my own pocket. But the amounts missing have increased lately, though this is the first time they have ever been as much as half-a-sovereign."

Mr. Grice regarded the boy with displeasure.

"All right," he said. "I will put the matter right; but the cash-box is in your care, Foster, so please to see that it does not occur again. You can go."

Disheartened, and suffering under a sense of injustice, that most acute of mental agonies, Geoffrey returned to the outer office, and set to work with increased zest in the copying of the law sheet.

In the midst of his work, the door opened, and Bangley Jeffcock entered. Geoffrey's Grovehouse enemy was clad in the height of fashion.

His elegant frock-coat suit was from Poole's, of Saville Row, the celebrated tailor's, his silk hat was from Heath's, of Oxford Street, and he wore lavender kid gloves, and held in his hand a cane mounted in gold. In his buttonhole he wore an expensive orchid. Altogether, Jeffcock looked what he termed "altogether the thing."

His glance at once met Geoffrey's, and he haughtily asked:

"Is Mr. Grice in?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, rising.

"Oh, you needn't trouble," said Jeffcock loftily. "He is expecting me. I made an appointment by letter last night."

He approached the door of the private office, turned the handle, and entered. Geoffrey, as the door closed, noticed for the first time that Patrick Mulready had risen, and, with his arms crossed, and a peculiar expression of something between anger, indecision, and fear upon his face, was staring at the door through which Jeffcock had vanished.

Geoffrey was troubled. That Jeffcock's visit boded him no good he felt certain.

And he was right. Ten minutes later Mr. Grice's bell rang. Patrick Mulready crossed to the door, opened it, and went in. When he came out he looked troubled.

"Mr. Grice wants you, sir," he said to Geoffrey.

Geoffrey went into Mr. Grice's office.

"Close the door, Foster," said the solicitor. And Geoffrey obeyed. "I have just learned from Mr. Jeffcock, here," said the solicitor sternly, "that you were expelled from Grovehouse School, Foster. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, colouring.

"Ah! It appears that your character was not of the best there. You were addicted to gambling, and were accused of stealing money from the cricket club treasury. Was that the reason why you were expelled?"

"I was accused of the theft, sir," said Geoffrey stoutly. "But it was a false accusation. I knew nothing about it."

"Unfortunately," said Mr. Grice dryly, "your family does not bear the best reputation for honesty, Foster. Your father defrauded the companies with which he was connected, and in honour bound to protect, of large sums of money. I was aware of that when I employed you, and thought that with such an example before you, you might be willing to pursue a straight path. But there has been money missing from the petty cash, as you yourself told me to-day. Did you take that money, Foster? Come now, tell me the truth. I know you have been somewhat extravagant. Your cricket must have cost you almost as much as you received from me in salary. I don't see how you could keep up your rooms and indulge in your fancy for the game on the salary you received from me."

"I had a few pounds on me when I left Grovehouse," said Geoffrey quickly, "and I had some valuable jewellery, on which I could raise some more. I managed that way, sir."

"H'm! So you would have me believe; but I cannot have anyone employed in my office who is to be regarded with suspicion. Already one or two of my clients, who are aware whose son you are, have spoken of you, and wished I had a different clerk. I must study my own interests. I am afraid you and I will have to part, Foster. I am sorry; but this is business, and friendship or regard must not be permitted to interfere."

"Thank you, sir," said Geoffrey grimly, "but if you wished to speak to me like this, don't you think you might have done so without hurting my feelings by degrading me before this man?"—pointing to Jeffcock.

"I met Mr. Jeffcock at his father's house last night," said the solicitor, "and he told me he had something important to tell me about you, which he thought in justice I ought to know. I asked him to call this afternoon. He did so, and has just told me the story of your leaving Grovehouse. I wished to confront him with you, in order to give you a chance of denying what he said. You see, you cannot."

Geoffrey was silent.

"I don't wish to be unfair," Mr. Grice went on, unlocking his desk, and taking a small cash-box out of a drawer. "I will pay you a month's salary in advance, which will give you a chance of living until you can get another job."

"I wouldn't take a penny of it!" cried Geoffrey quickly. "If you can believe what you say of me to be true, I will accept only my salary for this week, and shall be glad to go, Mr. Grice. I have done my best to please you. I think even you will admit that."

"Certainly! You are a good, conscientious worker," said Mr. Grice.

"And if I refer anyone to you, you will tell them that?"

"Reserving to myself the right to mention the circumstances under which you left Grovehouse—certainly."

"I shall not take advantage of your reference," said

NEXT WEDNESDAY— "THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Geoffrey hotly. "Do you want me any longer, or may I go?"

"You can go, if you wish," said Mr. Grice.

"You see, evil courses are bound to find you out, Foster," said Jeffcock, with a broad grin, overjoyed at having been the means of getting Geoffrey turned out of his employment.

The lad ignored him, and, with head erect, walked to the door. But, before he could quit the office, Patrick Mulready stepped quickly in.

His face was flushed. His eyes shone with an unnatural light. One of the Irishman's good moments had come upon him.

"I guessed what was about to happen when that snake in the grass came in," he said. "Mr. Grice, I knew young Mr. Jeffcock when I was working for his father. A more treacherous hound doesn't breathe. If you're going to take his word against that of Mr. Foster, you'll put up a lot of trouble for yourself. I listened at the door. I heard what you charged Mr. Foster with, sir, and I want to make a clean breast of it. I took the money from the petty cash-box. I took it to buy drink. Sometimes, when I think of what my life's been, I get the horrors, and then nothing but whisky will ease my conscience. When these fits have come upon me, I haven't had a penny in my pocket, and I've been tempted to use a key which I've got. There it is, sir." And, taking it from his pocket, he threw it on the table. "I opened Mr. Foster's desk, and took the cash-box out. It don't take much to open such a box as the one he has, and I took a little money at first, then more and more. He used to replace it out of his own pocket. I've seen him worried about the figures, and watched him make the money up. I took a half-sovereign yesterday, when I stayed behind to lock the office up for the night. If you want to see justice done, sir, discharge me, but keep Mr. Foster on."

With what amazement Geoffrey listened to Patrick Mulready's confession can be imagined. As for Mr. Grice, he did not know whether to be pleased or annoyed. He had delivered judgment on Geoffrey, and he didn't like it to be disturbed. As for Jeffcock, he ground his teeth together, and glared at Mulready as if he would like to kill him.

"And this is your gratitude," he said, "for all my father has done for you!"

"Your father might have done a great deal more," said the Irishman quickly. "He will do a great deal more in the future, or I'll know the reason why. I'm not afraid of talking to you, Mr. Jeffcock, even like that. You'll never be the man young Mr. Foster is, no, not if you live to be a million."

Mr. Grice rose.

"That will do," he said. "I have had more than enough worry and trouble for one day. I can only accept your confession, my man, in a spirit in which it is given. You can consider yourself discharged. You may come for your wages in the morning."

"And you'll keep Mr. Foster on?" said Mulready eagerly.

"No. Foster is discharged too. I will not have doubtful characters connected with my business. Will you both do me the kindness to retire?"

Geoffrey went out, and Patrick Mulready, after casting a scornful glance at Jeffcock, who made a sign to him to behave himself, soon followed.

Geoffrey took his hat and light overcoat down from a peg and put them on.

Patrick Mulready made a spring forward, and barred his way.

"I've been the means of getting you dismissed, Mr. Foster," he said, in a trembling voice. "And I said I would lay down my life for you. Nicely I've kept my word, haven't I? Can you ever forgive me? Will you take the hand of a scoundrel, and say you can forgive?"

Tears welled into the ex-soldier's eyes, and he was so distressed that Geoffrey, albeit he thought the man had been drinking again, complied with his request, and to his astonishment Patrick Mulready seized his extended hand, bent over it, and kissed it with the wild abandon of his Irish nature.

"God bless you, Mr. Foster!" he said. "The end hasn't come yet. You and I will see a good deal of each other before Patrick Mulready is called home to his last resting-place. And I may be able to do something for you yet. Who knows?"

But Geoffrey was tired of the scene. He wished to be alone, to brood over his misfortunes, and to try and think over some plan for the future. Snatching away his hand he passed out through the door of Messrs. Grice & Mortimer's City offices, never to enter them again.

(This Grand Serial will be continued in next Wednesday's issue.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 325.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY 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."

Miss Gwen Hales, Parramatta Road, Five Dock, Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age 15-16.

A. R. Wylie, 49, Victoria Street, Petone, Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

R. Mouroux, 139, St. Phillipe Street, Henri, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers in England, New Zealand, or Australia.

Chas. H. Phillips, P.O., New Primrose, Germiston, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 17-21.

Miss Daphne Cochrane, Bath Street, Parnell, Auckland, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with college boy readers living in any part of the world.

F. Gray, c/o Robertson & Moffat, Bourke Street, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl living in England, age 14-15.

L. G. Dawson, Mead Street, Peterhead, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living outside Australia.

Ivan Phillips, Box 193, New Primrose G.M., Coy, Germiston, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England, age 15-16.

Miss L. Oliveira, 21, Boone Road, Shanghai, China, wishes to correspond with an American girl and an English-speaking girl, age 15-18.

L. McKinnon, 13, Allnott Street, Temuka, S.C., New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England or Australia, age 14-16.

D. Blyth, 252, King Street, Temuka, South Canterbury, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England or Australia, age 13-15.

H. Cardeaux, Sea View, Bandra, Bombay, wishes to correspond with a Roman Catholic girl reader living in Ireland, age 14-15.

Miss Mary Bloem, 74, Noord Street, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in Scotland, age 18-19.

Robert E. Carke, 24, Noble Street, Newtown, Geelong, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps or postcards, age 17-20.

Miss Welsford, P.O. 2725, Johannesburg, S. Africa, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England, age 21-24.

O. Taylor, Gloucester, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Bristol, age 15-17.

Miss Dorothy Lewis, Kenely, Hamilton Street, East Freemantle, West Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers in America, age 16-18.

D. S. Adams, 2, Roeland Villas, off Roeland Street, Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with boy readers.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

ONLY SUPPOSE.

Suppose you saw a centipede a-racing with a snail,
Suppose you saw a hammer that was driven by a nail,
Suppose you saw a guinea-pig a-wagging of his tail,
What would *you* think?

Suppose you saw a woman who would miss a summer sail,
Suppose you saw a Scotsman who had never tasted ale,
Suppose you saw a prisoner who wished to stop in gaol,
What would *you* think?

Suppose you got a shop-egg which wasn't frightfully stale,
Suppose you met a waiter where a tip would not prevail,
Suppose you met a boatman who did not suggest a sail,
What would *you* think?

Suppose you saw these things I've named,
Then something surely must be blamed
That has disturbed your slumber.
The lobster-salad and champagne
Have brought a nightmare in their train.
Or was it the cucumber?

—Sent in by Miss Alice Jones, Cheshire.

WITTY.

Aunt Emily: "Hallo, Willie! Why have you got your throat wrapped up?"

Willie: "It's sore."

Aunt Emily: "How did you manage to catch a sore throat?"

Willie: "I expect I've been drinking something damp."—Sent in by Fred. Humphries, Bournemouth.

READ THE FOLLOWING QUICKLY.

"Pa, you know——"

"No, I don't."

"Don't what, pa?"

"Don't know the answer to whatever question you are going to ask."

"Why, you don't know what I am going to ask, do you, pa?"

"No, of course not!"

"Then how do you know you don't know what it is?"

"I don't know what it is that I don't know; but, all the same, I know I don't know it."

"But, pa, if you don't know what it is that you don't know, how do you know that you don't know? If you don't know, it seems to me that you don't know whether you know or don't know, and——"

"I know I don't know, simply because I don't know the answers to any of the outlandish questions that your peculiar inquisitiveness is for ever prompting you to ask."

"But, pa——"

"Ah, well, ask your question, and be done with it. What is it that you want to know?"

"Why, I—I don't know. You've made me forget it!"—Sent in by R. Tombs, Jersey.

OBLIGING HER.

The sweet young thing was being shown round the locomotive works, and the occupation of her guide was taken up by the numerous questions which were being put before him.

"And what is this thing?" she continued, pointing with her dainty parasol.

"That," answered the guide, "is an engine-boiler."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, becoming rather interested. "And why do they boil engines?"

"Well, to tell you the truth," politely replied the resourceful guide, "it's to make the engine tender."—Sent in by Miss W. Dodman, Notts.

THE DIARY OF A BABY.

Yelled fifteen minutes without taking breath.

Pulled out enough hair from his uncle's head and whiskers to stuff a pillow.

Swallowed six buttons and a good part of a reel of cotton.

Emptied the contents of his mother's workbasket into the fireplace.

Tried to squeeze the head of a cat into a tin cup, and was badly scratched in the attempt.

Knocked the head off a fine wax doll belonging to his elder sister by trying to drive a tack into a toy waggon with it.

Broke two panes of window-glass with a walking-stick which his uncle let him have.

Fell into a coal-scuttle and spoiled his new white dress.

Set fire to the carpet while his uncle was out of the room hunting for something to amuse him.

Got twisted into the rungs of a chair, which had to be broken to get him out.

Poured a jugful of water into his mother's best shoes.

Finally, when he saw his mother coming, he ran out to the porch and tumbled down the steps, damaging his little person and tearing a hole a foot square in his dress.—Sent in by James Edgar, Glasgow.

MISTAKEN KINDNESS.

Mrs. Jones came running to the door in answer to the knock. Could she believe her own ears? Was that her son crying? She opened the door, expecting to hear of something serious having happened. Johnnie rushed in, with eyes flaming and a very flushed face.

"Yow-how!" he roared. "I'm goin' to stop bein' kind to people!"

"Why, Johnnie, that's a very unmanly resolve!" remonstrated his mother. "I'm sure you don't mean it. What's the matter?"

"Yes, I do mean it!" screamed Johnnie. "To-day at school I saw Tommie Jacobs putting a pin on master's chair; so just as the master sat down I pulled away the chair. The master sat down on the floor; and when he got up he licked me for pulling away the chair, and then Tommie Jacobs licked me for interferin'! So—yow-yow-how!—I'm never going to help anybody no more!"—Sent in by S. A. Watkins, Devon.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

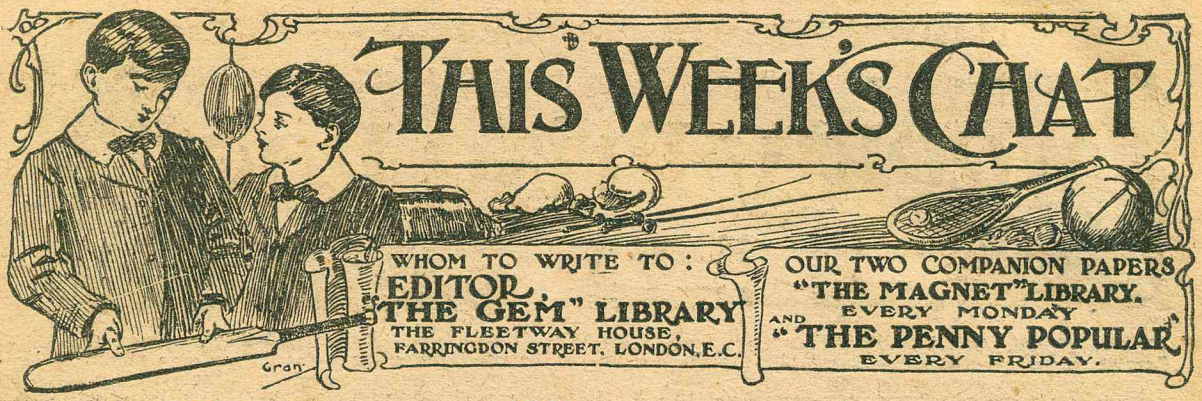
ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

NEXT WEDNESDAY— "THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday,

"THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!"
By Martin Clifford.

In our next grand long, complete tale, entitled as above, Tom Merry & Co. meet with a strange and exciting experience, which is destined to lead them far from St. Jim's and their old companions.

A little excursion is arranged by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the chums are walking by the seashore when their troubles commence. How they get a glimpse of an entirely new sort of life, the dangers and hardships they go through, and how they come out of their amazing experience, makes a tale of extraordinary interest and excitement.

Martin Clifford is seen at his best in

"THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!"

A LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA.

Here is an interesting letter from one of my many Australian readers, which I am sure my chums would like to read. So here it is:

"Dear Editor,—Just a line from a distant and enthusiastic reader, to let you know the opinion of the 'Gem' in this part of the world. I have been taking the 'Gem' now for about six years, and in all that time I have not missed a single copy, so I think that speaks for itself; in fact, my brother is so anxious to read it, that he won't wait till the others have done with it, but buys one of his own. Although but eighteen years old, I am in his Majesty's Australian Forces, and every year we go into camp I always take a few back numbers and give them to my tent-mates—and don't they enjoy them! Now, Mr. Editor, I am going to ask for something. Couldn't you let Tom Merry & Co. come out here for a trip—say, Harry Noble invited them out for a short time? Think what nice yarns you could make of them out on the stations and sheep-runs of Australia. I was talking to an immigrant girl-reader from Douglas, Isle of Man, the other day, when, mentioning Billy Bunter, I found she was as intimate with the fat rotter as I was. Well, as the light is giving out, I must dry up. Wishing the 'Gem,' 'Magnet,' and 'Penny Pop.' every success, I am,

"Your very interested reader,
"C. COCHRANE, Victoria, Australia."

Thanks very much for a very nice letter, Master Cochrane. Your idea of taking some back numbers to camp is an excellent one, which might well be copied by my Territorial chums over here. I cannot promise definitely to accept your "invitation" for Tom Merry & Co. to visit your grand country. I get the same requests, you know, from readers living in every quarter of the civilised globe, and it is not possible to fall in with them all.

However, we will see.

A FAMOUS CRICKET-GROUND.

King Cricket's reign has commenced once more, and cricket topics are interesting us again.

"Batsman" (Dalston)—an ardent reader of the "Gem" Library—asks me to give him a little information about Lord's, the famous cricket-ground of England's premier cricket club, and I think this subject will interest most of my chums.

Lord's Cricket Ground celebrates its hundredth birthday this year. It was opened in 1814.

The ground takes its name from its first landlord, Thomas Lord, who was not only a professional cricketer, but also a sort of cricket provider and manager. He took the present ground in St. John's Wood Road after he had been tenant of two other grounds in London, one where Dorset Square, Marylebone, now is, the other on the north side of Regent's Park.

It changed hands several times before, in 1866, it was purchased outright on behalf of the M.C.C. for £18,150.

The present pavilion cost over £15,000 to build, and the foundation-stone was laid in 1899.

THE MUNICIPAL SERVICE AS A PROFESSION.

The Value of General Knowledge.

The examinations may seem very formidable to some readers, but this will be only because they have little or no acquaintance with the method by which the subjects may be prepared. Several books are recommended for this purpose, such as Jenks' "English Local Government," and Blunden's "Local Taxation and Finance." But before entering upon the study of these works a youth who has the municipal profession in view can pick up a good deal of useful information in the course of his daily life.

To begin with, even his father's ratepaper, if carefully examined, will yield a good deal of knowledge concerning the purposes for which the money is required. This can be followed up by an occasional visit to the public gallery at the Town-hall during the council sittings, and a constant persusal of the reports of its proceedings in the local papers as well as the study of its own official records. He will certainly not understand all he reads and hears, but recourse can then be had to such books as I have mentioned, whilst the assistance of the local officials, if approached through his father as ratepayer, can be obtained to clear up doubtful points.

Enough has been said to show that, in order to enter the municipal profession with fair prospects of success, it is necessary to have an excellent general education as well as a certain amount of special knowledge. What has it to offer in return? Let us consider the remuneration first, as it is to be supposed the great majority of the readers of this article must necessarily make it their first consideration.

The L.C.C. service again furnishes us with the best criterion, if it is remembered that the figures in a provincial town will probably be lower by twenty per cent., or more. The salary of successful candidates, who must be between 18 and 23 years of age, begins at £80 a year in the fourth class of clerkships, and rises by £5 annually to £100. From the fourth to the third class, with a salary rising by £10 a year to £150, promotion is by merit, and from the third to the second and first classes, with salaries rising by proportionately higher sums to £300 per annum, promotion is in accordance with the fitness shown for particular duties.

This figure represents the highest goal for the clerk who, remaining faithful to the service until he reaches middle-age, does not succeed in distinguishing himself from the rank and file of his fellows. But by exceptional capacity various higher positions are attainable, these positions being mostly filled by the appointment of members of the existing staff.

(Another of these Special Articles Next Week.)

The Editor

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