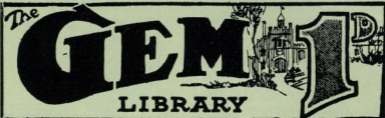


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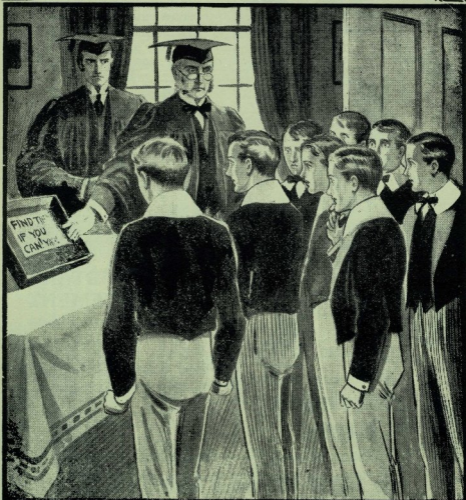
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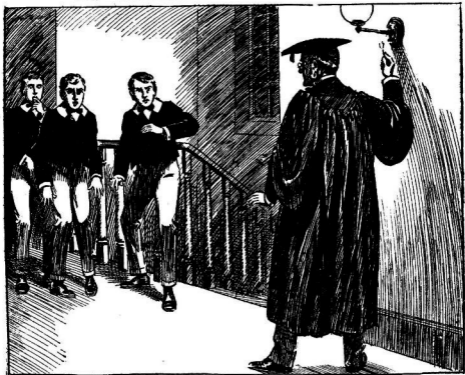


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THE TOFF!

A Splendid New, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. and their New Chum
at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



The raggies halted—just in time to avoid a collision with a gentleman who had just come upstairs. It was Mr. Selby! "Great Scott!" gasped Tom Merry. "Mr. Selby! Then who is the chap in the blanket?" (See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER 1.

A Kind Invitation Kindly Accepted.

FRAYNE of the Third put his head in at the doorway of Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther—were there. They were gathered round the table, deep in discussion, and did not notice young Frayne for the moment.

For it was a very important discussion. It was tea-time—past tea-time—and the matter under discussion was tea. The Terrible Three had been hard at work on the cricket-ground, and they were ready for tea—very ready. The trouble was that tea was not ready for them.

They had made the discovery—a discovery not infrequently made in junior studies—that funds were low. There was a loaf upon the table—a whole loaf. In the soap-dish was a fragment of butter. And there were three eggs. It was upon the eggs that the attention of the Terrible Three was concentrated.

"Fry 'em, with plenty of pepper and salt," said Manners, in a very thoughtful way. "Plenty—plenty of pepper and salt!"

"We've had 'em a week," said Lowther, with equal thoughtfulness. "The question is, how long had they been in the shop before we had 'em!"

"Plenty of pepper and salt," repeated Manners, "and perhaps a little mustard!"

Next Wednesday:

"HERO AND RASCAL!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

"And a little Condy's fluid, I should think!" granted Tom Merry. "Leave 'em alone. They're only fit for election purposes now. Leave 'em alone!"

Manners and Lowther nodded. They could not help feeling that perhaps those eggs were a little too far gone—that even plenty of pepper and salt wouldn't make them quite palatable, even with the addition of a little mustard. But they looked hopelessly at the tea-table.

Frayne of the Third grinned. The Shell fellows had not noticed him yet; the question of the eggs occupied them too much. But the Third-Former ventured to break the silence now.

"Master Tom?"

The Terrible Three looked round. Frayne of the Third never could get out of the habit of addressing Tom Merry as "Master Tom." Frayne was a St Jim's fellow now, on an equal footing with Tom Merry or anybody else; but Frayne couldn't somehow forget that he had been a lonely, ragged little urchin in the London slums not so very long ago, and that Tom Merry had befriended him, and that Tom Merry's uncle paid his fees at the school.

Frayne had not forgotten the sickly slum, the rowdy men and screaming women and ragged urchins, the sights and sounds and smells that had been his earliest associations, and his grateful devotion to Tom Merry was as fresh as on the day he had first come to St. Jim's.

"Hallo, young shaver!" said Monty Lowther. "What do you want?"

"Come in, kid!" said Tom kindly.

Frayne of the Third stepped into the study. He was red in the cheeks, and looked rather nervous. He seemed to have come to say something that he found it a little difficult to utter.

"Had your tea?" asked Lowther.

"Not yet," said Frayne.

"Then if you like you can have these eggs," said Lowther generously. "Take 'em away! No; don't thank me—you're quite welcome!"

Frayne grinned. Having heard the discussion concerning those eggs, he was not exactly overwhelmed by the generous offer.

"Thankie kindly," he replied. "I didn't come 'ere to borrow, thankie!" Frayne was getting on nicely in the Third Form. In the classics he was quite as good as his friends Wally D'Arcy and Jameson and Curly Gibson, but his English left much still to be desired. It was still, to a large extent, the English of Angel Alley and Murderers' Row. "The fact is, Master Tom—"

"Go ahead!" said Tom.

"I come 'ere—" said Frayne, and paused.

"My dear chap," said Manners, "we can see that you have come 'ere. You are large enough to be seen. But the question is, what did you come 'ere for?"

"I come 'ere—" repeated Frayne.

"Ear, 'ear!" murmured Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry gave his chums a warning glance. He did not like his protégé to be chipped on the subject of his weird pronunciation.

"Go it, kid!" said Tom. "File in! We're not going to eat you! We haven't anything else to eat, but we haven't come to cannibalism yet. What is it?"

"The fact is," said Frayne, "I come 'ere—"

"He's understanding Dane's parrot," said Monty Lowther.

"Put on a fresh record, kid!"

"Master Wally says, says he," went on Frayne. "Master Wally says, says he—"

And Frayne paused again. Evidently it was a difficult matter to deal with.

"We're getting warm!" said Lowther solemnly. "And what did the second edition of the great Gussy say—said he?"

"D'Arcy minor says, says he, p'raps you'd come, says he, so I come 'ere to ask you!" said Frayne, getting it out at last. "The fact is, Master Tom, we've got a feed in the

Third Form-room, and if you'd come and bring your pals, we'd be very 'appy!"

It was out at last, and Frayne stood looking anxiously at Tom Merry.

Monty Lowther assumed an expression of great severity, and shook an admonitory finger at the lad.

"Joseph," he said—"I think your name's Joseph?"

"My name's Joe," said Frayne.

"Joseph—on a serious occasion like this I prefer to call you Joseph—Joseph, are you aware that you are talking to gentlemen in the Shell? Not fags in the Third Form—not common or garden members of the Fourth—but the Shell! Do members of the Shell go to tea with fags? Joseph, I am surprised at you! I am shocked, Joseph, at your want of perception of the fitness of things! Joseph, it is like your cheek to ask us! You might as well ask Kildare of the Sixth, or the Head himself! Oh, Joseph!"

"I knowed you wouldn't come," said Frayne despondently.

"I told D'Arcy minor so. But it's a jolly good feed!"

"Joseph," said Monty Lowther, "now you're talking! I repeat, now you're talking, Joseph. I put it to the honourable meeting," said Lowther, looking round at his grinning chums, "it is like Frayne's cheek to think that members of the high and mighty Shell will come to tea with fags in the Third! It would be infra dig. The dignity of the Middle School must be considered. But there are occasions when the dignity of the Middle School may be set aside for once, and I suggest to the honourable meeting that this is one of the occasions."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry and Manners.

"Any port in a storm!" added Manners.

"Shush!" said Monty Lowther. "That is a crude, not to say brutal, way of putting it, Manners. We are going to honour the Third Form with our company on this suspicious occasion—I mean, this auspicious occasion—and we turn our back upon our own festive board—upon our board grouting with hands—and accept Frayne's invitation. Yoush, we will come!"

"Good!" said Frayne eagerly. "It will be alright, Master Tom—a real bit of alright. We're going to have a 'igh tea!"

"We were going to have a high tea—very high!" said Lowther, with a glance at the eggs. "Very high indeed! But 'nuff said—lead on!"

"Oh, 'tain't ready yet!" said Frayne. "I come 'ere to ask you to come. Ready at 'arf-past six sharp in the Form-room!"

And Frayne departed, whistling, evidently very glad that Tom Merry was coming to tea in the Third Form-room, but not so overwhelmed by the honour as he might have been.

Monty Lowther begrudged.

"Cheeky young beggar, asking us to tea!" he remarked.

"Especially as tea isn't ready! I'm hungry!"

"Same here!" said Tom Merry feelingly.

"We'll be early," said Manners.

Lowther shook his head.

"Think of the dignity of the Shell," he replied. "If we go early, it will look as if we are keen on their blessed fag feed!"

"Well, so we are, aren't we?" demanded Manners.

"Ahem! Yes. But keep up appearances," said Lowther. "Let's go out for a stroll; I'm almost hungry enough to eat those eggs. We'll take a little trot, and I'll tell you fellows the new comic poem I'm doing for the 'Weekly'."

"You jolly well won't," said Manners warily. "If you do, I'll recite you my article on photography. I know that."

"Look here, fatted—"

"Look here, at—"

"Oh, cheese it, and let's get out!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

And the chums of the Shell left the study, to kill the time intervening before that feed in the Third Form-room should be ready.

CHAPTER 2.

Fallen Among Thieves!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, came to a sudden halt.

The most elegant junior at St. Jim's had been proceeding along the lane with his usual elegant saunter, coming home from Rycombe. The shadows were lengthening in the lane, and Arthur Augustus had taken out his famous gold tucker to ascertain upon the precise time.

The sun gleamed upon that gold tucker, which, as all the juniors of the School House at St. Jim's knew, had cost twenty-five guineas, and was a birthday present to the Hon. Arthur Augustus from his revered father, Lord Eastwood.

"Quartab-past six, hai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus,

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See column 2, page 27, of this issue.



The cane crashed on the side of Hooky Walker's bullet head, and he reeled aside with a yell. Arthur Augustus rushed on, and fled towards the distant school. "Arter him!" shrieked Hooky. "Don't let 'im get away!" (See Chapter 2.)

"I shall have to huzwy, or I shall be late, and I promised Wally to come to his feed."

The golden gleam of Gussy's famous watch had caught the eyes of three rough-looking characters who were leaning on the stile in the lane. Arthur Augustus had not observed them, but they had observed Arthur Augustus. And as the swell of St. Jim's put his watch back into his pocket and walked on, the three rough-looking gentlemen started out into his path; and then came Arthur Augustus's sudden halt. He could not walk on without walking into them, so he had to stop. The looks of the three roughs showed that they meant mischief, and Arthur Augustus stepped back a pace or two and grasped his gold-headed case a little more tightly.

"Pway what do you want?" he asked.

The three men exchanged a grin. D'Arcy ran his eye over them. They did not belong to the quiet village of Rylcombe, that was certain. Rough characters sometimes came up the river with the barges, but they did not look quite like river roughs. Their attire, their looks, and their voices when they spoke, seemed to place them as East End cockneys from London, though what such persons could be doing in that quiet Sussex lane was a mystery. They certainly did not look like tramps. But they looked decidedly rough and decidedly unscrupulous, and Arthur Augustus realized that he was alone, and that night was falling, and that the road was a lonely one. And his slim, gloved fingers closed more tightly on his case.

"Wot do we want, Rabbit!" said one of them with a chuckle.

"Wot do we want, Hooky?" said the gentleman addressed as Rabbit.

And the third man chimed in:

"Wot do we want, I wonder?"

"Pway allow me to pass," said Arthur Augustus frigidly.

"I have no time to waste."

"Neither 'ave we," remarked Rabbit, who was a gentleman with a prominent nose, very large ears, and a crimson neckcloth. "So we'll trouble you for that thore ticker, and also wot loose chynge you've got about you—and 'urry up!"

"If you are thinkin' of wobbing me, you wascals—"

"Robbing you!" said Hooky, in a tone of humorous surprise. "Nothing of the sort, me lord. Simply a loan, sure as my name's Hooky Walker. Jest a loan of a ticker, 'cause we've left our own gold watches at 'ome on the grand pissand. Likewise, a little ready chynge, because we're inland our first-class tickets."

And the other two rascals chuckled, in appreciation of Mr. Walker's humour.

"Kin on!" added Rabbit, in a more businesslike tone.

"No time to wyste. 'And it hove?"

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the sort. If you approach me any neawh, I shall stwike you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

And he faced the three footpads without a trace of fear. Arthur Augustus might be the swell of the school, and the glass of fashion in the School House, the mirror of style for all the juniors of St. Jim's, but he was as brave as a lion, and he never counted odds when his noble blood was up.

"My heve!" said Mr. Walker. "Never 'eard a bantam

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crow so loud! Give 'im a lick with that there tickler, Nobby."

The "tickler" was a thick and knobby stick which Nobby carried under his arm. He let it slide into his hand, and gave it a flourish. Messrs. Hookey, Walker & Co. probably thought that that would be sufficient to scare the schoolboy; but they did not know Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. There was no help at hand, and Arthur Augustus had no intention of being tamely robbed by the footpads. And as it was to be a fight, he resolved to have the advantage of the attack. He made a sudden rush forward, and a sweep of his cane sent the thick cudgel whirling from Nobby's hand, and it flew into the ditch. The next instant the cane crashed on the side of Hookey Walker's bullet head, and he reeled aside with a yell of pain. Arthur Augustus rushed on and fled towards the distant school.

Hookey Walker sat down in the road, swearing dreadfully, and holding his head in both hands.

"Arter him!" he shrieked. "Arter him, you block-heads! Don't let 'im git away!"

Rabbit and Nobby, thus admonished, dashed in pursuit, and Hookey Walker scrambled to his feet, still holding his damaged head, and lumbered after them.

Arthur Augustus ran like the wind, but in a couple of minutes Rabbit's hand was on his shoulder, and he was swung back. He hit out even as he was swung round, and Rabbit gave a howl of anguish as a hard fist crashed on his jaw. He let go, but at the same moment Arthur Augustus was clutched over by Nobby, and rolled in the dust of the road with him. He struggled desperately with Nobby, but in a second more Rabbit was sprawling over him, and he was pinned down.

"Got him!" exclaimed Mr. Walker, coming up panting. "Now 'old 'im while I get a lick at 'im, and I'll teach 'im to crack a gentleman's 'ead for 'im!"

"Bai Jove! You beastly wuffians!" gasped Arthur Augustus, still struggling.

"Old 'im!" Rabbit and Nobby were holding the swell of St. Jim's, and Hookey Walker bent over him with a heavy fist upraised. But that cowardly blow was never struck.

There was a rush of footsteps in the lane, and Hookey Walker received a swinging blow on the side of the head that sent him spinning.

He rolled in the road, panting and swearing, and the other two rascals let go D'Arcy as if he had suddenly become red-hot.

"The Toff!" That sudden exclamation broke from both of them at once, and they backed away. And Hookey Walker, sitting up again, showed no desire to come to close quarters with the now-comer.

Arthur Augustus looked at him breathlessly. He was a youth of about D'Arcy's own age, well dressed, with a diamond pin in his tie, and a cigarette between his lips. His form was active, athletic; his face very handsome, with clear-cut features and dark, flashing eyes. The handsome face was suddenly convulsed with anger now. The three footpads shrank away in evident fear from the blaze of his eyes. And Arthur Augustus, seeing it, could not help noticing it and wondering, in spite of the state of confusion he was in. It was amazing to see three powerful ruffians in open fear of a lad of his own age.

"You fools! You brutes!" "We wasn't doin' any 'arm, Toff—" began Hookey Walker apologetically.

"Only goin' through the young swell, sorter fillin' up time," murmured Rabbit. "He's got a gold tigger—" "Clear off! Do you hear!" "Oh, I see—" "Do you want me to start on you?" exclaimed the boy, and he made a motion towards the three cowed-looking ruffians.

What followed seemed miraculous to Arthur Augustus. The three footpads, with one accord, ran as if for their lives. In a few moments a bend of the lane hid them from sight, and their footfalls died away.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Gwreat Scott!" The now-comer gave him a hand to rise.

"Not hurt?" he asked cheerily.

"Thank you, no! Thank you vewy much for comin' to my rescue like that. They were goin' to rob me, tho' wassals!"

"Lucky I came along," said the youth casually. "Here, let me brush you down. You're smothered with dust."

He began to dust Arthur Augustus down with his handkerchief as he spoke, D'Arcy gasping the while.

"I'm awfully obliged to you, deah boy."

"Oh, don't menth'!"

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

"But it is vewy vewy remarkable that those wuffians should wun away from you like that," said D'Arcy in amazement. "I suppose you are not a prize-fightin' prodigy, by any chance?"

The now-comer laughed. "Oh, they didn't want to tackle the two of us, that's all," he said.

"You don't know them?" "Know them?" said his new friend. "How should I know them? They are tramps, I suppose."

"Oh! They looked as if they knew you. They called you something—"

"Never seen them before," said the now-comer. "There, now you're all right. Do you live far from here?"

"I belong to St. Jim's."

"St. Jim's! What's that—a school?" Arthur Augustus looked at him in surprise. It had not occurred to him that there existed anyone who had not heard of St. Jim's.

"Yaas, wathah! I'm in the Fourth Form," he said. "My name's D'Arcy."

"Mine's Talbot. Glad to have met you!" said the rescuer affably. And they shook hands before D'Arcy started for St. Jim's again.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as he strode away towards the school. "That chap can hit! But it is vewy remarkable that those wottals should have wun away from him like that! I thought they knew him by the way they spoke; but as he says he's nevah seen them before, it's impossible, of course. He's a vewy decent chap, and it was vewy lucky he came along just then. I should have been wobbed, bai Jove! I wunst I shall meet that chap again."

Arthur Augustus was fated to meet that chap again sooner than he could possibly have anticipated.

CHAPTER 3.

An Interrupted Birthday Celebration.

GUSSY, by Jove! Been dust collecting!" The Terrible Three of the Shell were adorning the old gateway of St. Jim's with their persons as Arthur Augustus came in. They looked at him with smiles. His new acquaintance had dusted him down, but his clothes still showed many traces of that struggle in the dusty road.

"Been trying conclusions with a motor-car at close quarters?" asked Tom Merry.

"Wats! I've nevah been wobbed," said Arthur Augustus.

"Great Scott!" "Yaas. Three wotten footpads set on to me, and if a chap hadn't come along and helped, they would have wobbed me," said Arthur Augustus. "I don't know wethah I'd bettah tell Mr. Wailton, and let him telephone to the police-station. They may wob somebody else."

"Poor old Gussy!" said Lowther. "This is what comes of carrying a commercial traveller's outfit of jewellery about you."

"Wreally, Lowthah—" "Who was it helped you?" asked Tom Merry. "A St. Jim's chap?"

"No; a swangah. Nevah seen him before. Chap named Talbot. Vewy decent chap, though I am sorry to say he was smokin'. Pewwaps I had bettah report the mattah to Mr. Wailton. I should be able to identify those three scoundwals."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry. "Come on, though the feed's due now."

Lowther looked at his watch. "Half-past," he said.

"I'm hungry," said Manners.

"Better be a bit late," said Lowther. "Can't appear kevn after a fog feed. Are you going to the festive board in the halls of the Third, Gussy?"

"Yaas. I've promised Wally to look in," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I must wopert this mattah to Mr. Wailton first."

And the juniors walked to the School House together. Arthur Augustus tapped at the Housemaster's door and entered. Mr. Bailton, the master of the School House, heard his description of his adventure in the lane.

"Quite right to tell me," said the Housemaster, with a nod. "I will telephone to the police-station at once. Can you give me a description of the men?"

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus gave the description, adding the peculiar names by which they had called one another, and Mr. Bailton took up the receiver at once.

"That will do, D'Arcy," he said, when he put it down again. "If the men are found, you will be required to identify them."

"Yaas, sir."

Arthur Augustus left the study, and joined the Terrible

Three in the passage. Blake and Herries and Digby, D'Arcy's stud-mates in No. 6, were also there waiting for him. They looked him over curiously.

"So you've been looking for trouble, and finding it, as usual," Blake remarked.

"I found it without looking for it, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus ruefully, "and I should have been wobbled if a fellow hadn't chipped in like a veguliah brick. I twust those three wascals will be awested."

Blake looked thoughtful.

"The Head's at the vicarage," he remarked. "He will be coming home down the lane alone after dark. I wonder—"

"Oh, that's all right—those wottahs cleahed off at top speed," said Arthur Augustus, "and the police will be lookin' for them, too!"

"Railton can look after all that," said Manners. "Let's get along to the Third Form-room. I'm hungry."

It was quite a little party that arrived at the door of the Form-room. The Third, having no studies of their own like the higher Forms, usually used the Form-room for their little celebrations. They had the room to themselves until Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, came in at half-past seven to take them in evening preparation. By that time all traces of their little celebrations had to be cleared away. Mr. Selby was a very particular gentleman, and he had been known to become extremely "raty" on finding the tail of a herring on the Form-room floor, or a patch of jam on the lid of his desk. Indeed, he did not approve of feeds in the Form-room at all, and he was not blessed with sufficient tact to be blind to matters it was better for him not to notice.

There was a festive scene in the Third Form-room when Tom Merry & Co. arrived. The evening was quite warm; but a big fire blazed in the grate. A luscious smell of cooking fish pervaded the Form-room. Frayne, with a frying-pan, was frying blometers. Wally—the younger brother of the great Arthur Augustus—was cutting bread, and Jameson was making toast, with it almost as fast as he cut it. Curly Gibson was opening a large pot of jam. Several other fags were busily employed in preparations for the feed. There was a large pile of plates on a chair, and any number of knives and forks, and a considerable quantity of crockery of all sorts of patterns. The Third were evidently doing things in unaccustomed style.

"Oh, here they are!" said Wally, looking round. "Walk right in. Glad to see you. Try to be young again for once, you old fogies!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"This is Frayne's birthday party," explained Wally.

"We're honouring him in style, I can tell you. We've got twelve blometers."

"A regular feast of the bloated aristocracy," remarked Monty Lowther. "I don't suppose there are many dukes, though, who have twelve blometers at once."

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Wally. "Keep that for the 'Weekly.' Squat down, if you can find anything to squat on. Frayne, you ass, you're burning those blometers!"

"Want 'em well done," said Frayne.

"We don't want 'em burned to cinders," grunted Wally.

"You've burned 'em nearly all, so far. Buck up with that toast, Jimmy! Open the other pot of jam, Curly. We don't have a birthday feed every day."

"Frayne's birthday, is it?" said Tom Merry, a little puzzled.

Frayne of the Third was not quite certain which year he had been born in, and certainly he was quite in the dark as to the month or the day.

Wally grinned.

"You see, we think it's time Frayne had a birthday," he explained. "We've all had birthdays excepting Frayne, and as we're in funds to-day, we decided to let Joe have a birthday too. It's only fair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, that is wathah a good ideah," said Arthur Augustus. "Congrats, Frayne, dear boy. Many happy returns of the day!"

"Many happy returns, Frayne!" choused the visitors.

"Thanky kindly," said Joe Frayne, grinning. "Werry kind of you to come to my birthday, gentlemen. Which I 'ope—"

"You're burning those blometers, you ass!" roared Wally.

Certainly a powerful smell of burning as well as of cooking pervaded the Form-room. The strong scent probably penetrated into the passage, the door having unfortunately been left open. A thin and cross-looking gentleman passing down the passage stopped to sniff, and sniffed again.

"Shut the door, fatheads!" Wally called out. "If old Selby should come along—"

The words froze on Wally's lips.

A cross and frowning face looked in at the open doorway, just as Blake was about to close the door. It was the face of Wally's Form-master, whom he had just alluded to, and

who had certainly overheard his words—"Old" Selby himself!

"Oh!" murmured Wally.

Mr. Selby advanced into the room, sniffing. He had a long, thin, prominent nose, which seemed specially designed by Nature for the purpose of sniffing. He was now using it for the purpose Nature seemed to have designed it for—loudly.

Sniff, sniff, sniff!

"Disgusting!" said Mr. Selby.

The fags looked glum. The visitors stood silent.

"And that," went on Mr. Selby—"that is how you allude to your Form-master in his absence, D'Arcy, minor."

"I—I didn't know you were listening, sir," faltered Wally, rather an unfortunate way of putting it, as he realised too late.

"What!" thundered Mr. Selby.

"I—I mean, sir—I—ahem—"

"Disgusting! The whole room is pervaded with the smell of that—that revolting mess of fish! Take it off the fire at once!"

Frayne, looking decidedly gloomy, took the frying-pan off the fire. It was pretty certain now that the birthday celebration would not be a success.

"Take it away!" said Mr. Selby, with a wave of the hand.

"Take the disgusting thing away. I forbid this—this gorging in the Form-room. I distinctly forbid it. Take all those things away and dispose of them. D'Arcy, minor, I shall call you for your insolent reference to myself. Come here!"

Swish, swish!

"And you!" said Mr. Selby, laying down his cane and staring angrily at Tom Merry & Co. "I am surprised to see boys of higher Form encouraging these habits of gluttony in the Third Form. I am surprised at you, or, rather, I am not surprised, considering that you are the most unruly boys in this House."

"Go hon!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What—what did you say, Lowther?"

"I begged you to continue, sir," said Lowther, with an air of great respect. "It is always a pleasure, sir, to hear you."

"Lowther!"

"Yes, sir. Go hon—I mean, go on."

"If you were in my Form, Lowther, I should cane you," said Mr. Selby, his lips white with suppressed wrath.

"You are so kind, sir," murmured Lowther.

"As it is, I shall report you to your Form-master for insolence. Now leave this Form-room at once, and remember that I forbid you to take part here, at all events, in these revolting orgies!"

"These what, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"Orgies!" thundered Mr. Selby.

He raised his hand, and pointed to the door. The juniors' eyes were gleaming; they would have given anything to "bump" Mr. Selby on the floor of his own Form-room. But that was evidently out of the question. The Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows moved to the door, with the exception of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus stood his ground. He had some expostulations to make, and he meant to make them.

"Pway allow me to remark, Mr. Selby—"

"Go!"

"I refuse to come on, Blake, until I have pointed out to Mr. Selby—"

"Leave this room!"

"I shall have gwent pleasuah in leavin' this woom, sir, when I have remarked—"

"Go!"

"Come on, you ass!" whispered Blake.

"I refuse to come on, Blake, until I have pointed out to Mr. Selby—"

"Go!"

"That you have no right to intewwupt a birthday celebration that is bein' cawried out in perfect ordah. Undah the circs, I regard your intalfeewence as tywannah!"

"Boy!"

"Pway allow me, sir, to appeal to your bettah feelin's. Would it not be more gwaceful, undah the circs, to wotire, and allow us—"

Mr. Selby made a stride towards the swell of the Fourth. Jack Blake dragged him out of the Form-room just in time, or the angry master would certainly have boxed his aristocratic crabs. Blake rushed him down the passage.

"I weally wish you woudn't huvw my away like this, Blake," D'Arcy gasped. "I was only explainin' to Mr. Selby—"

"Come on, you ass!"

"I refuse to be called an ass. I considah— Pway don't hurry me so. You are throwin' me into quite a flutah."

But the juniors did not halt until they were a safe distance from the Form-room.

"And now, what about tea?" said Monty Lowther lugubriously. "This is what comes of going to tea with bloated fags."

"I'm hungry!" said Manners pathetically.
 "And there's nothing in our study," said Tom Merry.
 "And not much in ours," said Herries.
 "Hallo! Here's Wally!"
 Wally came up with a gleaming eye.
 "Feed's off!" he announced. "We've got an hour's extra prep. What do you think of that?"
 "Wotten!"
 "Boastly!"
 "Hard cheese!"
 "Frayne's going to have his birthday to-night!" said Wally savagely. "You fellows will come, won't you? The feed won't be any the worse for keeping. We'll have it in the box-room. Old Selby can't chip in there. After prep to-night in the box-room. Ta-ta!"
 "And Wally walked back to the Form-room.
 "Bang goes our feed!" growled Lowther. "Two blessed hours and a half! Grooh!"
 "Rotten!"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "I move that it is up to us to make Selby sorry he has chipped in and reduced innocent and inoffensive youths to a state of famine! I move that it is up to us to stand up for our rights and liberties of the Third Form! As seniors—"
 "Seniors, death boy!"
 "Seniors in comparison with the fags," explained Tom Merry. "As seniors, comparatively speaking, it's our duty to protect the fags against tyranny. In other words, to make that miserable, bad-tempered, interfering bouncer sorry he chipped in! Hands up in favour of the resolution."
 "All hands on deck!" said Lowther.

And all hands went up. The resolution was passed unanimously. And while Mr. Selby was busy with the Third Form, inflicting upon those unfortunate youths the extra hour of preparation, Tom Merry & Co. were scheming schemes and plotting plots for the special benefit of the most unpopular master of St. Jim's. And it was seldom that Tom Merry & Co. put their heads together without something coming of it.

CHAPTER 4. To the Rescue!

"STOP!"
 Dr. Holmes stopped, in sheer astonishment. It was dark in Kylcombe Lane, only a faint gleam of starlight coming down between the big, overhanging trees.

The Head of St. Jim's had left the vicarage gate, and was walking back to the school, thinking of anything but footpads or danger. As a matter of fact, he was thinking out a knotty point in *Æschylus*—a new edition of that great poet being the darling project of the Head of St. Jim's. But the sudden hoarse voice from the shadows of the trees drove *Æschylus* and the supplicants and the libation-bearers and the rest quite out of Dr. Holmes's mind.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.
 Three shadowy figures loomed up in the gloom. The Head could not see them very clearly, but he could distinguish that they were very roughly dressed, and that they had cudgels in their hands. As a single umbrella was not of much use opposed to three cudgels, the Head realised that he was at the mercy of the three footpads, as he concluded at once they were.

"And over yer cash, old codger," said the hoarse voice.
 "Collar 'im, Rabbit!"

A sinewy arm was thrown round Dr. Holmes's neck, and he was held firmly. He did not struggle. The dignity of the Head of St. Jim's would have been too much compromised by a rough-and-tumble with three footpads.

"I warn you that you will suffer for this outrage," the Head said, as calmly as he could.

"Old him, Rabbit. Now go through his pockets—money and tucker. Sharp's the word!"

"Old on. I kin 'ear somebody coming!" muttered one of the ruffians.

"Rot! There ain't nobody 'ere!"

"Help!" cried the Head, who had also heard the footsteps in the dark lane.

The footsteps hurried.

A youthful figure appeared in the gloom.

It was the figure of a boy—as young as the boys in the junior Forms at St. Jim's, but he did not hesitate for a moment.

He rushed right at the three footpads.

Rabbit dragged the Head down, and planted a knee upon him. Dr. Holmes was struggling now, but his struggles were quite useless.

As he lay pinned down under the ruffian, he heard a sound of blows and struggling, and a boyish voice shouting:

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"Here they are! Come on!"
 Then a sound of footsteps in rapid flight.
 "Come on, Rabbit!"
 The ruffian who was kneeling on the doctor jumped up, and followed his comrades down the dark road.
 Dr. Holmes sat up in amazement.
 A boyish figure stood over him, and gave him a hand to rise.

"Are you hurt, sir?"

"N-no!" gasped the Head. "I—I am very much shaken, but I am not hurt. You—you are not alone?"

"Yes, sir. Better get moving, in case they come back."

"But I heard you call out—"

"That was to make them think I wasn't alone, sir," he explained. "If they'd known they had only a kid to deal with they wouldn't have run."

"Oh! I—I understand. That shows great presence of mind, my dear lad," said the Head, struggling to his feet with the boy's assistance—"great presence of mind and great courage to come to my aid like that."

The boy appeared to listen.

"They've stopped running, sir," he said. "Better clear before they come back."

"Certainly, certainly. Come with me, my boy; it is not safe for you to be on this road alone," panted the Head.

"Very well, sir."

They hurried in the direction of St. Jim's. The boy listened again.

"It's all right," he said. "They're not following us."

"Hullo! Who's this!"

A tall form came running through the shadows from the direction of the school.

"Mr. Raitlon!" exclaimed the Head.

The Housemaster stopped.

"I heard you call," he exclaimed. "I trust you are not hurt, sir."

"Not at all, thanks to this brave lad, who came to my assistance," said Dr. Holmes. "But how came you—"

"I was coming to meet you, sir," the Housemaster explained. "D'Arcy of the Fourth was attacked by footpads in the lane, and he reported the matter to me; so, as you were coming home alone, I thought it best—"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Raitlon. Fortunately, I have received no hurt, but I should certainly have been robbed but for this boy." The Head peered at the lad in the darkness, and could barely make out the handsome face.

"Do you live far from here, my lad? You cannot go home alone."

The boy was silent.

"Come, my lad," said Mr. Raitlon. "I will walk home with you. It will not be safe for you to go home alone, with those scoundrels hanging about."

"I—I have no home, sir," faltered the boy.

"What?"

The two masters looked at him more closely. He was evidently well-dressed; they could see that much in the gloom. He was certainly not a street-arab, and his statement that he had no home took them by surprise.

"No home!" repeated the Head.

"No, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you have nowhere to go to-night?" Mr. Raitlon exclaimed.

"That is the case, sir."

"Then you will come to the school with me," said Dr. Holmes.

The lad drew back.

"Thank you, sir! But I am not asking for charity," he said, with a proud ring in his voice. "I answered your question because I could not avoid it. But I am not a beggar. I shall shift somehow."

"Come, come!" said the Head kindly. "After what you have done, I should be ungrateful indeed if I abandoned you. You will certainly come to St. Jim's—for the night, at least. Come!"

"But—"

"I shall take no denial," said the Head. "If your circumstances are as you state, you must be in need of a friend!"

"Goodness knows I am!" said the boy, with a sigh.

"Then I shall be your friend," said Dr. Holmes. "Come! You must explain to me how you happen to be in this strange situation. And for to-night, at least, you must remain with us!"

The lad made no further demur. When Dr. Holmes and Mr. Raitlon entered the School House at St. Jim's, the strange lad was with them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was talking to Reilly in the hall. He broke off as the two masters entered with their companion.

"G'out Scott!" he exclaimed. "You, dear boy?"

"You know this lad, D'Arcy?" exclaimed the Head, in surprise.

"Yaas, wathah, sir! That's Talbot, the kid who chipped in when those wascals were tryin' to wob me in the lane!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head.
Mr. Railton did not speak. His eyes were fastened upon Talbot. Perhaps it struck him as strange, to say the least, that the unknown lad should have been upon the spot, ready to come to the rescue, on both the occasions when the foot-pads had attempted a robbery. But if Mr. Railton pondered upon the peculiarity of that circumstance, not so the Head.

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes. "Then this is the second time, my dear lad, that you have acted with so much courage. Please come into my study. Mr. Railton, come with us, please!"

Talbot followed the Head to his study.

CHAPTER 5. A Strange Story.

TALBOT sat down in the Head's study. The Head had seated himself. Mr. Railton remained standing, his elbow on the mantelpiece, and his eyes on the boy's face. It was not suspicion that was in the Housemaster's scrutinising glance; but certainly his look was very curious, and very penetrating. It was evident that he did not know what to make of Talbot. But the boy seemed quite unaware of his scrutiny.

Talbot was certainly pleasing to look at. He was undeniably handsome, and his well-tout face had an open and frank expression. He was quite expensively clad, and certainly from his appearance no one would have guessed that he was a boy without a home. He would have passed quite easily among a crowd of St. Jim's fellows.

"Now, my lad, you must tell us something about yourself," said Dr. Holmes, with his benevolent smile. "Your statement was surprising—very surprising indeed. I should certainly not have guessed that you were in the situation you describe. Yet you tell me that you have no home?"

"It is true, sir."
"Your parents—"
"I have none, sir."
"But your guardian, then—your natural protectors—"
"I have no friends in this country, sir."
"You come from abroad?" asked the Head. "But you are English?"

Talbot smiled.
"Yes, sir. If you care to know about me, I will tell you. It is not much. Indeed, I should be very, very glad of your advice, if you cared to give it to me. I don't think a boy of my age ever found himself in such a queer position before. I have always had plenty of money, but it is true that I have no home now, and no one to look after me!"
"But it has not always been so?" said the Head, in wonder.

"Oh, no! I do not remember my parents, but my uncle took me with him to Australia when I was quite a nipper—a child, sir. I have lived there ever since, till we came to England again last month."

"And your uncle?"
"I do not know what has become of him, sir."
"Bless my soul! You do not mean to say that he has abandoned you, in a strange country?" the Head exclaimed, in a shocked tone.

"I will tell you what has happened. We landed at Southampton, and came on to a place called Luxford, in Sussex. There we stayed at an hotel. Before we left Australia I had reason to think that my uncle was in altered circumstances; but he had lost money in some land speculation; and he never said a word to me about his affairs. As a matter of fact, he never cared much about me, and only looked after me because I had no one else to look to. But he did his duty to me, though he was not kind. We stayed some time at Luxford—I understood because my uncle had some connections in Sussex, and I think perhaps he intended to ask them for some assistance. He was often absent for several days at a time, and I was left in the hotel by myself."

"What hotel was it?" asked Mr. Railton.
"The Luxford Arms, sir. The landlord's name was Bowker. One day, when my uncle left me, he did not come back at all. I expected, as usual, he would come after a few days; but he did not. On the fourth day I had a letter from him. He told me that he was quite penniless now, and that I was old enough to look after myself. It was not so much a shock to me as it might have been. Something in his manner had made me uneasy for some time. But that was the final blow. He paid the hotel bill by post, and I was left to look after myself. I had five pounds in my pocket, and my trunk of clothes and things. I did not know what to do!"

"My poor lad!" said Dr. Holmes softly. "It was a shocking situation—for one so young, too! And what did you do?"

"I stayed on a couple of days longer at the hotel, trying to think it out, sir," said Talbot. "Then I decided to return to Southampton, and get back to Australia if I could. I hadn't enough money to pay my fare, but I thought I might be able to work my passage out. I thought I would tramp it to Southampton, to save money, and that's how I came here. I stopped to rest to-day at Rylcombe, and I was looking about for a barn to sleep in, when I came on you, sir, and those rascals—"

"You know of no relations in England to whom you could have gone?" asked Mr. Railton.

"None, sir."
"Where did you live before you went to the Colonies?"
"I cannot remember the place—I was too young when I left," said Talbot. "But I have always understood that it was in Yorkshire. I may have relations there—I do not know. But my uncle has never spoken of them."

"You have your uncle's letter?"
"Yes, sir."
Talbot felt in an inside pocket, and drew out a crumpled letter, which he passed to the Head.

"You wish me to read this?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Certainly, sir."

The two masters read the letter. It was brief:

"My dear Reginald,—I am sorry to have to write this, but I think you must be expecting something of the sort by this time. I have come to the end of my tether. I can do nothing more for you; but you are of age now to look out for yourself. I have given you a good education, at least. I was younger than you when I started in life. If my affairs come round, you will hear from me again, otherwise not. I wish you good luck.—Your affectionate uncle,

"JAMES TALBOT."

"I am afraid that is a most unfeeling letter," said the Head, passing it back to Talbot. "Your position, then, is that you have no home, no protector, and only a little money between you and destitution?"

"I can work, sir."
"Ahem! What can you do?"
"I can find something to do if I can get back to Australia. I shall have to give up the idea of finishing my education, I suppose. Beggars can't be choosers!"

"That is very hard."
Talbot was silent.
"You have no friends," said the Head gently. "You are in a very unfortunate situation, Talbot, and you must allow me to be your friend."

"Thank you very much, sir!"
"You have done me a very great service to-night," said Dr. Holmes. "I should certainly have been robbed, and probably injured, by those ruffians. I hope to show my gratitude by something more than mere words. For to-night, at least, you must stay here; to-morrow we will consult what is best to be done."

Talbot hesitated.
"If—if you really wish to help me, sir—"

"My boy!"
"I mean—forgive me; of course you wish to, as you have said so," said Talbot. "I mean, there is something—you are a master in this school, I think?"

Dr. Holmes smiled.
"I am headmaster," he said.

"Then you could do as I wish—if you liked. I am not exactly a pauper, sir. I have very little money, but I have some very expensive presents that my uncle gave me when he was well off. I don't know what they are worth, but I think they would fetch a good deal of money—a gold watch, and diamond pins and studs, and things like that. They might bring enough to pay my fees for some terms here—if you would let me stay as a pupil."

"As a pupil!"
"Yes, sir. If I could only finish my education, I shouldn't mind facing the world after that; I should be prepared for it. And—and I think that if my things were sold by someone who understood their value, they would bring enough to pay my expenses, perhaps for a year or two—unless this school is very expensive."

"My dear boy," said the Head very kindly. "I cannot say how much I commend your ambition. I will certainly think over what you have said, and I hope we shall be able to arrange the matter as you wish. But we will talk it over further to-morrow. Now, are you hungry?"

Talbot smiled.
"Very, sir."
"Then I will ask my housekeeper to look after you to-night."

present, and to prepare a room for you in my own house. As for your things—"

"I left my trunk at the hotel in Luxford, sir. The landlord was going to send it on by railway when I should send him an address from Southampton."

"Very well; that can be seen to to-morrow. For to-night my housekeeper will provide you with what you need." The Head touched the bell.

Toby, the page, was sent to summon Mrs. Mimms; and when that good soul appeared the Head explained the matter to her and left Talbot in her charge.

"You are very, very kind, sir," Talbot faltered, as he was leaving the study.

"I hope you will find me always kind, my dear boy. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Talbot followed Mrs. Mimms, and the door closed behind him. The Head glanced at Mr. Railton, who was looking very thoughtful.

"A very sad story, Mr. Railton," said the Head

"Very, sir."

"I like the boy's face."

"He is certainly very good-looking."

The Head looked at him quickly.

"You do not doubt the story he has told us, Mr. Railton?" he exclaimed, the idea entering his benevolent mind for the first time.

"No, sir," said the Housemaster, after quite a long pause. "But at the same time, before he is admitted to the school, I should think that the strictest investigation would be advisable."

"I—I suppose so," said the Head.

"If you like, sir, I will go to Luxford to-morrow and see about his trunk. I know the hotel and the landlord, and shall soon ascertain if that part of the story is correct."

"I shall be much obliged to you, Mr. Railton, if you will. Though I cannot doubt the boy for a moment—especially after the courage he has shown. I am sure it will prove that every word he has told us is the exact truth."

"I am sure I hope so, sir."

But Mr. Railton's face was darkly clouded with thought as he left the Head's study. What reason had he for doubting Talbot? The coincidence of his having been twice on the scene to come to the rescue, surely that was little. The strangeness of the story he had told; stranger stories had been true. Mr. Railton felt that he was unjust, and he strove to banish the lingering doubt from his mind. Yet it persisted in lingering.

CHAPTER 6.

A Little Mistake.

"STEADY on! Quiet!"

"Yess, pray keep quiet, deah boys! Don't talk!"

"Sfurup!"

"Pway don't make a wow, talkin', Blake. You may spoil evewythin'!"

"Shush!"

"And don't make those widdleless noises, Lowthah! If Mr. Selby hears us, there will certainly be a wow."

"Are you going to leave off jawing, Gussy," asked Jack Blake, in a low tone of concentrated ferocity.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Put the blanket over his head and muffle him!" said Tom Merry.

"I refuse to be muffled. And I insist upon your keepin' quiet. Don't you see that old Selby may spot us if there's any talkin'!"

Arthur Augustus had the last word. His chums breathed hard, but did not answer. To slay Arthur Augustus would have been to betray themselves. And it was necessary just then for the chums of the School House to understandy Brer Fox, and his low—very low.

The scheme had been schemed, and the plot had ripened, as a novelist would say. Tom Merry & Co. were in ambush.

They were after vengeance. Mr. Selby's cup of iniquity had overflowed. Not only had the dyspeptic and ill-tempered master stopped the feed in the Third Form-room, and reduced the guests to a state of famine; not only had he confiscated a great part of the eatables—all, in fact, that the lads had not been able to hurry out of sight—thereby rendering the renewal of the birthday celebration a matter of doubt; not only had he cauced Wally, and given the whole Third Form an extra hour's preparation; he had reported Tom Merry & Co. to their respective Form-masters. Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, had given Blake and Herrie and Digby and D'Arcy a hundred lines each for impertinence to the Third Form-master, though, as a matter

of fact, only D'Arcy had spoken to him. But Mr. Latham felt bound to accept Mr. Selby's assurance that they had been impertinent. And Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who was much severer in his methods than the Fourth Form-master, had come down still more heavily upon the Terrible Three. He had given Tom Merry and Manners two hundred lines of Virgil each, and cauced Monty Lowther six cuts for his humorous remarks to Mr. Selby.

—And all because the juniors, in the kindness of their hearts, had consented to grace a fag feed with their presence.

It was the limit—in fact, past the limit. Tom Merry solemnly declared "that Britons never should be slaves." Mr. Selby was a Form-master, and his person was sacred. But there are exceptions to all rules. Mr. Selby's cup of iniquity was overflowing, and something had to be done. Of course, they could not give Mr. Selby what he deserved. That would have been, as Lowther remarked, something lingering, with boiling oil in it. But they had made up their minds to bump him, and they took their measures with great precaution. It was a serious matter, and if they had not been in such a state of exasperation the juniors would hardly have thought of going so far. But now they were exasperated, and they did think of it, and planned it.

Their plans were well laid. After finishing preparation in the Third Form-room, Mr. Selby would come up to his own room. Mr. Selby's room was at the end of a passage; that passage ended in a big window. There was only one room beyond Mr. Selby's—an extra bed-room, which was unoccupied. When there were guests in the House, as on the occasions when old boys came down in a swarm for some school function, the room was used. But there were no guests just now that the juniors knew of. Therefore, only Mr. Selby would be coming along that part of the passage. Therefore, it was safe to turn the light out there, and lie in wait for him in the darkness.

Some distance along the passage was a light, but they had turned it low. At the end of the passage where they were ambushed the darkness was intense. They could not see one another, except as dim shadows. Tom Merry held a blanket. That blanket was to be thrown over Mr. Selby's head, and then he was to be bumped. Then there was to be rapid flight.

Before the Form-master recovered from his astonishment the delinquents would be in their studies, hard at work on their preparation, and looking quite innocent and unconscious.

That was the scheme.

It was a wild and reckless one, but the juniors were so exasperated by the tyranny of the Third Form-master that they did not stop to reflect very much.

They waited.

It was time now for Mr. Selby to appear if he came up directly the Third Form preparation was over. As likely as not, of course, he would stop downstairs to chat with some master or other; or he might keep the Third a little longer than usual, being in so extremely acid a temper that evening. But he was sure to come sooner or later, and it was necessary to be very careful now.

Having reduced his companions to silence, and made them very much inclined to bump him instead of Mr. Selby, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chirruped with satisfaction.

"Don't you make any remarks," he murmured. "I'll listen for old Selby, and give you the word when he comes along."

The ambushed juniors did not reply, but they breathed hard. Again Arthur Augustus was in great danger of getting Mr. Selby's bumping all for himself.

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs.

"Hush!" Tom Merry whispered.

"Shut up, deah boy!"

Footsteps in the dark passage! Someone had come up the stairs and stopped on the landing. The light on the landing had been turned out, so he could not be seen. If it were Mr. Selby he would come towards his own room, of course, and walk right into the trap.

The ambushed juniors waited breathlessly. The pause of the footsteps was only for a moment or two. Then they came on again down the dark passage, directly towards the seven juniors who were hidden in the gloom.

Their hearts beat harder as the footsteps approached. Perhaps, now the crisis had come, they realised the seriousness of the joke on so august a person as a Form-master. But it was too late to back out now. They waited—two or three of them holding the blanket ready.

A moving form bumped into Blake, who was in the middle of the passage. The victim had walked into the trap. The juniors could see only a moving shadow dimly, but it was enough. In a twinkling the blanket was thrown over the top of the shadow, and a struggling form was borne to the floor.

of fact, only D'Arcy had spoken to him. But Mr. Latham felt bound to accept Mr. Selby's assurance that they had been impertinent. And Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, who was much severer in his methods than the Fourth Form-master, had come down still more heavily upon the Terrible Three. He had given Tom Merry and Manners two hundred lines of Virgil each, and cauced Monty Lowther six cuts for his humorous remarks to Mr. Selby.

—And all because the juniors, in the kindness of their hearts, had consented to grace a fag feed with their presence.

It was the limit—in fact, past the limit. Tom Merry solemnly declared "that Britons never should be slaves." Mr. Selby was a Form-master, and his person was sacred. But there are exceptions to all rules. Mr. Selby's cup of iniquity was overflowing, and something had to be done. Of course, they could not give Mr. Selby what he deserved. That would have been, as Lowther remarked, something lingering, with boiling oil in it. But they had made up their minds to bump him, and they took their measures with great precaution. It was a serious matter, and if they had not been in such a state of exasperation the juniors would hardly have thought of going so far. But now they were exasperated, and they did think of it, and planned it.

Their plans were well laid. After finishing preparation in the Third Form-room, Mr. Selby would come up to his own room. Mr. Selby's room was at the end of a passage; that passage ended in a big window. There was only one room beyond Mr. Selby's—an extra bed-room, which was unoccupied. When there were guests in the House, as on the occasions when old boys came down in a swarm for some school function, the room was used. But there were no guests just now that the juniors knew of. Therefore, only Mr. Selby would be coming along that part of the passage. Therefore, it was safe to turn the light out there, and lie in wait for him in the darkness.

Some distance along the passage was a light, but they had turned it low. At the end of the passage where they were ambushed the darkness was intense. They could not see one another, except as dim shadows. Tom Merry held a blanket. That blanket was to be thrown over Mr. Selby's head, and then he was to be bumped. Then there was to be rapid flight.

Before the Form-master recovered from his astonishment the delinquents would be in their studies, hard at work on their preparation, and looking quite innocent and unconscious.

That was the scheme.

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Talbot sat on the bed, looking enviously at the fag of the Third, scanning his pale and troubled face. "Speak you villain, can't you?" muttered Frayne. "Wot are you doing 'ere? You've come 'ere for some villainy, I know that!" "Hush!" said Talbot hastily. (See Chapter II.)

There was a sound of wild gasping under the blanket. The juniors did not heed it. They collared the wriggling form and raised it, and bumped it down on the linoleum.

Bump! Bump!
"Yar-ar-arh!" came in muffled tones from beneath the enveloping blanket.

"Wun, deah boys!" panted D'Arcy. "Don't speak, or the beast may recognise your voices! Wun like anythin'!"
"Shut up, you idiot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom snatched the blanket from the struggling figure and ran, and the juniors pelted down the passage after him.

A dim, wriggling form was left on the floor, gasping and panting.

Down the dark passage they went at top speed, leaving the wriggling form behind. They were just passing the landing when a light suddenly streamed out. They had not heard a match scratch; and the sudden lighting of the gas startled them, and they halted involuntarily. They halted just in time to avoid a collision with a thin and acid-looking gentleman, who had just come upstairs, and stopped to light the gas, which was unexpectedly out.

In the light they recognised him.

"Great Scott, it's Selby!"

"Selby, by Jove!"

"Then who—"

Mr. Selby fixed cold, basilisk eyes upon the startled juniors. They stood panting, gazing at him open-eyed and open-mouthed. It was Mr. Selby, the master of the Third. Then who was it they had left in the dark passage, wriggling and gasping on the floor?

CHAPTER 7.

A Real Brick.

MR. SELBY eyed the juniors grimly. "You again!" he said in acid tones. "Perhaps you will kindly explain what you are rushing about the passages in the dark for."

Silence!

"Did you turn this light out?"

Silence!

"What trick have you been playing here!" said Mr. Selby. "I suspected something when I saw that the light was out. You are the most unruled boys in this House. I demand to know why you have turned the lights out in this passage, and what you have been doing?"

Gasp, gasp! came from the dark passage near the Form-master's room. Mr. Selby started.

"Who is there?" he called out.

"It is I, sir," said a boyish voice.

"I do not know your voice. Come here!"

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in dismay. "we've bagged the wrong chap! It's a kid!"

"Shurrup!" murmured Blake.

A handsome lad came down the dark passage, and passed in the light. He looked in some disorder, and was very red and ruffled. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon him, and uttered an ejaculation.

"Talbot, bai Jove!"

Mr. Selby fixed his eyes upon the new-comer.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"My name is Talbot, sir," gasped the stranger. He had not yet recovered from his severe handling.

"What are you—a new boy? I have not seen you before."
 "I am a guest of Dr. Holmes, sir. I was going to my room—the room at the end of this passage," Talbot explained. He paused.
 Tom Merry & Co. almost groaned. They had known nothing about this unknown stranger staying in the School House—nothing about the extra bed-room at the end of the passage having been assigned to him. How were they to know that Talbot would be coming along there just then?
 "Bai Jove," murmured D'Arcy, "what wotten lack?"
 Mr. Selby scanned the boy.
 "I presume these boys have been playing some trick upon you," he said. "Is that it?"
 Talbot hesitated. He looked at Tom Merry & Co., and understood that they had japed him, though why he did not understand. But he did not want to get them into trouble with this ill-tempered-looking master.
 "Oh, it's nothing, sir," he said cheerfully. "I don't mind. I can take a little joke."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Selby harshly. "Merry, what have you been doing with that blanket?"
 "This—this blanket, sir?" stammered Tom Merry.
 "Yes. Answer me at once."
 "—I—chucked it over Talbot, sir."
 "And why?"
 "It was a—jape, sir," stammered Tom. He had presence of mind enough not to tell the Form-master that the blanket had been intended for him, Mr. Selby. That piece of information would certainly not have improved matters.
 "What?" thundered Mr. Selby. "You deliberately turned out the lights in the passage, and threw that blanket over a person coming along in the dark?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "A practical joke, I presume?"
 "Yes, sir."

"I do not approve of practical jokes, Merry, especially upon guests of your headmaster. Master Talbot, kindly come with me; and the Head shall be acquainted with this outrage. All of you will follow me."
 "My hat," murmured Blake, "we're in for it now!"
 "Yes, wathah!"
 Talbot, however, did not stir.
 "Come, boy," said Mr. Selby impatiently. "These boys shall be severely punished for having played such a trick upon a guest of their headmaster."
 "Excuse me, sir," said Talbot quietly, "I do not wish to complain."

"Nonsense!"
 "I don't mind a joke, sir. I don't want anybody to be punished on my account."
 "That is nonsense, Talbot. They must be punished, of course," said Mr. Selby impatiently. "You will kindly come with me."
 "I do not wish to complain, sir," said Talbot, quietly but very firmly.

Mr. Selby paused, and the juniors breathed again. Unless Talbot complained of the blanketing and the bumping, Mr. Selby could hardly carry the matter before the Head. Talbot had been the victim, and if he did not complain, there was evidently nothing more to be done.
 "Bai Jove, you are a brack, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Selby fixed a most unpleasant look upon Talbot. The boy's firm refusal to get the juniors into trouble made him take a dislike to the lad on the spot.
 "Very well," said the Form-master awkwardly at last, "if you do not complain—"
 "Certainly not, sir."

"I shall report your conduct, Merry, in turning out the lights, to the Housemaster," said Mr. Selby. "You may go."
 "Thank you, sir," said Tom demurely.
 And the juniors departed. Mr. Selby gave Talbot a look of dislike, and passed on to his room, relighting the gas in the passage. Talbot looked after the juniors, and smiled. Then he passed Mr. Selby's door, and went to his own room.

"That chap is a brack," said Tom Merry, when the juniors reached the Shell passage. "We should have got it pretty warm from the Head, if he'd let Selby lead him by the nose. He was a brack to stand up to the old boulder in that way."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Jolly decent chap," said Herries. "I wonder who he is?"
 "He's the chap I told you of, deah boys—the chap who chipped in and helped me when those tramps were wobbin' me."
 "My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Well, he's a good sort. I think I'll trot along and have a word with him. We ought to thank him for what he's done. It would have meant a good licking all round if he hadn't stood up for us."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 Tom Merry tiptoed past Mr. Selby's door; he did not want

to have any further dealings with the Third Form-master just then. He tapped lightly at Talbot's door.

"Come in!"
 Tom Merry opened the door.
 Talbot greeted him with a cherry smile as he came in.
 "I say," began Tom, "you acted jolly decently just now. I want to thank you for standing up for us as you did."
 Talbot laughed.
 "That's all right. I could see that old chap was simply yearning to get you licked. I don't mind a joke, though really it was rather a rough joke to play on a chap you don't know, wasn't it?"
 "It was," said Tom, "and that makes it all the more decent of you to stand up for us as you did. But I want to explain. You see, it was a mistake. We took you for somebody else. We couldn't see in the dark. We didn't know you were in the house at all. Nobody ever comes along this passage but Selby, and so you see—"
 Talbot whistled.

"You were waiting for him?"
 "Yes, he's a beast!" said Tom frankly. "He's stopped a feed for us, and got us into trouble, and we were going to blanket him. You could see what an ill-tempered joser he was, couldn't you?"

"That old chap? Yes, rather. But—"
 "But I'm glad we made the mistake, now I come to think of it," said Tom. "It would very likely have come out who did it, and it would have meant a flogging going for a Form-master. You came along in the nick of time to prevent us from getting into serious trouble, as a matter of fact. So we're doubly obliged to you."
 "Then I'm glad I came," said Talbot, laughing. "It was rather a surprise to me when I was collared in the dark. But I don't mind a bit."

"Well, you are a brack," said Tom. "I'm glad, after all, that we didn't bump old Selby. There's more than one way of killing a cat, and we'll find some safer way. Muck up his numismatic collection, or something like that. By Jove, I'll get Figgins of the New House to do it, and we can all prove alibis. I thought I'd come along and tell you we're obliged."
 "That's all right," said Talbot cheerily. "I hope we shall be friends if I stay at the school."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with interest. "You're a new boy, then?"
 "I don't know," said Talbot. "I want to come to this school, and if it can be arranged, I shall come. To-night I'm the Head's guest, that is all."

"I jolly well hope you'll come, then," said Tom. "You're just the sort of fellow who'll get on here. You helped Gussy when those tramps went for him, didn't you?"
 "Oh, that was nothing!"
 "It was jolly plucky," said Tom warmly. "Going to bed now?"

"I was going to read a bit before turning in," said Talbot. "It's rather early to go to bed."
 "Would you care to come to a feed in the box-room?" asked Tom. "You can make the acquaintance of the fellows there. It isn't much of a feed, I'm afraid. Selby has confiscated some of the tommy; but if you care to come, we'll be jolly glad."

"Thanks. I'll come with pleasure. I've had my supper, as a matter of fact; but I'll be very glad to come, all the same."
 "Come on, then," said Tom cordially. And they quitted the room together.

CHAPTER 8. "The Toff!"

WALLY & CO. were already in the box-room. A crowd of Third Form fags were making preparations there for the deferred feed. Half the good things had been lost owing to Mr. Selby's reckless confiscations. The dozen blazers were gone, also the pots of jam and a bag of tarts. But Wally & Co. had rallied round nobly. True, the Terrible Three had very little to contribute—merely a loaf, the offer of the three eggs having been declined without thanks. But the chums of Study No. 6 had done very well.

Arthur Augustus had gone through all his pockets in search of funds, and had found a half-sovereign in an old jacket, and had generously expended it at the tuckshop to swell the supplies. Blake had brought a jar of treacle. Kangaroo of the Shell had kindly consented to come to the feed, and he had brought three pots of jam and a pot of marmalade along with him. Small contributions were thankfully received; larger ones in proportion, as Wally put it humorously. In the box-room they were safe from interference by Mr. Selby. There was a fire going, and Frayne was frying eggs by the dozen,

and handsome rashers of bacon. The scent of frying bacon was very grateful and comforting to the hungry juniors as they came in.

Empty boxes and trunks served as chairs and tables. The fags had brought in the crockery and the cutlery, and most of the guests had thoughtfully provided themselves with knives and forks. The feed was almost ready, and all the participants were on the scene with the exception of Tom Merry.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally, looking round over the preparations with an air of great satisfaction. "It's going to be a good feed, after all. Many thanks for the jam, Kasey."

"Not at all," said the Cornstalk gracefully. "Upon an auspicious occasion like this, it's a case of all hands on deck."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How are those eggs getting on, Frayne? Don't burn them like you did the blisters!"

"Orlright," said Joe cheerfully. "Nearly finished."

"Finished the toast, Jimmy?"

"Every slice," said Jameson. "Blow old Selby! It's time I was in my own House."

"Never mind, it's worth staying for. Gussy, old man, make yourself useful. Better the toast!" said D'Arcy minor briskly.

"Certainly, deah boy."

"We're all here, ain't we?" said Wally, looking round. "Where's that ass Tom Merry?"

"Weally, Wally, you should not allude to an eidah person in that disrespectful mannah. I considah——"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy?" implored Wally.

"You cheaky young boundah——"

"Shuah!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Shuah!" repeated Blake. "Remember you are a guest. Gussy, I shan't bring you out to tea if you don't behave yourself."

"Company manners, Gussy!" urged Digby.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy laid down the butter-knife, and jammed his famous monocle into his eye, and gave his ehums a withering look.

"You uttah asses!" he began. "Owowow! There's some beastly buttah on my beastly eyeglass! I've got some in my beastly eye! Gwooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Back up with those eggs, Frayne!"

"This is the last lot," said Frayne. Frayne bent over the frying-pan, devoting all his attention to the eggs, which he was doing to a turn.

"Here's Tommy," said Monty Lowther, as the door opened again. "Hallo, another guest!"

Talbot came in with the captain of the Shell.

"Bai Jove, what a weally wippin' ideah to bring Talbot!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Wally, deah boy, this is Talbot!"

"Welcome to the festive hall, my pippin!" said Wally cheerfully.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Jolly glad to see you here," said Wally, unheeding. "I've heard about you, and I think you're a brick. Are you going to stay at St. Jim's?"

"I hope so," said Talbot, smiling.

"Then I hope you'll come into the Third," said Wally cordially.

"Wats?" said Arthur Augustus. "Talbot is too old to come into the Third, you young duffah. I trust you will come into the Fourth, Talbot, deah boy. The Fourth is my Form!" added Arthur Augustus, with dignity, as if that were a very good thing indeed for the Fourth.

"Bosh!" said Tom Merry. "If Talbot stays at St. Jim's, he's coming into the Shell. We shall insist upon it!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther and Kangaroo.

"Into the School House, anyway," said Blake. "I suppose you know we have two houses here, Talbot—this, and the other one!"

"I didn't know."

"Great Scott, then you're had a narrow escape! Mind they don't shove you into the New House!" said Blake in a tone of warning. "The New House is a regular casual ward—a home for duffers—practically speaking, not much better than a reformatory. The School House—this House—is cock-house of St. Jim's. It's the oldest House, you know. Dates back to King Cole——"

"Old King Cole, you know," explained Lowther. "The celebrated monarch who was a merry old soul."

"Weally, deah boys, I protest against your pullin' Talbot's leg. The School House dates back to the reign of King John, Talbot. It is cock-house, of course. Most of the masters live in the School House. The Head, in fact, is weally a School House chap."

"Hear, hear!"

"Don't jaw the new chap blind and deaf, Gussy!" protested Wally. "Sit down, Talbot, old man, and make yourself comfy."

"Here's a box for you," said Lowther hospitably.

Talbot sat down, smiling. These could be no doubt of the cordiality of his reception. Talbot had made a very good impression upon the St. Jim's juniors to start with; and whatever Form he was put into—if he stayed—he was certain of a warm welcome. And he had a frank, easy manner that made him at home at once. The fellows felt already as if they had known him for a whole term at least.

"Make up your mind to stay here," said Lowther as Talbot sat down beside him on the box. "This is the best school going, beats Eton and Harrow hollow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I shall certainly stay if it can be arranged," said Talbot.

"I don't think there's anything I should like better."

"Good. And you'll come into the School House—this House?"

"Yes, rather."

"Hear, hear!"

"Finished those eggs, Frayne?"

"Yes, I've just about finished," said Joe Frayne, turning a warm and ruddy face from the fire. "Old that dish, Curly, and I'll turn 'em out."

"Ere you har," said Curly humorously.

Frayne lifted the frying-pan from the fire, and turned round. Curly Gibson held the dish ready for the eggs to be turned out. Frayne had not seen the latest addition to the party yet, having been too busy with the cooking. But as he turned from the fire with the frying-pan in his hand, he looked over to where Talbot was sitting.

Talbot, sitting on the box beside Lowther, with a plate on his knees, was in the full light of the gas-burner flaring overhead. The light fell clearly upon his handsome face, with its well-cut features and dark eyes.

Frayne looked at him, and a strange change came over Frayne's face.

He stood rooted to the floor, as it were; the frying-pan in his hand, and his eyes almost starting from his head.

His gaze was glued upon Talbot.

His lips moved, but no word came from them. It was as if Joe Frayne had received a sudden, unaccountable and paralyzing shock, and could not speak.

"Back up!" said Curly. "How long am I to hold this dish?"

"What's the matter with you, Frayne?" exclaimed Wally.

"What the dickens——"

The juniors all stared at Frayne, Talbot looking at him with the rest.

A slight, almost imperceptible change came over Talbot's face as he saw the wail of the Third. He had not noticed him before.

"My—my heavens!" muttered Frayne.

"Joe! What the deuce——"

The frying-pan dropped from Frayne's hand, and crashed upon the floor; the last lot of eggs splashed out of it, and Curly Gibson gave a gasp, and dropped the dish in his surprise, and there was another crash.

"Frayne——"

"You ass——"

"What's the matter with you?"

Frayne did not heed. He did not seem to know that the juniors were staring at him in blank amazement. He did not seem to be aware that the frying-pan had slipped from his hand. His starting eyes were fastened upon Talbot.

"My heavens!" he muttered again hoarsely. "The Toff!"

CHAPTER 9.

The Feed.

TALBOT looked at the startled fig, with a smile still on his lips.

There was a buzz of astonishment from the rest. Wally caught his chum by the shoulder, and shook him.

"Joe, what's the matter with you? You silly ass, what's the matter? Are you going off your rocker?"

"The Toff!" muttered Frayne hoarsely.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know Talbot?" asked Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Talbot!" repeated Frayne. "Talbot!"

"Yes, this chap is Talbot."

"I should say he knows me, by the way he stares at me," said Talbot lightly. "Who is the kid?"

"It's Frayne of the Third——"

"Weally, Frayne, you are actin in a verry odd mannah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "What do you mean by starin' at Talbot in that wude way?"

"Oh, never mind!" said Talbot calmly. "It's all right, kid. Don't be scared—I'm not a ghost. What's the matter with you?"

Frayne did not reply.

His eyes were still glued upon Talbot, and he seemed unable to speak. His face was quite white.

"He looks as if he's going to have a fit," said Talbot.

"Does he have fits?"

"No, he doesn't," said Wally, rather gruffly. Wally was quite ashamed of the extraordinary behaviour of his chum.

"Don't play the giddy goat, Frayne. What's the matter with you? Do you know Talbot?"

"Know him?" muttered Frayne. "Wot's he doin' 'ere?"

"He's our guest, and you might be civil to him!" said Wally sharply. "Don't mind him, Talbot. Blessed if I know what's the matter with this young ass!"

"Seems to me to be quite off his workah!"

"Dotty!" said Monty Lowther. "Nothing unusual in the Third—they're all much of a muckness. Pass the eggs, Wally—net those on the floor!"

Wally dragged Frayne to a seat. Frayne seemed rather to collapse than to sit down. The sight of Talbot had evidently given him a shock that he could not easily recover from.

But he did not speak again. He seemed to be trying to put himself together. The juniors were exchanging looks of wonder.

Frayne recognised Talbot, that was evident, and he had called him by a peculiar nickname. What could it mean?

Talbot was perfectly calm and self-possessed. He was eating fried eggs and bacon now, with perfect coolness. Evidently the sight of Frayne had not had a similar effect upon him.

There was a buzz of talk at once. All the fellows wanted instinctively to obliterate the curious incident, as it were. Certainly Frayne's remarkable conduct was not likely to impress Talbot with a good impression of the manners and the hospitality of St. Jim's.

"Pass the eggs, Wally!"

"Ginger-pop this way!"

"Who says toast?"

"Toast!"

"Now, then, buck up with those rashers!"

"Gentlemen," said Monty Lowther, "it is rash to eat bacon just before going to bed; but the bacon is rasher!"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Manners. "You can put that in the Cinnamon Column in the 'Weekly.' Lowther's Cheery Chestnuts, you know?"

And the talk buzzed on, and Talbot joined in it pleasantly enough, and the juniors were glad to see that he showed no signs of annoyance at Frayne's extraordinary conduct.

Joe Frayne did not join in the talk, however.

He sat quiet and still—dumb, almost, as if he had been stunned. But the other feasters made it a point not to look towards him. Wally meant to have a very plain explanation with him afterwards; but the immediate business in hand was to make the party go as pleasantly as possible. Fortunately, that was not difficult. The crowd of juniors had good appetites, and the feed was a very good one, and Frayne's peculiar action was soon almost forgotten.

Frayne, as he sat silent, was covertly scanning Talbot's face.

He seemed unable to take his eyes from it.

Talbot seemed to have forgotten the existence of the wall of the Third. He was sitting and laughing cheerily with the Terrible Threes and the Fourth-Formers. He was the centre of a cheery group of fellows, and seemed to be quite at his ease, and quite at home in his new surroundings.

It was some time before Wally appeared to remember the existence of his old chum, and clapped Joe Frayne on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, Joe!" he muttered. "Don't sit there like a giddy graves image! Have you forgotten it's your birthday!"

"Yes—no, Master Wally," stammered Joe.

"You've got to make a speech directly."

Joe looked dismayed.

"I—I think I'll mizzle, if you don't mind, Wally," he stammered, getting up from the box.

"What rot!" said Wally. "You won't do anything of the sort! Chap's got to be at his own birthday feed, you duffer!"

"But I—I—"

"Gussy's going to speechify, and you've got to return thanks," said Wally. "Now, pull yourself together; Gussy's just going to begin."

"Alright," said Joe heavily.

"And for goodness' sake don't be so jolly glum!" said D'Arcy minor testily. "What is there to look so blue about?"

"N-o-nethin'."

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"Then chuck it!"

"Alright," repeated Frayne, but as gloomily as before.

It was evident that something weighed heavily on his spirits, and would not be got rid of.

Arthur Augustus was on his feet, or on his legs, as it would be described in connection with a more august assembly. He had a glass of ginger-beer in his hand, sipping.

"Gentlemen!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Silence for the chair!" said Monty Lowther, rapping upon a trunk with an empty ginger-beer bottle.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I wish to make a few remarks."

"Hear, hear!"

"To-day—I mean, to-night—is a great occasion. On this occasion, gentlemen, we are met together to felicitate—"

"Bravo!"

"Good word!"

"Pile in!"

"To felicitate our young friend Fwayne on havin' attained his—his—his—I weally do not know how old our young friend Fwayne is, but that is a mattah of no moment. He has attained his birthdlay—it does not mattah which."

Loud applause.

"I need not dwell on the chawcter and mewits of our young friend Fwayne. He is known to all of you—"

Applause.

"Our young friend Fwayne came to this school from a wathah 'sneech quartah. Tom Mewwy discovahed him wathin' his great talents and his high chawcter in a feabul slum, and brougt him from those shockin' surroundin's. But I venture to suggest, gentlemen, that had our young friend Fwayne wathained in Angel Alley and Murdewah's Wew, he would have made his mark there. You are all aware, howehw, of the great progress he has made since he has honahed St. Jim's with his presence. Gentlemen, there is no membah of this ancient and respected Foundation that I would wathah wise to—I mean, wise to propose the health of—than our young friend Fwayne, and I rejoice that this occasion of his natal day gives me the opportunity of puttin' into words what we all think—that our respected friend young Fwayne is a jolly good fellow—"

Thinkers of applause.

"A cweedit to his school, and a cweedit to his country—"

Tremendous applause.

I therefore propose the health of our young friend Fwayne. Long may he wave—I mean, long may he flourish! Gentlemen, I drink to young Fwayne, and to many happy weturns of the day to our young friend!"

And Arthur Augustus sat down.

"Good old Gussy!" chirruped Blake. "Good old Gussy! Won't you make things hum when you get into the House of Lords—what?—if Lloyd George lets it last till you're grown up!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Frayne! Young Frayne!"

"Speech!"

Wally jerked Joe Frayne forward. Frayne was looking anything but happy. The birthday feed, since he had seen Talbot, was anything but a joy to him. He stood flushing before the crowd of fellows, and quite dumb. Wally lunged at his ribs.

"Speak, you ass! Speechify, you chump!"

"Wot—not am I to?" stammered Frayne.

"Any old thing, but pile in!"

"Go it, Frayne!"

"Hear, hear!"

Thus encouraged, Frayne went it.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, which you've all 'eard the kind things wot Master Gussy 'ave been so kind as to go for to say—"

"Hurray!"

When poor Joe was nervous or confused, his old diction, learned in Murderer's Row, always came back to him unchanged, as if he had never had a single lesson at St. Jim's.

"Gentlemen, which I say it's werry kind of Master Wally to give me a birthday—which I don't know whether it's my birthday or not, but Master Wally says as 'ow it is—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Which Master Gussy says a lot of nice things of me which they ain't true, which I don't mean for to go for to say as Master Gussy tells an untruth. Far from it. But I mean for to say as 'ow I ain't deservin' of them kind things which Master Gussy says, says he—"

"Hear, hear!"

"But I thank Master Gussy all the same, and all you gentlemen for comin' to the birthday feed, and I'm sorry as 'ow old Selby 'ave nailed the bloaters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hear, hear!"

"And—and I drink this 'ere toast with pleasure," concluded Joe; and he forthwith drank his own health amid roars of laughter and applause.

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "Joe will be making things hum in the House of Commons by the time you're making them sit up in the House of Lords, Gussy! He's a born orator. Demosthenes and Pitt and Lloyd George aren't in it with him."

"Weally, Blake——"
The box-room door opened, and the good-humoured face of Darrel of the Sixth looked in.

"Are you kids aware that it is bedtime?" he asked.
"Bai Jove, is it! Vewy kind of you to woinand us, Darrel."

The prefect laughed.
"Third Form off to bed," he said.
"Right-ho!" said Wally. "It's a celebration, Darrel; young Frayne's birthday. You've come just too late for the great speech—your loss."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
And the meeting broke up.

CHAPTER 10.

Face to Face!

"AND now, you young ass, you'll explain," said Wally, as soon as the Third Formers were in their dormitory. Jameson and the rest of the New House portion of the Form had trooped off to their own House. Darrel had shepherded the School House fags off to their dormitory, and left them to turn in.

Joe Frayne was very silent.
The gloomy expression had returned to his face and stayed there. He gave a little start as Wally addressed him, but did not reply.

"Yes, tell us what you were glaring at Talbot like that for," said Curly Gibson. "Do you know the chap?"

Joe was still silent.
"You were jolly rude to him," said Wally.

"Was I?" muttered Frayne.
"Yes, you were. What did you mean by it?"

"Nothin'," said Frayne, with an effort.
"Oh, rot!" said Wally. "You must have meant something. Have you ever seen the chap before? Do you know him?"

"I—I thought as I knowed him," said Joe reluctantly.
"You've met him before?"

"I—I thought I 'ad."

"Where did you meet him?" asked half a dozen voices.
"Get it off your chest, Joe."

"Out with it!"
"I ain't nothing to say," said Joe at last. "I s'pose I've made a mistake. Suttin'ly I 'ave if the young gent's name is Talbot."

"Why, his name must be Talbot," said Wally in wonder.
"He's said so."

"Course," admitted Joe.
"Do you mean to say that you mistook him for somebody else?"

"I—I s'pose that was it."

"Then you're a silly young ass," said Wally severely.
"He must have thought you were off your rocker staring at him like that. What did you call him the Toff for?"

"I——"

"Is he like somebody you used to know that you called the Toff?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Where was it—in Murderers' Row?" asked Curly, with a grin. "Talbot doesn't look as if he'd had much to do with any Murderers' Rows."

Joe Frayne looked worried. It was clear that the questioning of the Form-fellows was troubling him greatly.

"You've made an idiotic mistake, Joe, and made the chap think you're potty," said Wally. "But you needn't look so blue about it. No harm done."

"So he's coming to St. Jim's?" said Joe thoughtfully.
"So he says."

"And he's staying 'ere to-night?"
"Looks like it."

"He's got the bed-room next to Selby's," said Jones minimus. "Didn't you hear those Shell chaps saying how they'd bumped him in mistake for old Selby?"

"The next room to Selby's?" repeated Joe Frayne.
He did not say anything more. He turned in, and all the remarks of the Third Formers that failed to draw any reply from him. Darrel came in and put out the lights.

There was a buzz of talk in the dormitory, as usual, before the fags went to sleep, but Joe Frayne did not take any share in it. He lay quite silent, and the others thought he had gone to sleep.

But the wail of St. Jim's was very far from sleeping.

While the rest of the Third dropped off one by one into slumber, Joe Frayne lay sleepless, staring into the darkness with wide-open eyes.

There was a vision before his eyes in the darkness; he could still see the handsome, smiling, somewhat mocking face of Talbot.

Ten o'clock struck.
The other Third were asleep by that time; and the higher junior Forms had been in bed half an hour.

Then Joe Frayne slipped quietly from his bed.

Moving with great caution, not to awaken the others, he dressed himself in the darkness, and stole silently towards the door of the dormitory. He opened the door quietly, passed out into the passage, and drew the door shut after him without a sound.

The passage was dark; but there was still a light burning downstairs. The seniors were not gone to bed yet.

Joe Frayne's heart was thumping, uncomfortably. If he were found out of his dormitory at that hour, it would mean trouble for him, for he would not be able to explain. He could not tell anyone at St. Jim's that he had to see Talbot—that he could not sleep till he had seen and spoken with the boy who had come so strangely to St. Jim's.

And to reach his room he had to pass Mr. Selby's door, and Mr. Selby might be in his room; perhaps reading by his fire before he went to bed, but the risk had to be run, if he was to see Talbot; and, indeed, Joe Frayne, with that fixed idea in his mind, gave hardly a thought to Mr. Selby just then.

But he was very careful. He tiptoed down the flight of stairs, and tiptoed down the passage past the door of the Third Form-master.

There was no light under the door. Either Mr. Selby was not there, or he had gone to bed. Neither was there a light under Talbot's door. It was most probable that Talbot was in bed; but that made no difference to Joe Frayne. He had to see him—to wake him from his sleep, if necessary.

He turned the handle of the door silently. It opened at his touch.

The room was in darkness. Only a faint glimmer of starlight came in at the window; and it showed dimly the bed and a figure sitting up in it.

"Who's that?"
The voice was only a whisper; but it struck on Frayne's ears with a sudden shock, and he gave a gasp.

"Me!"
"Shut the door!"

Frayne shut the door quietly.
"Come here!"

Talbot's voice was low, but quite calm. He was in pyjamas, sitting up in bed; he had heard the door open, though Frayne had made scarcely a perceptible sound in opening it. Talbot evidently had very keen hearing.

It was very clear that he had not slept, though he had gone to bed at the same time as the juniors. Frayne understood that.

"You was awake?" he muttered.
"Yes."

"You—you expected me?" Frayne peered at him. His eyes became accustomed to the half-light in the room, and he could see Talbot more clearly now. A gleam of starlight from the window fell upon the clear, handsome face.

"I thought you would come."

Frayne caught his breath.

"Then—then it wasn't any mistake?" he muttered. "I knowed it wasn't a mistake. I knowed it was you! I knowed it was the Toff! You—you villain! Wot are you doing 'ere? Wot are you doing at St. Jim's?"

CHAPTER 11.

The Toff's Programme.

TALBOT did not speak for a moment.

He sat in the bed, looking curiously at the fag of the Third, scanning his pale and troubled face.

Joe Frayne watched him, waiting for his reply.

"Speak, you villain, can't you?" he muttered, his voice rising. "Wot are you doing 'ere? You've come 'ere for some villainy, I know that!"

"Hush!"

"Wot for? I'll raise my voice and call the whole 'ouse 'ere if you don't explain!" said Joe. "I 'oped as it might be a mistake—though I knowed it wasn't! I never thought that even you would 'ave the cheek to come 'ere. And then it's a long time since I see you—a long time since I was in Angel Alley. But I knowed you! You didn't know I was 'ere when you came!"

Talbot shook his head.

"How should I know? I didn't even know you weren't in Angel Alley still. I don't waste much time thinking about little ragamuffins."

"Master Merry made me come 'ere—to give me a chance," said Joe. "But 'tain't that as has brought you 'ere. You've 'ad all the chance you want. You was always the Toff—always with plenty of money—you, and your father afore you! Where's your father now? In prison, I s'pose!"

"My father's dead."

"Oh!"

"And if you say another word about him I'll get out of bed and wring your neck!" said the Toff, in a low, concentrated tone.

"I—I didn't know as he was dead," muttered Frayne. "I wouldn't say anything 'agin him if I knowed. But that don't excuse your coming 'ere, and you knows it. You ain't 'abert to come 'ere honest. You're on a new lay."

"Exactly!"

"You come 'ere to rob—"

"Don't be a fool, Joe! Do I look as if I were going to rob anyone?"

"Then wot do you want?"

"Nothing!"

"Look 'ere—"

"You have heard how I came," said Talbot. "The Head was attacked by a gang of footpads, and I chipped in, and he gave me a shelter for the night out of gratitude."

"The same footpads wot went for Master D'Arcy?"

"It seems so."

"I've 'eard him speaking of it," said Frayne bitterly. "I 'eard him mention one name—a name I'd 'eard before."

"Indeed?"

"It was 'Ookey Walker," said Frayne. "'Ookey Walker, the cracksmen and garrotter, a great pal of your father's in his time. Don't tell me no lies, Toff! Their roughs was 'ere on your account—I know it now that I know you. That job on the 'Ead was a put-up job. 'Ookey Walker and the rest wotked it for you—a dodge to git you into the school."

Talbot smiled.

"You are as sharp as ever, Joe—"

"I ain't a fool!" said Joe sturdily. "When I knowed

that you was 'ere, and that 'Ookey Walker was around, I knowed you was in some game together. And you say you ain't 'ere to rob anybody; but they tried to rob Master D'Arcy."

"If you've heard that, you've heard, I suppose, that I chipped in and stopped them!"

"Yes, I remember that."

"That doesn't look as if I'm here on a new lay, does it?"

"Then wot—"

"As you have so sagely guessed, it was a put-up job on the Head," said the Toff, in a curious tone of sarcasm. "'Hookey Walker and Nobby and the Babb't were here for that purpose, and the blundering fools tried to fill in time by going through D'Arcy, as they had seen that he had a gold watch, and they had nothing to do. But I stopped them. They came very near spoiling the whole game. But, as you see, there's no harm done. The put-up job on the Head came off all right, and I'm here."

"You won't stay here, Toff!"

"No? And why not?"

"Why not?" Joe Frayne's voice rose again. "Do you think I'm going to keep quiet and let you play your game 'ere? I come to warn you. I don't want to give you away, for old time's sake; you was kind to me sometimes in the alley, and I ain't forgot you 'elped me at times when I was

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'ard up. You always had a kind 'eart, I'll say that for you. I always liked you; and in them days—'fore I knew Master Merry—I wasn't particular. I never knew the difference between honesty and the other thing, the way I was brought up in Angel Alley. But I know now. Since I've knowed Master Tom I've been as straight as a die, and I'm goin' to keep so. Do you think I'm going to let you stay 'ere—you, the Toff, the kid cracksmen that can crack any safe you lay your 'ands on? I come here to warn you, I say. You've got to get out!"

"When?"

"To-night!"

The Toff laughed, a low, musical laugh.

"That's rather sudden, isn't it, Joe?"

"You've got to go!"

"The Head would be a little surprised to find that his guest had vanished during the night," said the Toff, in an amused tone.

"He'd be more surprised to 'ear that you was a cracksmen, and wanted by the police in a dozen towns," said Joe. Talbot laughed again.

"He would; I can imagine his face," he assented. "But you're not going to tell him, Joe?"

"I'm goin' to tell 'im if you don't clear."

The Toff settled himself more comfortably in the bed.

The fig's threat did not seem to move him in the least. Boy as he was, he had an iron nerve.

"You ain't goin'?" asked Frayne, clenching his hands.

"No!"

"Mind, I mean business!" Frayne's voice came sharp and loud. "You go out of this House, or I go to the 'Ead before I get back to bed this night. Arter all they've done for me, I'm not going to see them robbed."

"Quiet!"

Frayne's voice sank again. He seemed strangely under the influence of the handsome, mocking face before him.

"Well, then, out you go!" he said.

"I'll explain the situation to you, Joe." The Toff spoke quietly. "You think I am here to play the old game—the cracksmen game?"

"—I s'pose so."

"Well, you are wrong. I'm here to start fresh."

"Start fresh? And ow?"

"The same as you have done," said the Toff. "What were you? A ragged kid in a slum—a pickpocket when you had the chance! What are you now?"

"Honest, at least!" said Joe fiercely.

The Toff made a soothing gesture.

"I don't doubt it," he said. "You always were honest in your way, Joe. At one time you were grateful too."

"I'm grateful now," muttered Frayne. "I ain't forgot as you 'elped me many a time. But—"

"I'm left alone in the world, Joe—excepting for the kind of friends that a boy is better without," said the Toff. "Hookey Walker and the rest. I've thrown the old life over for good."

Joe gasped.

"You've thrown it over!"

"Yes. I'm going to make a fresh start. I've got some money behind me; I've had a pretty good education."

"I often wondered that you didn't chuck the 'pinching game," said Frayne. "You was always too good for that."

"I'm going to be too good for it, at least. I tell you I've thrown it all over."

Joe shook his head.

"You could always come over anybody with palaver, Toff. But it don't look like throwin' it over—this 'ere put-up job on the 'Ead, with the old gang 'elping you."

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

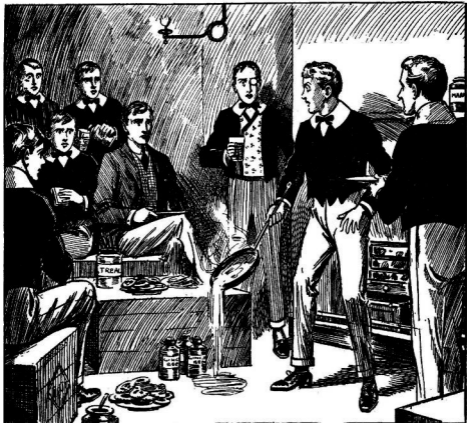
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Frayne stared at Talbot, and a strange look came into his eyes. His lips moved, but no word came from them. "What's the matter with you, Frayne?" demanded Wally D'Arcy. "Crash! The frying-pan dropped from Frayne's fingers, and crashed upon the floor!" (See Chapter 4.)

"That was necessary. I determined that I'd get into a decent school, where I should have a chance of making a decent name for myself—a chance for a decent future. But I couldn't come to St. Jim's or any other school and say, 'Here I am—the Toff, son of Captain Crow—boy crackman, wanted for half a dozen robberies—here I am!' What sort of a reception should I have got, Joe?"

Joe could not help grinning.

"You see, it had to be worked. I thought it all out. Hookey Walker helped me, too; and we laid the little plan. I've got a good yarn made up ready; and I made a good impression on the Head by what's happened to-night. Of course, we've been watching the place for days, and I had it all out and dried. But it's worked. I'm here to-night as a guest of the Head. He has swallowed me whole. The other master is keener; he is not quite satisfied; but he will be when he has made the investigations I know he's going to make. Everything is prepared, and we've spent weeks on it. I come here with a clear character and a chance. I'm going to work—to make a name for myself. Instead of a member of the swell mob, I'm going to be an ordinary decent chap, like the rest of them here. What do you think of that, Joe? Well, you say yourself you've wondered why I didn't chuck it and become something better. I've done it now. That put-up job was necessary to get me an entrance here. It's the last. Now all's plain sailing—unless you betray me, Joe, and drive me back to—you know what."

Joe shuddered.

"Not that, Toff. If you've given it up; 'Eeaven forbid that I should 'elp to send you back to it."

"I've given it up, Joe. Haven't you?"

"Good Lord knows I 'ave!"

"And you are straight?"

"Ask Master Tom—ask Master Wally—they'll tell you I'm as straight as a die!"

"Then why should I not do what you've done?"

There was a silence.

"You mean that, Toff?"

"Of course I mean it!"

"I—I never thought of that!" confessed Joe. "I—I never thought—I reckoned you was 'ere on the old lay."

"But now you know—"

"If you mean business, Toff—"

"Give me a chance. Simply hold your tongue—you nearly gave the show away at the feed in the box-room. If I'd been as big a fool as you, it would have been 'all U.P.' It gave me a start when I saw you, I can tell you. But I'm glad you're here—glad you've got a chance in life as well as myself, Joe. Only don't spoil my chance. If you remember anything I did for you in the old days, when you were a starving nipper—"

"I do remember, Toff."

"Then don't spoil my chance."

"You'll give me your 'and on it, Toff!"

The Toff held out his hand.

"I believe you," said Joe simply. "I won't give you away. But if you've took me in, Toff, it's the wickedest thing as you've ever done."

Perhaps the handsome boy, sitting up in the bed, winced

for a moment; but if so, the fog did not observe it in the dim light.

"I'll go," whispered Frayne. "I won't say a word—you're goin' to 'ave your chance, same as I've 'ad mine. Play the game, Toff, and you'll be all right. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Joe!"
The door closed silently behind the fog.
"What rotten luck—what rotten luck that he should be here!" Talbot murmured, as he settled down in the bed.
"And yet he's a good little chap, and I'm glad he's got a chance. It makes it more risky for me, but I'm glad all the same."

And Joe Frayne returned to the Third-Form dormitory as silently as he had left it, with his heart and his mind at ease, and he was soon sleeping soundly.

CHAPTER 12.

Talbot Explains.

TOM MERRY, who was generally one of the first down in the School House, came out into the quadrangle, bright and fresh in the early summer sunshine, before the rising-bell had ceased to clang. But he was not the first out; he caught sight of Talbot sauntering across the quad with his hands in his pockets, looking about him with keen interest.

The captain of the Shell joined him at once.
"Top of the morning, as Reilly says," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You're an early bird, Talbot!"

Talbot nodded and smiled.
"You seem to be the same," he said. "I say, what a ripping old place this is! You are lucky to be here!"

It was a remark to make a St. Jim's fellow feel cordial. All the fellows were proud of the old school; proud of its history and its traditions, attached to every grey old stone that had withstood the storms of long centuries.

"What-oh!" said Tom cheerily. "Let me show you round a bit. Lots of time before early chapel. So you like the place?"

"Yes, rather! Jolly old—what?"

"Lost in the giddy mists of antiquity!" said Tom, laughing.
"There was a school here in the reign of King John—you can see the records in the school library, if you like—old parchments in jolly bad Latin. The Third Form would get swamped in our days if they wrote the kind of Latin that was good enough for those old johnnies. But St. Jim's first began to flourish in the reign of Henry the Eighth—there was a big monastic establishment here, you see, that the school belonged to—and when old Harry wiped up the monasteries, the abbey lands went to some old johnny who founded the present Foundation—and a good thing too. It was the Abbey of St. James, and the school kept the name. Some of the buildings are earlier than that, though—the ruined tower is part Saxon and part Norman—and that tower that is still standing dates from Stephen's reign."

"You are well up in it," said Talbot.
"Yes; I've mugged up some of the school records," said Tom. "Manners goes in for them—he likes that kind of thing. This way to the ruined chapel," went on Tom, assuming the manner of a Cook's guide. "Here, gentlemen, you behold one of the earliest portions of this historic building—destroyed by cannon in the reign of Cromwell the First—I mean in the Parliamentary Wars. Some old Royalist johnny held St. Jim's against the Parliament in those days, and was wiped right up by the Ironsides. Lucky they didn't knock the School House over while they were about it. Part of the School House is modern—additions made in the reigns of Charles the Second, George the Second, Victoria, and Edward the Seventh. Yonder's the New House."

Talbot glanced at the New House.
"Quite modern!" said Tom Merry. "Put up the other day when the School House couldn't accommodate the chaps any longer."

"The other day?" asked Talbot. "It doesn't look so new as all that."

Tom Merry grinned.
"The other day, comparatively speaking," he said. "The date is on it—1780—only a little over a century and a quarter old. Not of much account—the School House is cock House, and always has been. But the chaps over there fancy themselves—Figgins or Kerr or Wynn would tell you that the New House is cock House, which is, of course—"

"Rot!" suggested Talbot.
"That's it—rot!" agreed Tom Merry. "We hold the top record in cricket, footer, running, jumping, swimming, everything—only Figgins labours under a delusion that the New House holds it. If you come to St. Jim's, Talbot—I mean when you come—you've simply got to come into the School House."

"You're very kind to want me there," said Talbot.

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"Oh, we know you're the right sort—you'd be wasted in the New House. Besides, we've got the best Housemaster—Ralston is a brick. Ratcliff is a beast—ahem—I mean nobody likes Ratcliff, the New Housemaster. Besides, we have twice as many fellows in the School House, and always outvote the other House on school questions. The captain of St. Jim's is always a School House chap. So is the Head himself for that matter—the Head's house is only an addition to the School House—built in the reign of Charles the Second—electric light put in later—ahem!"

"Yes, I suppose so!" laughed Talbot.
"Now come and have a look at the playing-fields. Here's Little Side—that's the junior ground. Over there, Big Side, where the seniors amuse their little selves. Are you a cricketer by the way?"

"You bet!"
"We'll give you a chance to show how you shape, then, as soon as you belong to us," said Tom Merry. "We play a lot of cricket here, and we're very keen about the House matches, senior and junior. Of course, we think more of the junior matches than the senior games—we play 'em ourselves, you see, and we only look on at the senior games. But it's worth while seeing Kiddare at the wickets, I can tell you—or Monteth of the New House bowling. Here's the junior pavilion."

Talbot paused outside the pavilion and gazed on the scene before him.

The wide stretch of playing-fields—the ancient buildings—the quadrangle shaded by the elms that had been standing for long centuries—a glimpse of the river winding in the distance—it made a wonderful picture.

Unconsciously, as if from habit, Talbot drew a russet-leather cigarette-case from his pocket, selected a cigarette, and lighted it, and blew out little clouds of smoke as he gazed on the scene.

Tom Merry started a little, as he observed him.
Smoking was forbidden at St. Jim's, but more serious than that was the fact that it was regarded as "bad form." If Talbot had been a St. Jim's fellow, Tom Merry would have told him so at once; but he felt that he had no right to remark upon the manners and customs of one who was, after all, the Head's guest.

The involuntary expression on his face, however, caught Talbot's eye. Few things escaped that keen, wary glance.

Talbot removed the cigarette from his lips.
"You don't smoke?" he asked.

"No," said Tom, rather shortly.
"It's a bad habit!" said Talbot, throwing the cigarette away. "Is it considered bad form here?"

"Yes."
"Then the sooner I drop it the better."
"Oh, I didn't mean—" stammered Tom, a little taken aback.

Talbot laughed.
"I'm coming to St. Jim's, if I can manage it," he said. "The sooner I got into the way of things the better. I've roughed it a good deal at times, and picked up some ways I'd better learn to drop. I'd be glad of any tips you could give me."

"This was said so frankly that Tom's heart quite warmed towards him.

"That's all right," he said. "We don't smoke here—it's bad for the wind, for one thing, and you need all your wind in footer or cricket. And we look on it as bad form. But, of course, until you belong to us, you can do as you like."

"Not at all," said Talbot. "Can't begin too soon."
He turned the contents out of his cigarette-case and ground them under his boot. It was an unmistakable evidence of good faith.

"That settles it," he remarked, returning the empty case to his pocket.

"Good for you!" said Tom.
They strolled round the buildings, Tom Merry pointing out the objects of interest, and he found Talbot a very keen and attentive listener. The bell rang for early chapel.

"Hallo, I must cut off!" said Tom.
"Can I come?" asked Talbot diffidently.
"Yes, rather, if you like."

"I should like to."
"Right—ho, then!" The Head will be glad to see you there. He always takes early service himself."

And Talbot went in with Tom Merry and the rest of the Shell. After the service he quitted the juniors, as he was to breakfast in the Head's house. Tom Merry went into the School House to breakfast with his chums.

"Been showing the kid round?" asked Manners.
"Yes. He's as keen about the place as if he'd been here half a dozen terms," said Tom. "I hope he'll come into the Shell."

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as

be joined them. "I hope he'll come, too. I quite approve of that chap. But he had better come into the Fourth."

"By the way, what did young Frayne mean by calling him the Toff?" asked Lowther. "Does he know Talbot?"

"Blessed if I know."

"Yas, that's watah cawious—in fact, vewy cawious indeed," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It struck me when I was thinkin' it o'ar last night. Vewy cawious that young Frayne should call him by the same nickname as those wotabhs!"

"What rotters!" asked Tom, looking at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Those wotabhs who tried to rob me in the lane," explained Arthur Augustus. "You wemembarh I told you that Talbot went for them like a weal horse. They seemed to know him by sight, and one of them called him 'the Toff.'"

The Terrible Three looked rather oddly at one another. "That is a bit curious," said Tom. "I'm not surprised at his having a nickname like that. He looks the part. But it's queer that Frayne and those footpads should know him. Of course, it's nothing against him."

"Oh, of course not," said Manners and Lowther at once.

"Watah not," said Arthur Augustus.

But they could not help thinking it a little odd. During brekker Tom Merry thought about it a little, and he decided to speak to Talbot about it. He felt so friendly towards the new fellow that he wanted to have that odd circumstance explained. It worried him a little, and he had no doubt that a word or two from Talbot would clear it up. After breakfast the chums of the School House found Talbot in the quadrangle, and Tom plunged into the subject at once in his open way.

"It seems that you've got a nickname!" he began. "They call you the Toff?"

A steely look came into Talbot's eyes for a moment. But he laughed.

"Yes, I have been called that," he said.

"You'll excuse my speaking," said Tom, "but there's a little thing that puzzles us. Young Frayne called you by that name."

"Yes."

"And those rascals who bothered Gussy yesterday did the same."

Talbot nodded.

"I believe they did," he replied. "It's an old saying that more people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows. I'd never seen them before, but I suppose they had seen me somewhere—perhaps in Angel Alley."

"You know Angel Alley?" exclaimed Tom.

"Certainly. I did some slumming in London once, and came upon that salubrious spot. I made the acquaintance of young Frayne there—in fact, I did him some little service. Probably those roughs who tackled D'Arcy yesterday came from the same quarter, and they may have seen me while I was there. I was surprised to see young Frayne—I mean, I was surprised when I found out who he was. I didn't know him at first. It's rather a far cry from Angel Alley to St. Jim's."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Tom. "It's rather a change of surroundings for Joe. But he's a splendid little chap."

"Yes, I believe he is. He was surprised to see me here. I gather, I was surprised when I found out who he was. He came to see me in my room last night," Talbot explained, with an air of great frankness, "and we had a little talk."

Talbot's frank explanation quite satisfied the juniors. They had not had any doubts of him—once a feeling that they would like that very odd circumstance explained. Talbot had explained it. And that his explanation did not tally with the story he had related to the Head they could not know, for they knew nothing of what had passed between the Toff and the Head of St. Jim's, and were not likely to know anything. Tom Merry was quite satisfied, and he would not admit to himself that he had felt anything like a doubt of Talbot's bona-fides; and yet, thinking of it afterwards, he realised that his mentioning the matter to Talbot at all implied some lingering kind of a doubt, and he wondered, in a rather worried way, whether it appeared to Talbot himself in that light. And that made him more than ever cordial and friendly towards the new chum

CHAPTER 13. Talbot of the Shell.

MR. RAILTON was absent from the school that morning.

Only Talbot and the Head knew that he had gone to Luxford, and only the Head, as he thought, knew that he was there to inquire into the bona-fides of the

boy who had so strangely come to St. Jim's. But as a matter of fact, Talbot knew. He waited the result with equanimity.

Talbot explored St. Jim's and the vicinity, and went on the river, while the fellows were in the Form-room that morning. He seemed to take an inexhaustible interest in the old school. He dropped in at the school tuckshop, and quite won Dame Taggles' heart by his keen appreciation of her pastry. He chatted with Taggles, the porter, in his lodge, and succeeded even in making friends with that crusty old gentleman. He encountered Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, in the quadrangle, and "capped" him very respectfully, and picked up a book the Housemaster had dropped, and ran to restore it to him, so that even Mr. Ratcliff, who detested boys of all sorts and conditions, was pleased to give him an approving glance. Indeed, Talbot, with his handsome face, pleasant manners, and winning smile, made friends wherever he went—with a single exception. Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form, had not forgiven or forgotten. Talbot's refusal to complain of the jape played on him in the dark passage had robbed Mr. Selby of the pleasure of seeing Tom Merry & Co. cased by the Head, and Mr. Selby could not forget that. He chose to characterise Talbot's conduct, in his own mind, as impertinence, and he had taken a dislike to the boy—and Mr. Selby's dislikes were like the laws of the Medes and Persians, they never changed. So when Talbot met him in one of the passages and saluted him civilly, the Third Form-master replied only with a glare, and Talbot realised that there was one person at St. Jim's, at least, with whom he would never get on good terms. Fortunately, he was not likely to have much to do with Mr. Selby if he came to St. Jim's to stay.

When Mr. Railton returned to the school, he went at once to the Head's study, where Dr. Holmes was awaiting him a little anxiously.

"Well?" asked the Head.

"Everything is as Talbot stated at Luxford, sir," said the Housemaster. "I have seen Mr. Bowker. He did not think much of Talbot's uncle, but he has a very high opinion of the boy—indeed, Talbot seems to have made many friends there. He played cricket with the local team while he was staying there, and they made him their captain. And Mr. Bowker told me that Talbot had rescued his little boy from a pond he had fallen into, at some risk to himself."

"He is certainly a courageous lad," said the Head. "It was, of course, necessary to make these inquiries; but I was quite certain that nothing would be learned to his disadvantage. He is a very fine lad."

The Housemaster nodded assent.

"I am glad you agree with me, Mr. Railton. And now about the lad's ambition. You will agree that it is a very laudable desire on his part to wish to go to a good school and finish his education."

"Undoubtedly."

"There appears to be nothing against his admission to this school. It would be very much against my conscience to abandon the lad, especially after his service to me last night," said the Head. "I do not like the idea of letting a lad of his age go into the world alone and unfriended if it can be helped. I acknowledge that it is a serious matter to assume the charge of him. But—"

"He seems to be a clever lad," said the Housemaster. "It is quite possible that he might gain one of the scholarships, and so become independent."

"I have been thinking of that. The scholarships were founded especially for the benefit of poor scholars, and there could not be a more deserving case."

"Very true."

"I have also, as headmaster, the disposal of a certain sum for the assistance of poor scholars, and I think I should be justified in helping Talbot from this fund. I have no doubt that the governors would give their consent. Will you call him in, Mr. Railton?"

Talbot was in the quadrangle, chatting with Frayne of the Third, in sight of the Head's window. Mr. Railton beckoned to him from the open window.

The boy entered the study in a couple of minutes.

"Mr. Railton has been to Luxford," said the Head. "He has heard an excellent report of you there, Talbot. Of course, you understand that this does not imply that there was any doubt of your story in any way whatever."

"Thank you, sir!"

"And now, about your desire to enter this school," said the Head kindly. "You have thought about it, and are quite sure that that is your desire?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I see no reason, and Mr. Railton sees no reason, why you should not become a pupil here," said the Head.

Talbot's face lighted up.

"You are very, very kind, sir."

"In the matter of the fees, that can be arranged, I think—"

"Pardon me, sir," said Talbot respectfully but firmly. "I do not wish to enter the school on different terms from the other fellows. I am sure that I can raise enough money by selling my things to pay the fees for a year at least, and by that time I hope to hear from my uncle again."

"My dear boy—"

"Don't think I am ungrateful for your kindness, sir. But I want to be independent. If any favours are done me in that way, I shall feel that I have come here like a beggar." The look of distress that came over the handsome face moved the Head deeply. "You will forgive me, sir, but I—I couldn't accept charity from anyone. If you allow me to come to the school, that will be favour enough, and I shall always be grateful, and I hope I shall prove myself deserving of your kindness. But let me pay my way."

The two masters exchanged glances. It was certainly a very right spirit in the lad, and it impressed them favourably.

"But, my dear boy," said the Head, "there is a fund left by the founder for this very purpose—to assist poor scholars—and upon my recommendation the board of governors will certainly allow—"

Talbot shook his head.

"I—I would rather not, sir, if you don't mind."

"But your little capital, whatever the amount, could then be preserved, to help you to a start in life when you leave St. Jim's."

"Oh, no, sir! Let me pay my fees in the ordinary way, if I have enough money—and I am sure I have. I have a good many valuable things; and indeed, my uncle when he gave them to me told me that they would help me in the future, by their money value, if anything should go wrong with his affairs. It was a kind of provision for me. If you will let me send for my things and put them into the hands of someone who understands their value, I think they will raise quite a large sum."

"I will not refuse your wish," said the Head slowly. "It is a very proper spirit—very proper indeed. It shall be as you wish. Go to Luxford this afternoon, then, and bring your things here. First, however, Mr. Railton will examine you and assign you to your Form and study."

"Thank you, sir!"

Talbot followed Mr. Railton from the room.

His face was very bright now, and he seemed to be walking on air. There was no doubt that the certainty of becoming a St. Jim's fellow delighted him. He followed the Housemaster into his study. He passed the Terrible Three in the passage, and found time for a word with them.

"It's all right," he said.

"You're coming?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"Good egg! Mind you get into the Shell."

Talbot nodded and smiled and went into the Housemaster's study. He was there for half an hour, and when he came out he found the Terrible Three waiting for him.

"Well!" said the trio together.

Talbot's face beamed.

"Mr. Railton says I'm to be in the Shell—"

"Hurrah!"

"And Study No. 8 in the School House."

"That's Gore's study," said Tom Merry. "But it's next to ours. Come along, my pippin, and we'll show you your quarters."

And Tom Merry and Lowther took an arm each of the new fellow and marched him up the stairs, and Manners followed, whistling a march. The welcome the new fellow received into his Form and House was heartiness itself.

Tom Merry thumped on Gore's door and opened it. There was a sound of voices in dispute in the study. George Gore shared it with Skimpole, and they did not thrive together.

"You silly chump—"

"My dear Gore—"

"I've a jolly good mind to bump your silly head against the wall!"

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "More trouble in the family!"

Skimpole blinked at the new-comers through his big spectacles.

"Gore is very unreasonable," he said. "I have used his impot paper to write a chapter of my book—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My book, which will make a great sensation when it is finished," said Skimpole, who was a very wise youth and given to deeply learned pursuits. "Gore can easily obtain a further supply of impot paper by asking for it. The trouble of going downstairs is really not worth this display of temper on Gore's part."

"I've got lines to do, you thumping idiot!" said Gore.

"My dear Gore—"

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FERRERS LOCKE, DETECTIVE,

is the principal character in one of the most popular stories contained in

CHUCKLES. 14

"More lines!" asked Tom. Gore always seemed to be getting lines.

"Yes. That beast Selby!" growled Gore. "I dropped the end of my bat on his foot, and he persisted to Linton that I did it on purpose, and Linton's given me a hundred Virgil. I explained that it was an accident, but he wouldn't believe me."

"Was it?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Well, yes, it was. I only meant the bat to clump on the floor and startle him; but he had to move his silly foot, and get it on his favourite corn. You should have seen him hop, though," said Gore, grinning at the recollection. "Hallo! Who's this chap?"

"Your new study-mate," said Tom.

"Oh, rats!" said Gore ungraciously. "I don't want a new study-mate. Skimpole's enough to turn a fellow's hair grey. I thought we were going to have this study to ourselves when Vavasour left."

"Sorry!" said Talbot. "Mr. Railton has put me in here. I hope I shan't be much trouble to you. I'll try not to be."

"Well," said Gore, mollified, "if Railton's put you here, I suppose you're bound to come. You can treat in."

Talbot smiled and came in. Skimpole blinked at him.

"I am very glad you are coming here, Talbot," he said, in his solemn way. "Perhaps you will keep Gore in order. He is a very brutal person."

"Oh, we shall get on all right!" said Talbot.

"You will find it difficult to get on with Gore," said Skimpole, with a sigh. "Vavasour used to thrash him, and he was much better then."

"I'd like to see that new kid trying to thrash me," said Gore tranquilly. The bully of the Shell was always ready to take offence and generally looking for trouble. "Do you think you could do it, Talbot?"

The Terrible Three looked uneasy. They did not want their new friend's arrival to be marked by a fight with the bully of the Form. But Talbot only laughed good-naturedly.

"Don't let's think about anything of the sort," he suggested. "Let's try to live peacefully in the study. I don't want to row."

Even Gore could not quarrel with that. He nodded surlily, and walked out of the study in quest of a new supply of impot paper. And Talbot, after looking round his new quarters, walked away with the Terrible Three. Talbot certainly had the gift of making friends, and it was a surprise to all the Shell when he took possession of his new quarters that day without a row with Gore to begin with. And the Terrible Three were surprised and relieved, too, when Gore was heard to declare in the junior common-room that evening that the new fellow was a jolly decent chap.

It's giddy magic, Tom Merry said to Talbot, laughing.

"You're about the only chap who's ever got on with Gore, and you seem to do it quite easily. If you can make friends with Gore, depend upon it you'll never have an enemy in the school at all."

And it certainly looked like it. Talbot had not been a day at St. Jim's, but he was well upon the way to becoming one of the most popular fellows there.

CHAPTER 14.

Kid Attentions.

DURING the next few days Talbot's popularity increased rather than diminished.

His Form-fellows liked him, and Figgins & Co. of the New House, having made his acquaintance, pronounced him a good sort.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy declared that he was one of the best, and was extremely friendly towards him.

He was still on friendly terms with Gore of the Shell, and at the same time his presence in Study No. 8 kept the peace between Gore and Skimpole, and the latter junior found the study much more agreeable with Talbot there.

Frayne of the Third for some time paid special attention to Talbot, perhaps with a lingering doubt of his good intentions.

But the new Shell fellow succeeded in reassuring the waif of the Third.

He was very kind to Frayne when they met, but he did not meet him oftener than could be helped. And Frayne never spoke of him to the other fags. The fact that they had met before Talbot came to St. Jim's was a fact that Talbot wished to have forgotten. The less that was said about their previous acquaintance the better the Toff liked it. But he had no reason to fear Frayne's discretion. Once convinced of the Toff's good faith, nothing would have induced the loyal little fag to betray him.

Talbot's property had been brought over from the hotel at Luxford. Both the Head and Mr. Railton were surprised at the number of articles of value he possessed. His uncle, if

not kind to him, had apparently been very generous. After another conversation with the new boy on the subject, and finding him determined, the Head allowed the sale to be made, as Talbot desired, and more than sufficient was realised to pay Talbot's expenses at the school for a year, with an ample allowance over. His circumstances, however, were known only to the Head, the Housemaster, and himself. To the rest of the fellows he was simply an ordinary new boy.

There was only one person in the school who did not wish him well, and that was Mr. Selby.

That gentleman never forgot or forgave. The fact that Talbot had "stood up to him" was a thing Mr. Selby could not forget.

As Talbot was not in his Form, Mr. Selby need not have come into contact with him at all; but his dislike of the new boy seemed to increase as he saw that he was looked upon with favour by the Head and the School House master.

Talbot, naturally, shared the sentiments of the juniors towards Mr. Selby. He had been four or five days at St. Jim's when the master of the Third found an opportunity of "dropping" on him. The Shell fellows had come out of the Form-room after morning lessons, and Talbot and the Terrible Three and Kangaroo and one or two others leaped-frogged their way down the passage in the exuberance of their youthful spirits.

Mr. Selby came round a corner unexpectedly—Monty Lowther declared afterwards that he had heard the noise, and was sneaking round to catch the delinquents—and Talbot, who was just clearing Tom Merry's bent back, bumped right into him.

"Oh, oh! Ah!" gasped Mr. Selby.

He sat down suddenly on the floor.

The leap-frog ceased as if by magic. It was not a light matter to frog a Form-master, even by accident, especially so irascible a Form-master as Mr. Selby.

"I'm sorry, sir!" exclaimed Talbot. "I didn't hear you coming."

Mr. Selby staggered up painfully, rejecting angrily the helping hand of the Shell fellow.

"It is false!" he exclaimed furiously. "You have done this intentionally!"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Silence, Merry! I repeat, Talbot, that you have done this on purpose! It is of a piece with your previous conduct."

"What previous conduct, sir?" asked Talbot quietly.

"Don't answer with me!" snapped Mr. Selby, who would have found it difficult to answer that question frankly. "You are a most impertinent boy—an insolent young rascal, sir—as might be expected of a boy coming from goodness knows where, without antecedents and without connections."

Talbot bit his lips, and the other fellows glared. Form-master or not, Mr. Selby had no right to taunt the new boy in that manner.

"You've no right to say that, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry boldly.

"What, Merry! You dare—"

"Yes, I do! And I'll repeat what I've said before the Head too!"

Mr. Selby glared at him, and walked away. Perhaps he realised that he had said a little too much—more than he would care to have repeated to the Head, who was known to have a very high opinion of Talbot.

"The rotter!" said Kangaroo, with a deep breath. "The beast!"

"The mean boulder!" growled Manners. "Don't mind him, Talbot. He's got his knife into you because you wouldn't play his game the other night by complaining of us."

Talbot nodded.

"It's all right. I don't mind him," he said.

But the Terrible Three minded. At tea in the study that evening Tom Merry declared war on Mr. Selby—in strict private, of course.

"It's too thick!" he said. "He snuck up young Frayn's birthdays feed for nothing—likened Wally—bothered us a hound—and now he's insulted Talbot, than whom there isn't a more decent fellow breathing!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners and Lowther sympathetically.

"Selby's got to be taught manners!"

"And Lowther?" asked the owner of that name.

"Oh, don't be funny! We won't bump him. As a matter of fact, it was rather lucky for us that we bumped Talbot by mistake that night. We might have been sacked."

"I thought of that afterwards," remarked Manners.

"He's gone out now," added Tom. "Follow your leader!"

And Tom Merry, keeping a wary eye open, led the way to Mr. Selby's study. They had seen the Third Form-master cross the quadrangle towards the gates, and so felt secure from interruption in his quarters. But as they paused outside the door there was a sound of a movement within.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Somebody's in the room," he murmured.

"But Selby's gone out," said Lowther.

"Somebody else japing him, perhaps," whispered Manners.

"Look through the keyhole."

"Yes, very likely."

Tom Merry looked.

"Talbot," he said.

And he opened the door.

Talbot was in the Third Form-master's room. He swung round with a start as the door opened.

"All serene," grinned Tom Merry. "Only us—innocent and harmless us! What are you up to?"

"What's the jape!" asked Lowther.

Talbot laughed.

"I—I thought I'd pay him a visit," he remarked. "I was thinking of filling his inkpot with glue."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry admiringly. "You're picking up our manners and customs wonderfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And a little treacle in his favourite slippers," suggested Lowther.

"Hear, hear!"

"What about mucking up his blessed collection!"

The Terrible Three considered. Mr. Selby was the owner of a very expensive and valuable numismatic collection. Numismatics was his hobby, and he had spent the leisure hours of twenty years or more on his collection of coins. He had a set of gold pieces of ancient Roman times that was almost unique, and had cost him more money than he could well afford, though his salary was a liberal one. But Mr. Selby had chosen his hobby wisely. The value of his collection increased with the years, and he generally secured his specimens at a bargain price whenever opportunity offered. The collection reposed in his study in a large case with a glass top, and was proudly shown to visitors, and envious numismatics often came to see it.

"Rather a joke to tumble the whole blessed lot out, and put the giddy labels in the fire," Monty Lowther suggested.

"One way of giving him lines—what!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Better not muddle with valuables," he said. "If any of them got lost there would be a row. Some of those coins are worth twenty pounds each."

"A valuable lot to be left in a case with a glass top," Talbot remarked.

"It's locked," said Manners, examining the case. "We couldn't get at them, anyway."

"Easy enough to open it," said Talbot, looking at the lock. "That's a fool lock. Anybody could pick it with a punkie."

"Blessed if I could!" said Tom Merry. "But it would be easy enough to open it with a chisel. The lock wouldn't hold it long; it's not strong. But that would be a bit too thick. Stick to his slippers."

"Easy enough to stick to them," grinned Lowther, as he poured treacle into the Third Form-master's slippers, having brought a pot for the purpose.

"Now some in the seat of the armchair."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now let's get out. We shall have to prove a jolly strong alibi after this."

And the Shell fellows departed, chuckling.

CHAPTER 15.

The Missing Coins.

MR. SELBY was in a decidedly bad temper with the Third Form at preparation that evening. Wally and Jameson and Frayn especially came in for the rough edge of his tongue; and Mr. Selby's tongue could be very bitter.

When prep was over and the lads were left to themselves, there was much gritting of teeth and gloaming of eyes. Wally punched an imaginary countenance in the air, and Joe Frayn made passes with a ruler expressive of what he would like to do with his respected Form-master.

"Worse than ever!" growled Jameson. "The beast has dyspepsia, you know; never takes enough exercise, except in whacking us."

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of

Tom Merry & Co. by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"When I'm grown up," said Wally ferociously, "I'm coming back to St. Jim's specially to see Selby. I'm going to take him by the scruff of his neck and give him a hiding!"

"He makes me think of 'Fox's Book of Martyrs'!" said Curly Gibson, with a sigh. "There's a lot of things in that book that I should like to do to Selby!"

And the fags chuckled at the idea.

The chuckle stopped short as Mr. Selby strode into the Form-room with a flaming face, a pair of slippers in one hand, from which treacle was dripping.

He held the slippers up to view.

"Which of you did this?" he demanded.

There was silence. Nobody there had done it, though they were pleased enough to see that it had been done. They only hoped that Mr. Selby had put his feet into the slippers before discovering the treacle there.

"Will you answer me?"

No reply.

"Very well!" said Mr. Selby, in a choking voice. "If the rascals—I repeat, the rascals—who have perpetrated this outrage do not immediately confess, I shall cane the whole Form!"

There was a buzz in the Third. If the delinquent had been there he would probably have owned up. As it was, there were "no takers," so to speak.

Mr. Selby selected a cane from his desk.

"Well!" he said.

There was a grim silence.

"You refuse to confess? Then I shall conclude that the whole Form was concerned in this. You first, D'Arcy minor!" And Mr. Selby wished the cane.

Wally advanced reluctantly to take the caning. He took it and retired squirming. Mr. Selby was not an athlete, and he was not in good form, but his right arm that evening seemed to be wonderfully sinewy. Every member of the Third Form passed before him in turn and received a caning.

Then Mr. Selby retired, taking his treacle slippers with him, and feeling somewhat soled. But he left the Third Form in an almost homicidal frame of mind.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" groaned Wally, rubbing his smarting palms. "The awful, awful beast! The chap who treacled his beastly slippers ought to have owned up! Yow-ow!"

"Who was it?" groaned Frayne.

But nobody was found to admit it. It was clear that the delinquent was not in the Third Form at all. That discovery intensified the resentment of the fags. They had been punished on suspicion only, and punished severely.

For the rest of that evening there was only one topic in the Third Form at St. Jim's—schemes of vengeance upon their unjust master. A dozen impracticable schemes were mooted and abandoned; and when the fags went to bed at nine o'clock, they were no nearer to their desire to "get their own back" on the obnoxious Selby.

They were still thinking of their wrongs when they turned out at the clang of the rising-bell the next morning.

As the Third Form came downstairs, Kildere of the Sixth met them, with a stern look.

"All of you go to Mr. Selby's study!" he rapped out.

Wally gave a snort.

"What's the row now?" he demanded. "I think Selby's been down on us enough!"

"Some of you young sweeps have been playing tricks in his study," said the captain of St. Jim's. "What have you done with his coins?"

"His what?"

"His coins!"

"I haven't done anything with them," said Wally, in wonder. "Blessed if I know what you're talking about, Kildere!"

Kildere looked at him keenly.

"Well, some of you know," he said. "You're to go to his study at once!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Wally resignedly. "I suppose we shall get it hot again, though we haven't done anything!"

And the School House portins of the Third Form trooped off to their Form-master's study.

Mr. Railton was there with the Third Form-master. He was looking very stern, and Mr. Selby was white with rage.

The fags crowded in, and their glances turned at once towards the numismatic case. The lid of the case had been wrenched open, and almost all the coins had been taken out.

A sheet of cardboard lay in their place. On the card was scrawled roughly in Roman letters with a brush:

"FIND THEM IF YOU CAN! YAH!"

Wally whistled softly. It was evident that some unknown person had stolen into Mr. Selby's study overnight, abstracted the collection of coins, and hidden them, and left that defiant

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notice for the Form-master to find in the morning. The daubed letters offered no clue whatever to the writer.

Mr. Selby's eyes burned as he turned them on the crowd of palpitating fags.

"You see what has been done!" he said. "Where are my coins? If they are not restored to me immediately, you will be accused of theft!"

"Patience, Mr. Selby," said the Housemaster, quietly but very firmly. "There is no question of theft here. Your collection has been taken away and hidden—apparently for a practical joke; and there is as yet no proof that it was done by boys of your own Form."

"I am certain of it. Last night I had to cane the whole Form for a trick played upon me in this room—"

"And we hadn't done it!" burst out Wally angrily. "Mr. Railton, I appeal to you! Nobody in the Third knows who put the treacle into Mr. Selby's slippers!"

"I have also found glue in my inkpot," said Mr. Selby, his voice shaking with rage. "Hold your tongue, D'Arcy minor! It is useless to tell falsehoods!"

"I'm not telling falsehoods!" said Wally fiercely. "And we've a right to appeal to our Housemaster against injustice!"

"Injustice! Take care!"

"One moment!" said Mr. Railton. "What do you Shell boys want here?"

The Terrible Three and Talbot had appeared in the open doorway.

"We—we've got something to say, sir," stammered Tom Merry.

"Do you know who has done that?" asked Mr. Railton, pointing to the wrenched-open case.

The four juniors stared at it.

"Oh, no, sir! We—we thought—"

"You thought what?"

"Ahem! We—we were under a—a—a misapprehension, sir."

"Explain why you came here, Merry, instantly!"

"Ahem! We—we thought the Third had been sent for because of the treacle in Mr. Selby's slippers," stammered Tom. "so we—we came to own up!"

"Then it was you—you!" shouted Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

"And I put the glue in the inkpot, sir," said Talbot. "I was here with the others!"

"You—you dare—"

"It appears, then, Mr. Selby," said the Housemaster, in a somewhat ominous tone, "that you caned the whole of the Third Form for an offence of which they had not been guilty, and upon suspicion merely!"

Mr. Selby stammered. He realised that he had been very hasty.

"It—it appears so," he said awkwardly. "I—I am sorry to say it appears so. However—"

It was certainly very unfortunate. Under the circumstances, if your collection of coins has been hidden by a boy in the Third Form, I suggest that the boy shall be pardoned, if he will restore the coins immediately!"

"Mr. Railton! He should be severely punished—"

"The punishment has already been inflicted, without just cause," said the Housemaster drily. "I am willing to leave the matter to the Head's decision if you wish."

"I—I will take your advice. Let him be pardoned, if the collection is restored to me undamaged!"

"Very well! Now, my boys," said Mr. Railton, "you hear! Someone has taken the coins and concealed them somewhere. Whoever has done it will be forgiven, if the coins are brought back at once!"

There was a pause.

"I don't know anything about them, sir," said Wally.

"Same here," said Curly.

"Nor I don't, sir," said Frayne.

"I was fast asleep all last night, sir," said Hobbs.

And the fags all answered to the same effect. Mr. Railton looked at them searchingly, while the Third Form-master bit his lips with anger.

"Come, come!" said Mr. Railton. "Someone has taken them, and I am convinced that it was only a practical joke. Indeed, that absurd and impertinent message left there in the case proves as much! Please confess, whoever has done it!"

Silence.

Mr. Railton thought he understood that silence. Whoever had played the trick was afraid to own up, lest he should be marked out for future vengeance by the Form-master.

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, after a pause. "I will give you time. I expect Mr. Selby's coins to be replaced intact before morning lessons commence. If this is not done, I shall have to place the matter before the Head. I may point out to you that the collection is more valuable than you may

have supposed; it is worth more than five hundred pounds. Now go!

The fags fled out of the study. At breakfast that morning Mr. Selby was white and furious, with difficulty suppressing his fury. His hobby was his one relaxation, and he valued his collection far higher than its monetary value, though that was very considerable. That the collection had been swept off for a "jape" he did not doubt, but he had fears that when the "japer" realised the value of the coins, he might think twice about letting them be discovered.

If they could be concealed in safety for a considerable time, it would then be easy for a thief to dispose of them one at a time; and there were a thousand nooks and crannies about the old, rambling buildings where such small objects could be concealed.

CHAPTER 16. Not to be Found!

"SERVE him right!" That was the verdict of all the Lower School when the news of Mr. Selby's loss spread through St. Jim's.

The general belief was that some fag in the Third had played the trick, and meant to keep Mr. Selby on tenterhooks by keeping the coins hidden for an indefinite time.

That any St. Jim's chap intended to steal them was not thought for a moment. It was feared by Mr. Selby, but by no one else. It was a jape, and it served old Selby right. That was the unanimous verdict.

It was admitted that Mr. Selby had cased the whole Form unjustly the evening before. It was not surprising, therefore, that they had "got their own back" in that unexpected manner. The tyrant of the Third had been hit in the tenderest place by the abstraction and concealment of his numismatic collection.

"And I jolly well hope they won't be found!" said Jack Blake.

"Yess, watsah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It weally serves the old boundah right!"

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Loewther. "We've got three hundred lines each for tracing his slippers. I hope it'll be three hundred years before he finds his giddy coins!"

"Rather rough on him to lose such a valuable collection, though," said Talbot thoughtfully. "Surely the chap will own up!"

"I fancy not," said Tom Merry. "If it were anybody but Selby, yes. But they know him too well!"

"But they've promised a free pardon—"

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"That's all very well; but they know that Selby would keep his eye on the chap, all the same, if he owned up. He couldn't punish him for this, after what Railton said; but he would watch for chances afterwards, and make him smart for something else—the way he does his prep, or the way he does his back hair!"

"Yess, watsah! There's no trustin' Selby's sense of honah."

"I suppose it was some Third Form kid," Kangaroo remarked.

"Most likely."

"I don't know," said Tom. "Nearly every fellow in the House dislikes Selby. It might have been a Shell chap, for all we know. As a matter of fact, I heard somebody moving in the dorm, last night, when I woke up for a minute. Wasn't any of you chaps, I suppose?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"But if the chap nevah owns up, Selby will nevah get his collection back," said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, he's only got himself to thank. Why don't he play the game?"

"Yess, that's vewy true."

"But the things are bound to turn up, sooner or later," observed Talbot. "They must be hidden about the school somewhere, and it's only a matter of time."

"Yes, I suppose so. Selby's only got to be patient."

"He doesn't look very patient!" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was the amount of sympathy that Mr. Selby received; and it was probably as much as he deserved.

The culprit did not come forward. The matter was taken before the Head; and all the School House realised that it was serious. The New House fellows were outside the possi-

bility of suspicion; but after morning lessons, all the School House boys, from the head of the Sixth to the youngest fag, were collected in Big Hall. There they were questioned by the Head.

Mr. Selby persisted in his belief that the Third Form, or some of them, were guilty; and he would willingly have cased the whole Form. But the matter was in juster hands now; and the Head would certainly allow nothing of the kind. Every boy in the School House was asked individually if he knew anything about the matter; and every boy replied in the negative. That someone had lied was certain; and fellows who were known to be indifferent to the truth, like Levison and Mellich and Crooks, found themselves subjected to a very searching scrutiny. But nothing came of the examination; and the assembly was dismissed.

That day Mr. Selby bore a very strong resemblance to a caged wild animal. The Third Form felt the full force of his acid temper. But his severity was more likely to make the fags keep the secret, if they had one, than to reveal it. Mr. Selby almost believed by this time that his collection had been stolen, though everybody else was convinced that it had simply been hidden, and would turn up in the course of time. Perhaps there was one who doubted—Frayne of the Third. During afternoon lessons Frayne was sunk in a deep and troubled reverie, from which even Mr. Selby's bitter tongue and cane could not effectually arouse him.

After lessons, Frayne hurried away by himself, avoiding his comrades. Tom Merry & Co. had gone down to cricket practice, taking Talbot with them. Frayne seemed to feel an unaccustomed interest in Shell cricket, for he stood and watched Tom Merry & Co. till they had finished. When they adjourned to the tuckshop for refreshment in the shape of ginger-beer, Frayne followed them, and waited outside. When they came out, he caught Talbot by the sleeve.

"I want to speak to you," he muttered.

Talbot looked down at the fag with a good-natured smile.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll come after you fellows."

"Tea in the study in ten minutes," said Tom Merry.

"All serene."

Talbot paused under the elms with Frayne. The wail of the Third was searching his face with eyes that seemed to burn.

"Well, what is it, kid?" asked Talbot. "Do you want help with your Latin?"

"No. Toff, tell me—you got to own up—was it you?"

Talbot looked at him in amazement.

"Was what me?" he asked. "I don't understand."

Frayne clenched his hands.

"You know wot I mean, Toff."

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Talbot. "If you'll explain what you mean, I may understand. Buck up! I'm going to tea with Tom Merry."

"About Selby's coins. They was worth five 'undred pound," said Frayne. "Do you know anythin' about them?"

"Oh, is that it?"

"Yes, that's it," said Frayne, his lips twitching convulsively. "You know wot I thought when you came 'ere—that you was on the old lay. Was it you, Toff? Have you stolen that five 'undred quid? If you ave—"

Talbot's face became very grave.

"Now, look here, Joe," he said quietly. "I've told you once that I'm not here on the old lay. I'm going straight. I don't want any more of this. Mr. Selby's collection has been hidden by somebody, and I suppose it will turn up in time. It's bound to. I don't know anything about it. Does that satisfy you?"

Joe Frayne eyed him dubiously.

"But wot if it don't turn up?" he said.

"I think it will; but, anyway, it's no business of mine."

"And—you don't know nothin'?"

"What should I know?"

Frayne gave him another hard look, scanning the handsome, careless face, and then he sighed helplessly.

"I dunno wot to do!" he muttered. "If I thought it was you, I'd go straight to the 'Ead. But—but—you was good to me in them old days, and I'll try to believe you, Toff. But—but if I find out that you ain't straight, then look out, that's all."

"Agreed?" said Talbot.

Frayne moved away with heavy steps and a troubled face. Talbot glanced after him with a smile, and then walked cheerfully into the School House. He was the merriest of the little party in Tom Merry's study, like a fellow who had not a care in the world. Was it possible that that handsome and careless face hid a black and guilty secret? Was there any ground, after all, for Frayne's half-formed doubt and suspicion? The future alone could tell!

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ANSWERS

NEXT WEDNESDAY— "HERO AND RASCAL?"

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By ARTHUR S. HARDY.

INTRODUCTION.

Geoffrey Foster's father fails in business, and flees the country, and shortly after Geoffrey himself is wrongfully expelled from Grovehouse School. After he has filled many positions, including office clerk and professional cricketer, he joins his father's old regiment, the 29th Hussars. Much to his surprise and pleasure, he finds that Haines, one of the few of his schoolfellows who believed him innocent, is also a trooper of the same regiment. In addition to this, Hewitt, Jellotson, and Jeffcock, all old Grovehouse boys, are officers of the 29th.

A rising of the natives in Africa results in the regiment being sent out to help quell the insurgents. But time hangs heavily on their hands, and races are arranged. Geoffrey is successful in riding two winners.

A short time after this, Patrick Mulcready, an old servant of Geoffrey's father, comes staggering into the camp with the news that Joe Gost, a man who has been leading a number of men against the insurgents with wonderful success, is badly in need of help. Joe Gost, Mulcready explains, is none other than Major Foster, Geoffrey's father! Major Renton, of the 29th, decides to send help at once.

However, the 29th themselves are attacked by the Matabele, and get in a tight corner. For hours the fight continues, until at last the besiegers, unable to stand the deadly fire of the 29th, retreat a short distance, where they camp. Tired out, the 29th lay down to rest.

(Now go on with the story.)

Unexpected Help—Major Foster is taken Prisoner.

They relapsed into silence, and, stretching themselves out to rest, with the hot sun pouring down upon them, they waited for the hours to pass. It was weary waiting, for the atmosphere was humid and unpleasant. It simply spelled malaria.

Towards evening the enemy were seen to be in a state of great agitation. Some movement was about to be decided on.

Lieutenant-Colonel Travers, who had been watching them from the summit of a pile of biscuit-boxes that had been converted into a sort of watch-tower for half an hour, suddenly exclaimed:

"By gad, Renton, I think they are going to retreat!"

Renton looked hard for a while.

"You're right, Travers," he said.

Ten minutes later there came a loud crackle, crackle, crackle of rifles and maxims beyond the position of the enemy.

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Screams and yells broke from the infuriated natives. A desperate battle was being fought.

"It's Du Croc come to our relief," said the Lieutenant-colonel excitedly. "Give orders for the men to mount!"

Boot-and-saddle was sounded. The men sprang into their saddles, glad of the break in the monotony. A gap was made in the protecting wall of the camp, and out rode the 29th to the charge.

They had not proceeded a quarter of a mile across the broken ground, when a sudden and mighty cheer went up, and through the serried ranks of the beaten and demoralised enemy came charging pell-mell a body of men. But they were not Du Croc's men. They were not soldiers of Britain. They were an armed mob of scallywags, of ragamuffins, of men dressed like scarecrows.

And at their head rode a man whose long hair trailed over his shoulders from beneath the brim of his big slouched hat. His chin was adorned with a long beard. But as Lieutenant-Colonel Travers came up to him, despite the disguise, he instantly recognised an old acquaintance of olden days.

"Major Foster!" he cried, bringing his hand to the salute.

Then a horse and rider dashed by him and ranged up beside the commander. A boyish form, clad in khaki, leant over his saddle, and the next moment Geoffrey Foster was clasped in his father's arms.

When that first embrace was over, Major Foster drew his horse aside, and looked at Geoffrey with an admiration he could scarcely conceal. The well-knit figure of the trooper in the 29th Hussars, the face of the boy burned brick-red by the sun, were enough to awaken a feeling of admiration in anyone.

But now came the stern command:

"Trooper Foster, fall back!"

And Lieutenant-Colonel Travers rode his horse to the side of the commandant of the Gost Irregulars.

He looked straight at the man who was once major in his own regiment. One keen, hard glance, and all doubt was removed. This man, who had chosen to call himself Joe Gost, was in reality none other than Major Foster, late of the 29th Hussars, once a brave and loyal son of the Empire.

The man himself was tall and spare of figure. There was the odd depth of chest that had always denoted great physical strength in the major; but his limbs were lean and hungry now. There was not an ounce of fat upon his bones; his cheeks were sunken in, and only the indomitable spirit of the man kept him working, fighting, battling where another, weaker than he, would have given way.

The iron-grey hair which adorned his head had been

permitted to grow until it hung about his shoulders. He had a beard and moustache, but behind all this disguise of Nature there was no mistaking Major Gilbert Foster to anyone who had known him in the old days.

"Commandant," said Lieutenant-Colonel Travers sternly, "what has brought you here?"

"The fortune of war," was the quick reply, "and the fact that your advance served to draw off the enemy, and enabled me to cut my way clean through them. It was as well I did, perhaps, for, rendered desperate by resistance I had made, and by your advance, I think they would have succeeded in overwhelming your force in the attack they had decided to make after nightfall to-day."

"How do you know that?" asked the lieutenant-colonel sharply.

"In making my advance I captured many of the enemy," was the quick reply. "I can speak the language like a native, and under my cross-examination I discovered their plans."

Lieutenant-Colonel Travers looked at Major Foster in unconcealed amazement.

"Foster," he said, "whatever the future may hold for you, whether you will be tried as an enemy to your country and condemned, or, whether you will be honoured as a patriot and a hero, I know not; but this I do know. You are a man, and I honour you as such. There is a grave charge hanging over your head in England. You are discredited and dishonoured in the eyes of your fellow-men, but there is nothing I should like so well as to see you re-established in your own again. I take it that your command is fatigued and hungry?"

"They are ravenous," said the commandant, with a quick glance at the ragged, toilworn, and haggard troop of men, who had followed him with blind devotion right through the insurrection, and who, a day ago, had looked like perishing at the hands of their relentless enemy, as, fierce-eyed and gaunt, they lay behind their defences watching the encircling blacks as they approached nearer and nearer. "If you have food, for mercy's sake give it them. I want nothing for myself. I can last until they are succoured."

"Foster," said the lieutenant-colonel, "you shall come into camp and dine with me. I say dine, for I think there is a

can of beef and some fresh bread, baked this morning, that you may have, and at least one bottle of champagne left."

Major Foster's eyes sparkled. "Let us go," he said. "And my son—may I see my son?"

"Presently—presently," said the lieutenant-colonel. "You must not go too fast, major."

From all parts of the compass men, on tired horses, or afoot, where their mounts had been shot under them, came straggling into the camp.

Some were so sick and ill that they could not move without support. All were tired, with toes protruding through their boots, with elbows bursting through their coats and shirts; all had long, matted hair, and that fierce expression which semi-madness gives.

What they had endured during the past two or three months, as they fought with "Joe Goat" to help save a part of the British Empire, none but themselves would ever know.

The enemy had been routed. They came in now in their hundreds to pile up their arms where the Hussars and the Mounted Infantry waited for them.

Face-seeing men had from the first known the insurrection to be foredoomed to failure, for there was not one of the influential Boer leaders but had thrown in his lot with his Majesty the King; and ragamuffin adventurers, whose only idea was gain, had little chance of successfully leading the battle of the wrong to a decisive issue against the right.

When at length Major Foster, for so we shall continue to call the commandant of Irregulars, had reached the camp and dismounted from his horse, he was so stiff with fatigue and hard riding that he threw himself down upon the ground, full length, with a sigh, and remained for some minutes incapable of movement. Trooper Haines was at once despatched to obtain food for the starving man. With his own hands Lieutenant-Colonel Travers poured out a bumper of life-giving wine, and, soon refreshed, the soldier was able to sit up, and there was a lifelight in his eyes which had been dull in the extreme but a little while before.

"Travers," said Gilbert Foster, adopting the friendly manner of olden days, "what are you going to do with me? I suppose I am to consider myself your prisoner?"

"You give me your word of honour that you will make no attempt to escape?" asked the lieutenant-colonel.

"I give you my word I will make no such attempt. The insurrection is at an end. I shall be of no further use out here. I am longing to get back to civilisation. I am longing to face any charge that may be brought against me, and to clear my name from the stain that has besmirched it for so long."

"What made you flee from England?" asked Travers. "It was a cowardly thing for a soldier to do, Foster. It was scarcely like you."

The commandant's face worked in spasms of agony.

"I did it," he cried, "to save, as I thought, the honour of a brave and loyal man. Travers, I thought I owed my life to Major Jefferock. Because I entered into business enterprises in the City with him when he both retired from the Service, and he put me in the way of finding money for them, I thought I owed him what little fortune came to me. He was always hinting at the obligations under which I rested. And when he came to me one day after I had been inquiring into the affairs of the London and County Building Society—our auditor having informed me that there were huge sums missing, and false entries made in the books—and he confessed that he had stolen the amounts, and spoke of the eternal shame that would be his when the truth became known, I volunteered, like the fool I was, to take all the blame upon my own shoulders, and sweep away once and for all the obligations under which I rested. I was a fool—a mad, quixotic fool! I had had many years of supreme happiness. Jefferock was always speaking of his misery. I thought I could in justice do nothing else but bear my friend's burden."

Lieutenant-Colonel Travers regarded the grizzled and gaunt veteran with something like admiration shining in his eyes. He could not help thinking that Major Foster had been a madman; and yet he thought how proud he would feel if he could realize that he had the power to act as this unselfish, great-hearted, noble man had done.

"It was not until I came out here, and in the wilds of Bechuanaland and Matabeleland discovered that there was a plot being hatched to overthrow the Empire of South Africa, and whilst organising my troop of irregulars fell in with an old trooper of the 29th who had served with me through the South African campaign, and who had taken part in the gallant affair of Botha's Bluff, where Major Jefferock won his Victoria Cross and promotion, and learned from Patrick Mulreedy that it was he, and not Captain Jefferock, who had saved me, and that Captain Jefferock was a potroom and a

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ward, that my eyes were opened and I saw my enemy in his true colours. By the way"—with a quick glance at the lieutenant-colonel—"I sent Mulreedy through the enemy's lines on a forlorn hope to you. Did he arrive safely?"

His brows were puckered with anxiety as he asked the question.

"Mulreedy reached our lines all right, as you may guess," said Travers seriously, "or we shouldn't be here. Foster, he died here in camp the other night—shot, I regret to say, by a friend, not an enemy. But before he died he managed to sign an affidavit which, if believed, will clear your name of every stain that rests upon it."

"Dead!" muttered the commandant. "Dead! And that is the end! Poor fellow! I believe he had no wish to live. He had made a sad wreck of his life, and he told me when he joined me out here that he was as certain as certain could be that he would leave his bones upon the field of battle, dying for his country as well as he could die. Poor fellow! His prophecy was scarcely fulfilled. He was a good lad, despite his weakness and his many faults. I wish he had lived to have another chance."

"That reminds me," said Lieutenant-Colonel Travers, rising, "of a duty unfulfilled. Haines!" The orderly stepped forward. "Summon a guard, and have Lieutenant Jeffcock sent to me."

"Jeffcock!" cried Major Foster, with a start. "The son of Major Jeffcock, V.C.," explained the lieutenant-colonel, in reply to the glance.

A few minutes later Lieutenant Jeffcock, pale and nervous, with wild, staring eyes, stood facing his chief. He was ill-at-ease and shifted one foot uneasily in front of the other.

"Lieutenant Jeffcock," said Travers sternly, "I have reason to suspect you of the murder of Patrick Mulreedy, and I order you under arrest! Will you please surrender your side-arms!"

Without a word the lieutenant delivered them up. Then he cast a defiant glare of hate at Major Foster, who was seated cross-legged upon the ground, and, in charge of a guard, he was marched away.

Breaking the Back of the Rebellion—The Irregulars Take Part in the Charge—Disappearance of Lieutenant Jeffcock.

The brilliant morning sun was shining upon the camp. All was bustle and movement, for the troops were about to march again. Then a sudden beam of light flashed across the heavens, then another and then another.

"Heliograph, sir!" said an officer of the 29th, running to Lieutenant-colonel Travers, as the commander of the forces sat eating a dry biscuit and drinking a cup of muddy cocoa-and-water, with an expression of content.

"Answer it!" was the immediate reply. "I will be with you in a moment."

Soon the distant signal was being answered, and it became apparent to all a few minutes later that communication had been established with the missing Du Cros.

"What the deuce does it all mean?" asked Jellotson of his comrade, William Hewitt. "I never mastered the code properly. What does it say about the enemy?"

"He has driven the fleeing forces of the enemy into the pass of the Rackenberg," was the quick reply. "Most of them are killed or captured; but one desperate detachment got away and forded the Crocodile River. Du Cros, in close pursuit, has driven them this way. By Jove, if the chief only moves quickly enough, we are bound to come up with them—we are bound to intercept them, and the rebellion will then, indeed, be at an end!"

"More fighting!" growled Jellotson. "And no chance of promotion, for the enemy doesn't stand a chance. By the way, you know that Lieutenant Jeffcock is under arrest?"

"For the shooting of Mulreedy?" said Hewitt. "Yes; and may be for punishing as he deserves! All the same, I can't help feeling a bit sorry. One never likes to see an officer and a gentleman fall so low. He's taken it to heart too."

"Didn't deny the charge," said Jellotson, "and looked guilty. By George, what a sensation the Jeffcock-Foster affair will make when the war is at an end. It looks as if the major and his son will come by their own at last."

"Cleared of every stain upon their characters," said Hewitt. "Well, it is as it should be. They both have suffered enough, goodness knows—that's certain."

A couple of hours later the troops were on the march, and not a trace of the camp remained but what would be washed away with the first heavy storm that came.

It was a forced march, in which the horses were urged forward at a goodly speed.

Some thousands of native prisoners accompanied them—all broken-spirited creatures now, footsore, hungry, and weary, THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 334.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Every Saturday, 1

and without arms. They were well guarded. Any attempt to get away could be stopped in a moment.

Over undulating country, now thickly wooded, and covered with brush, now open and undulating, they marched, until at length shots from a hillside, which was strewn with heavy boulders, told them that they had come upon the ground which the remnant of the rebel army had fortified for their last stand.

The British force immediately assumed open order. Skirmishers were advanced, and a strong guard left with the prisoners.

Major Foster and his men were under parole to take no part in the battle.

The firing soon became general. The attacking troops gradually advanced, seizing upon every bit of cover, and locating the positions held by the enemy by the puffs of smoke made by their rifle-fire.

And now from afar a shell came circling over the ridge of the hill, and, bursting right in the midst of the enemy, scattered a shower of dust and stones far around. It was followed by another, and another, and the enemy's fire began to slacken. Then suddenly a flank attack was made upon the 4th Mounted Infantry, having secured a commanding position, from which they poured a heavy fire into the stationary body of troops, and rode their ponies every moment nearer and nearer.

The position was an interesting one. It was plain that the number of the enemy had been underestimated by Du Cros in his heliographing, and the 4th and 29th were scarcely able to cope with them on equal terms.

But then, again, Du Cros was at hand; he had discovered the enemy's position upon the hill, and was pouring a heavy rain of shells in upon them, which, together with the fire of Travers' advancing troops, must speedily dislodge them. But would the newly-arrived flanking-party of the enemy overwhelm the two regiments ere the dislodgment could be effected? It was a nice point; and Major Foster sent a messenger riding hot to Lieutenant-Colonel Travers, begging that his men might be allowed to beat off the advancing flanking-party of the enemy. If the parole were removed he was confident he was quite equal to the task of beating them.

The reply was as Major Foster had expected. His troops were instructed to assist the 4th and the 29th.

In an instant the veteran soldier issued his commands.

One half, the remnant of his men, were told off to storm the hill and capture the position at the point of the bayonet. The other was to ride towards the advancing enemy, and go right through them.

They raised a mighty cheer, and with some of the 4th and the 29th, mounted men all, the last rode in open order towards the oncoming enemy.

With a feeling of relief, Geoffrey Foster found himself with the detachment that was to assist his father's Irregulars in the charge, and he noticed, too, that Jellotson was his lieutenant. Then, as they rode onward, he saw, with a feeling of uneasiness, that the erstwhile prisoner, Lieutenant Jeffcock, was with the party of the 4th that was riding with them; and he noticed, too, that Jeffcock kept near his father, who was lead-

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ing the charge. But Jeffcock was unarmed. That was a comfort.

They advanced first of all at a walk, then at a trot, then at a slow canter, then the word was given, as they got within close rifle range, and the whole force swept pell-mell. It was open country. The enemy, like themselves, made no effort at concealment, and the two forces advanced to meet each other in the charge.

The regiments got hopelessly mixed up, and Geoffrey, keeping his eye on his father, rode his horse near. Then a few minutes later they were in the thick of the fight. Major Foster was the first to use his sword, and a stalwart native fell beneath his stroke. He was in the thick of the fray in a moment, with horses carvetting around him, and shot and sword raining about his devoted head.

The rebels, determined at first, began to waver. The British force thrust their attack home.

The enemy began to flee. The 29th and the Irregulars had already ridden through them once, and were coming back again.

Then suddenly Geoffrey saw Jeffcock flash by him. He had a revolver held in his grasp, and, urging his horse near to Major Foster, he fired the weapon twice.

"Take that!" he murmured. And, wheeling his horse about, fled.

Geoffrey saw his father fall, and was the next moment engaged in a desperate conflict with a big Colonial. They plied sword against sword, but Geoffrey was the more scientific wielder of the weapon, and, laying his opponent's shoulder open, he had him off his horse in a moment. Then looking round him, he saw the enemy breaking in all directions, and closely pursued. He thought he saw Lieutenant Jeffcock, dismounted, stripping the distinguishing badges from his khaki jacket. But he had other things to think about. Where was his father? He rode back to where he thought he had seen him fall, and presently, with a glad cry, he saw him sitting on the ground trying to stanch a wound in his shoulder.

Geoffrey quickly dismounted, and, kneeling, held him in his arms.

"Father—father!" he murmured brokenly.

"It's all right, my boy!" was the quiet answer. "That scoundrel shot me through the shoulder, but I can feel the wound is not serious. The bullet went clean through, and was too high up for much damage to be done. Confound him!"

The firing had now ceased. No shells came over the ridge, and presently a stupendous, roaring cheer from the top of the hill caused them both to look in that direction, and they saw innumerable little specks like ants winding their way downward to meet the victorious 4th and 29th.

The enemy had surrendered. The last battle had been fought. The insurrection was at an end.

Within half an hour Du Croc's men had joined forces with Lieutenant-Colonel Travers's command, and the wounded had been conveyed to hospitals.

The British casualties were fairly large, but the enemy had suffered terribly.

On the roll-call being made, Lieutenant Jeffcock was found to be missing. The field was searched for him, but he could not be found.

Then Major Foster told of the attempt to murder him in the charge, to which Trooper Foster bore witness, and Trooper Haines, who had been riding near at the time, affirmed.

A search-party was sent out; but though they wandered over the field for miles, and followed after the party that had gone in pursuit of the retreating enemy, no sign of him could they find.

The dead body of a rebel, denuded of its outer clothing, and a khaki uniform belonging to an officer, but stripped of all its distinguishing badges and of its buttons, lying near by, told a tale which was easy of interpretation. Lieutenant Jeffcock, wanted for murder and attempted murder, had deserted from his regiment, and had fled none knew whither.

That night the combined forces rested on the scene of the last engagement. The next day, with their prisoners well guarded, of which there were now some thousands, the whole force began its southward march.

Twenty-four hours later they crossed the Crocodile River. Then the news of the final defeat of the enemy, of the rescue and arrest of Joe Gost, otherwise Major Foster, and the full list of casualties was cabled to the Cape, and from thence to England, where an immense sensation was caused.

Geoffrey had found his father. He had good reason to believe that the stain that had besmirched Major Foster's name was soon to be removed. But Major Foster was meanwhile a prisoner who was to be charged with high treason and tried at Cape Town, and until the verdict of the jury empanelled to try him had acquitted him, there would be no peace for either of them. But from what he could learn, Geoffrey had nothing to fear, and his father's great courage and stout heart assured him that all would come right in the end.

All he could do was to wait and hope; and with such stout-hearted friends as Sergeant Haines—for the trooper had been promoted to that rank—and Lieutenant Jellicott and Lieutenant Hewitt to encourage him, Geoffrey's hope was strong indeed.

(This Serial has now reached the final stage, and will be concluded next Wednesday. Order your "Gem" in advance.)

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ST. JIM'S JINGLES.

No. 4.—MONTY LOWTHER.

All hail to his most genial Grace,
So jocular and jolly,
Whose smiles effectively efface
The marks of melancholy!
Before his bright and breezy chaff
The world has rocked in wonder;
And boys have held their sides to laugh
Till buttons burst asunder!

This lively hero long has been
A study-mate of Merry's,
And figures in each stormy scene
With Digby, Blake, and Herries.
Full oft in fusticuff displays
He'll wax enthusiastic;
And foes have learned to fear his ways,
So deadly and so drastic.

Soon Monty reached the restless age
When many boys surrender
Towards a passion for the stage
And all its stately splendour.
He witnessed once a local play,
Becoming quite enraptured,
And by the scenes so grand and gay
His soul was swiftly captured.

Impelled by all the reckless whims
He nursed both night and morning,
The foolish fellow left St. Jim's
Without a word of warning.
He joined a wild and careless band
Who through the country travelled,
And hoped the plots that he had planned
Might never be unravelled.

By reckless rascals he was fleeced.
Of large amounts of money,
And stage life very quickly ceased
To seem like milk-and-honey.
The luckless Lowther now could find
No chances of retracting,
And, sick at heart, became resigned
To all the cares of acting.

One evening, during Monty's dance,
Appeared the anxious doctor;
And when an actress met his glance
It absolutely shocked her!
But, meanwhile, each devoted mate
Had missed the hapless hero,
And as they pondered o'er his fate
Their spirits sank to zero.

The prodigal to school returned,
And thanked his kind adviser;
And through the lesson he had learned
Became a great deal wiser.
Right soon the fatted calf was slain,
And many hands were serving
The lad who never longed again
To shine like Henry Irving!

**"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."

R. J. Khajurina, 24, Ghogha Street, Fort, Bombay, India, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in England or Wales, age 15-17.

Leonard Harrison, P.O. Box 1171, Montreal, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers living in England, age 14-15.

R. Charty, Main Street, Bunyip, Gippsland, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in Melton Mowbray (Leicestershire) or Gravesend, interested in postcards.

Cecil Swinay, Albert Street, Horse Shoe Bend, West Maitland, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England, age 14-15.

Miss Mabel Robins, Gwynne Street, Firlie, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers living outside Australia.

Thomas Blake, c/o Government Produce, Ocean Steamers Wharf, Port Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles, age 15-16.

A. L. McKenzie, 447, Chancery Lane, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the United Kingdom, age 15-14.

Frank Taylor, c/o Mrs. F. Arnold, Wilson Street, Horsham, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in the United Kingdom or the Colonies interested in stamps, age 13-15.

Walter Horbury, 62, Harrison Street, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in the United Kingdom interested in stamps.

R. G. Valentine, c/o A. H. Barbank, Chinctulla, Queensland, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 20-23.

F. Carter, Maidston House, Bunyip, Gippsland, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in India, Canada, or South Africa, interested in postcards.

C. Dickens, Okarito, Gertrude Street, Malvern, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers, age 16.

R. J. Wagh, 55, Park Street West, Brunswick, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers living in England, age 15-17.

L. Stewart, T. T. & A. Coy, Coolgardie, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 14.

H. Kay, c/o G.P.O. Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England, age 14-15.

Edwin Ashley, 525, Jorisson Street, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 15-18.

Miss Irene Dunning, 177, Boom Street, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with boy readers living in England, Scotland or Australia, age 18-20.

Next Week:
FATTY WYNN.

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

WANTED—A TIP.

An anxious man hurried into the police-station and accosted the sergeant at the desk.

"I am Mr. Hibbert," he said. "I understand you caught the burglar who robbed my house last night!"

"Yes, we've got him," answered the sergeant. "Want to speak to him?"

"You bet I do!" bawled the excited man. "I want to know how he got in without waking my wife. I have been trying to do that for the last twenty-five years, and have never succeeded yet!"—Sent in by R. R. Calvey, Waltham-stow.

VERY "GRATING."

The small lad was taking his father's dinner, when he stopped for a moment to watch a workman empty a sewer.

"That," said the youngster, "is the grating my father dropped a sovereign down."

The workman's eyes lit up.

"Well, young man," he said, "you'd better get along with that dinner before it gets cold."

Half an hour later the boy returned, to find the men at the same grating.

"Are you quite sure," said the labourer, "it was this grating the sovereign was lost in?"

"Yes," replied the youngster: "because I saw my father get it out again."—Sent in by George Morrison, Scotland.

THE CAREFUL STABLE-KEEPER.

A certain livery-stable keeper would never let a horse out without requesting the lessee not to drive fast. One day a young man called for a turn-out to attend a funeral.

"Certainly," said the stable-keeper. "But," he added, forgetting the solemn purpose for which the horse was wanted, "don't drive fast."

"Well, jest look here, old fellow," said the somewhat excited man, "I want you to understand that I shall keep up with the procession if it kills the horse!"—Sent in by E. G. Taylor, Islington, N.

ZOOLOGICAL TOMMY.

When Tommy's good, I often hear

His mamma call him little "deer."

But when he has a cold, of course

He sometimes is a little "horse."

And oftentimes quite sure I am

He is a precious little "famb."

While then, again, without excuse,

He proves to be a silly "goose."

Alas! It grieves me this to tell,

But I have sometimes seen quite well

Greedy Tom, with mouthful big,

Turn into a little "pig."

—Sent in by C. Manthorpe, Lanes.

STRIKING.

An Irishman and a Scot were arguing as to the merits of their respective countries.

"Aw weel," said Sandy, "they pulled doon an auld castle in Scotland, and found many wires under it, which shows that the telegraph was knoon there hoondreds o' years ago."

"Well," said Pat, "they pulled down an auld castle in Oireland, and there was no wires found under it; which shows that they knew all about wireless telegraphy in Oireland hoondreds av years ago."—Sent in by Cecil John Wood, Surrey.

NO WONDER!

An Irishman on a visit to London halted outside the great buildings of the Houses of Parliament, and, comparing his watch with Big Ben, burst into a fit of laughter. An interested stranger passing by inquired of his merriment.

"An' how can I help it?" he answered excitedly. "Here's my little watch, made by Paddy O'Flaherty, which cost me thirty shillings, has beat your big London clock there a full hour and a quarter since yesterday!"—Sent in by D. Asbury, Finsbury.

SUGGESTIVE.

"Jimmy," said the fond mother to her smart ten-year-old, "what became of that little pie I made for you yesterday? Did you eat it?"

"No, mother," answered Johnny, with a grin. "I gave it to the teacher at school instead."

"That was very nice and generous of you, Jimmy!" complimented his mother. "And did the teacher eat it?"

"Yes, mother, I think so," answered Jimmy. "She wasn't in school to-day."—Sent in by Harry O'Neill, Dublin.

ON THE (SCENT).

"I believe young Billy Jones has a sweetheart!"

"Yes. And a pretty girl she is, too. Her name is Millicent—at least, that's what Billy calls her when she's in possession of her Saturday ha'penny. At any other time she's only gets Milly."

"Why? How's that?"

"Because she hasn't her 'cent,' of course, silly!"—Sent in by T. Wright, Manchester.

MISTOOK THE INSTRUMENT.

A parish beadle was lately much exercised at the appearance of a strange old man who, when the sermon was about to begin, took an ear-trumpet in two parts out of his pocket and began screwing them together. The beadle watched him until the process was completed, and then, going stealthily up to him, touched him on the shoulder.

"Ye mauna play that here," he whispered. "If ye ðae, I'll turn ye out!"—Sent in by Fred Smith, Stockport.

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.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

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For Next Wednesday.

"HERO AND RASCAL!"
 By Martin Clifford.

In this grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's and Talbot, the new boy, a cricket match at Glyn House provides the background for the principal events of the story. Talbot increases his popularity in the school by his marvellous talent for cricket, and creates a sensation by the havoc his howling wreaks among the wickets of the country-house team. Then an emergency arises which tests his pluck and nerve to the utmost, and again he rises to the occasion in a manner worthy of a hero. In the stillness of the night, however, when the house-party is wrapped in slumber, the other side of this amazing boy's character becomes active! Little Joe Frayne has his suspicions, which later on become certainties. The waif of St. Jim's makes a last appeal to "The Toff," and this proving vain, proceeds to carry out the desperate resolve he has formed. Meantime, Talbot, as popular as ever, remains at St. Jim's.

"HERO AND RASCAL!"

SOMETHING SPECIAL IN SERIALS.

A. S. Hardy's great sporting serial in "The Gem" Library is now drawing to a close, and a great deal of time and trouble lately have been devoted to the task of procuring a worthy successor to such a popular serial. My chums will all be pleased to hear that the right story has been found at last. The title of it will be

"A BID FOR A THRONE!"

and a stronger, more thrilling and gripping, tale of modern adventure and international intrigue I never remember reading.

"A BID FOR A THRONE!"

has been specially written for "The Gem" Library by Clive R. Fenn, the son of the late distinguished author, G. Manville Fenn, whose wonderful books have delighted British boys and girls for years past. Clive R. Fenn is himself a talented author, with a special gift for writing a story of really powerful interest, and I am satisfied that

"A BID FOR A THRONE!"

represents the best of his work. This amazing, real-life, adventure story will commence next week in "The Gem" Library, and I ask all my chums to give it the rousing welcome it deserves.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

W. Young (East Ham).—I am afraid the answer to both of your questions is in the negative.

J. Sheen (London, N.E.).—Very many thanks for your postcard.

J. S. Paddy and D. Hollywood (Ireland).—Many thanks for your letters. Your suggestions I will keep by me.

"Scribbler" (Gloucester).—I am afraid I cannot make you any definite promise, but will keep your letter by me.

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

L. P. Duff, 6, Lower North Brook Avenue, North Strand Road, Dublin, Ireland, is anxious to form a "Gem" Exchange Circle in Dublin, and would like to hear from all fellow-readers interested. Membership cards forwarded on application, if stamped addressed envelope enclosed.

Edgar Camille, 202, Kennington Road, London, S.E., would like to hear from fellow-readers interested in stamp collecting, with a view to forming a "Gem" Stamp Club. Subscription one shilling per annum.

Will A. Eeek of Brisbane correspond with P. Ireland of Home Farm, Warkworth, Banbury!

C. E. Smerdon, of 25, Endwell Road, Brockley, S.E., is desirous of forming a "Magnet and Gem" League for outdoor sports, such as cricket, cycling, football, etc., and will be pleased to send intending members full particulars on application.

Ernest J. Lloyd, of 156, High Street, Hanwell, is about to organise a "Gem" Amateur Photographic League, and hopes to hear from all fellow-readers of the "Gem" and its companion papers who would care to join him.

HOLIDAY MAKING WITH A CAMERA.

By H. Snowden Ward, F.R.P.S.

(Editor of "The Photographic Monthly").

A Warning.

Some holiday photographers have done much to bring their hobby into disrepute by the want of consideration. Trespassing on private grounds, snap-shooting private conferences, and exhibiting prints of persons in ungraceful positions, they have, at times, caused much annoyance and pain. I am sure none of my readers would do these things wilfully, but the word of warning may be useful for preventing thoughtless slips. Many amateurs on holiday are notable for the lavish way in which they promise to send prints to those upon whom they expose their plates; and it is surprising how seldom these promises are kept. Try very hard to promise as little as possible, but to send as many and as good prints as you can, as soon as you can, to all those whose courtesy has helped your work.

The Holiday Album.

In conclusion, if the holiday photography ends with the exposure of a number of plates and the production of a few scrappy, poor prints, it is not much good. It ought to end in, at least, one album, giving a fairly complete review of the holiday, in a series of good, permanent prints, neatly mounted, and accompanied by cuttings, etc., from newspapers, guide-books, or what-not, including the programmes of any sports that may be re-presented, engravings, memo-cards, etc., of the hotels or boarding-houses where enjoyable days were spent, and so forth. Moreover, as a holiday spent alone is never a perfect joy, there should be a duplicate album or albums, for those whose companionship added to the pleasure, and I know of no more enjoyable hobby than the making of a good record of a summer holiday jaunt, followed by the preparation of a beautiful, permanent souvenir, to be presented to the comrades of the trip at birthday or Christmas-tide.

(A Special Article next
 Wednesday, entitled
 "Guarding the King.")



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