FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.

— Complete Stories for ALL, and Every Story a GEM. —

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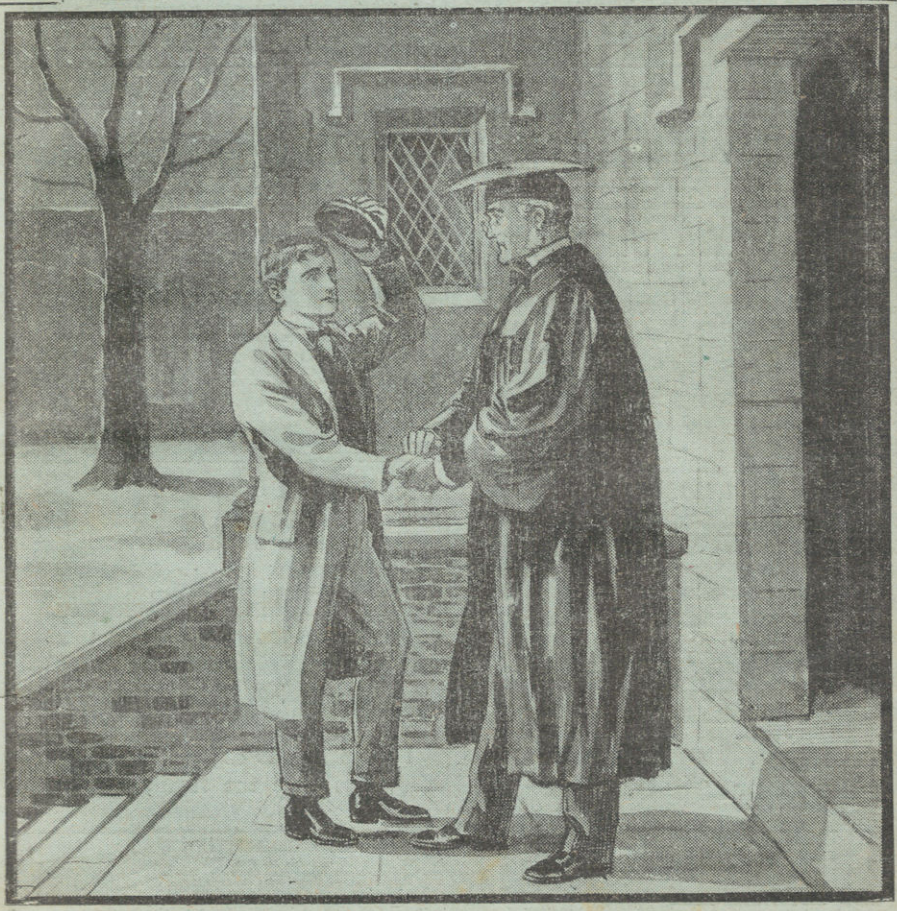

THE MIDNIGHT EXPULSION!

PUBLISHED IN TOWN AND COUNTRY EVERY WEDNESDAY MORNING

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COMPLETE STORIES FOR ALL, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Heavily the big iron door swung open. Talbot drew a deep breath. He felt in his pocket for the bundles of notes. Suddenly his movements were arrested. He stood frozen, as a gleam of light penetrated the darkness of the study. (See Chapter 12.)

CHAPTER 1.
A Surprise for the Shell.

"GORE!"

The voice of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell at St. Jim's, was not loud, but deep. It resembled the rumble of distant thunder.

There was, in fact, thunder in the air of the Shell Form-room.

Mr. Linton was a severe gentleman, and when he came down he came down heavy. The Shell fellows never ventured anything approaching a "rag" in class when Mr. Linton was in charge. They allowed themselves little relaxations with Monsieur Morny, and sometimes with Herr Schneider; but never with Mr. Linton. Twisting the lion's tail was too dangerous an enterprise where the master of the Shell was concerned.

But that Monday afternoon Gore seemed to be hunting for trouble, and he had succeeded in finding it at last. Tom Merry & Co. had noted the rising thundercloud on their Form-master's brow, and they were very, very good. All the Shell, in fact, were very, very good, excepting Gore.

When his Form-master addressed him, Gore replied at random. Either he had some pressing worry on his

Next Wednesday:

"THE HERO OF THE HOUR!" AND "OFFICER AND TROOPER!"

mind or he was trying to get Mr. Linton into a "wax." If the latter was his object, his success was complete. Mr. Linton had developed a really alarming "wax."

Now, as if to put the lid on, so to speak, Gore did not answer when his Form-master addressed him. He sat with his eyes glued on his desk, just as if he didn't hear Mr. Linton's voice at all.

"Gore!"

Mr. Linton's voice now resembled thunder which was drawing near.

Talbot, who sat next to Gore, nudged him. Talbot was good-natured, and he wished to avert the storm if he could.

"Gore," he whispered, "wake up——"

"Talbot!" rapped out Mr. Linton.

"Ye-es, sir."

"You need not speak to Gore."

"Nunno, sir!"

"You will take fifty lines for talking in class."

Talbot sat silent. He was one of Mr. Linton's best pupils, and generally in the Form-master's good graces. That imposition showed how much the Shell-master's temper had suffered.

Tom Merry, who had been about to give Gore a friendly kick under the desk, to draw his attention, withdrew his foot hastily. He did not want the vials of the Form-master's wrath to be poured on his head.

The Shell fellows were all staring at George Gore. They were wondering what on earth was the matter with him, for he was still sitting silent, his eyes on his desk, as if he was memorised. Mr. Linton approached nearer, his eyes glinting. Never had he been treated with such disrespect in his own Form-room, and he was not likely to bear it patiently. Patience was not his forte.

"Gore!" he thundered.

It was thunder quite close at hand now. Gore started and looked up and blinked at the Form-master. His face was strangely pale, and his eyes were burning.

"I—I—— Did you speak, sir?" stammered Gore, passing his hand across his brow.

"Did you hear me, Gore?"

"No, sir."

"Have you become suddenly deaf?" asked Mr. Linton sarcastically.

"Yes—no—no!" said Gore confusedly.

"Come here, Gore!" said Mr. Linton.

He stepped to his desk, and took up his cane.

Gore rose unsteadily to his feet.

"What the dickens is the matter with the chap?" muttered Monty Lowther, in amazement.

"He must be ill," whispered Tom Merry. "He's been jolly queer lately."

Gore went out unsteadily before the class. Mr. Linton fixed a frowning glance upon him. He was intensely exasperated.

"You seem to be determined, Gore, to give me as much trouble as possible. This morning your construing would have disgraced a boy in the Third Form. This afternoon you have assumed a stupidity greater than that with which Nature has endowed you. I have no doubt that it due to a peculiar sense of humour, which I'll teach you not to cultivate in the Form-room."

Some of the Shell grinned. When Mr. Linton was humorous it was the duty of his class to grin, and they took this remark for a joke. Apparently, however, Mr. Linton was not joking, for he swept the class with a terrific frown.

"You are laughing, Lowther!"

"I, sir!"

"Yes, you. Take fifty lines!"

Monty Lowther did not grin any more. He registered a mental vow that, however humorous Mr. Linton might be in the future, he would never smile again. He was not going to take chances like this.

Mr. Linton, having reduced his class to gravity, turned his attention to Gore again. The burly Shell fellow stood staring at him stupidly.

"Now, Gore, I am about to punish you severely. Hold out your hand!"

Gore made no movement.

Mr. Linton's brow grew darker and darker. Talbot of the Shell rose in his place. His look was anxious and concerned.

"If you please, sir——"

"Silence, Talbot!"

"Certainly, sir," said Talbot; but he continued all the same. "I think Gore is ill, sir."

"If Gore is ill, Gore can say so, I presume," said Mr. Linton harshly; "Gore has a tongue, I believe. There is no need for you to speak. Take your place!"

Talbot sat down, crushed.

But the suggestion had given Mr. Linton food for thought. He lowered the cane, and looked searchingly at George Gore's pale, strained face.

"Is there anything the matter with you, Gore? This conduct on your part certainly does not seem natural."

Gore did not answer. He only stared at the Form-master in a stupefied way. Mr. Linton compressed his lips. The junior did not seem to be quite himself; but Mr. Linton suspected that his leg was being pulled.

"Will you answer me, Gore?"

Gore's lips moved, but no reply came. The Shell fellows were tensely silent now, watching Gore. What was the matter with the fellow? If this was a joke on Mr. Linton the joker would have to pay dearly for it.

"You are trying my patience very severely, Gore," said Mr. Linton, in a rumbling voice. "I repeat—— Good gracious!"

Mr. Linton gasped out that exclamation breathlessly, for the junior standing before him suddenly swayed and pitched headlong to the floor at his feet.

Mr. Linton started back, aghast. From the juniors came a buzz of excitement and alarm. Gore had fainted.

CHAPTER 2.
Gore's Trouble.

TOM MERRY & CO. were on their feet at once.

In that extraordinary emergency Mr. Linton seemed quite overcome. Nothing of the kind had ever occurred before in the Shell Form-room at St. Jim's. The Form-master gazed, open-eyed, in surprise and horror, at the junior stretched at his feet.

Talbot reached him first. He raised Gore's head upon his knee. The junior's face was colourless, and his eyes were closed. It was evident that he was not shamming; it was decidedly not a "joke on Linton." He was quite unconscious.

"Water!" said Talbot quickly.

"G-g-goodness gracious!" ejaculated the master of the Shell.

Tom Merry ran to the mantelpiece, where there was a flower-vase. He pitched out the flowers, and brought the vase.

Talbot quickly sprinkled the cold water in Gore's face. The Shell fellows were gathering round excitedly, and Tom Merry pushed them back. George Gore's eyes opened, and he gazed round him wildly.

"Don't," he muttered—"don't let them take me! It was all his fault! He told me—he advised me!"

"Hush!" whispered Talbot.

Gore stared at him, and caught his wrist in a convulsive grip that almost made Talbot utter a cry of pain.

"Stand by me, Talbot! You've been through it yourself; I haven't! You're the only chap who'd help me. You——"

"Hush—hush!" muttered Talbot. "It's all right, Gore! We're looking after you, old chap. Don't worry."

Gore pulled himself together. He sat on the floor, leaning on Talbot's strong arm, his face white as chalk, panting. Mr. Linton approached. His stern look was gone now. It was only too clear that the boy was ill.

"Calm yourself, my boy," said the Form-master, in a kindly tone. "You should have told me that you were not well. I had no suspicion. Talbot, Merry, help him to the dormitory. Remain with him there, Merry, and you, Talbot, ask Miss Pinch to come and see him."

"Yes, sir."

Gore staggered to his feet, helped by his two Form fellows, and, leaning heavily on them, he left the Form-room.

"Take your places," said Mr. Linton. "We will now resume the lesson."

The Shell fellows took their places, but it was not so easy to resume the lesson. The whole Form was in a buzz of excitement. It was an unprecedented happening at St. Jim's, and it was not easy to dismiss it from their minds.

Tom Merry and Talbot helped Gore up to the Shell dormitory. The burly junior went blindly. In the dormitory, he sat on his bed and stared at them, passing his hand across his forehead.

"I—I—— Did I faint?" he stammered.

"Yes," said Talbot quietly.

"What's the matter with you, Gore?" demanded Tom Merry. "Tain't overwork in your case; I jolly well know that. What made you faint?"

"You'd better turn in, Gore," said Talbot.

Gore made an irritable gesture.

"I'm not going to turn in!"

"Well, lie down, then."

"I won't!"

"Stay with him, Tom, while I fetch the nurse," whispered Talbot.

"You needn't bring that old gargoyle to me!" said Gore. "I'm not ill!"

Talbot made no reply to that. He quitted the dormitory. Gore stared disagreeably at Tom Merry.

"I suppose I surprised you all?" he growled.

"Well, you did a bit."

"What did I say when I came-to? I said something."

"I didn't hear you. You were mumbling."

"Did Linton hear?"

"Hardly. He was further away from you. What does it matter?"

Gore looked relieved.

"A fellow might blab out anything when he's like that," he said.

Tom Merry smiled.

"I suppose you haven't got any deadly secrets you might blab out?" he remarked.

Gore did not answer. He sat with a sullen expression on his heavy face. He was evidently still far from being himself.

Meanwhile, Talbot had hurried away towards the sanatorium. Miss Pinch was the nurse in charge there, where she had the assistance of Marie Rivers, Talbot's girl-chum. The Shell fellow was hurrying through the Head's garden, when a sweet voice called to him:

"Toff, you are not at lessons?"

It was Miss Marie.

The Toff—Marie always called him by that old nickname—paused for a moment.

"I've come for Miss Pinch," he said. "One of the chaps has fainted in the Form-room. He's seedy."

"Poor boy! Who is it?"

"Gore. Where's Miss Pinch?"

"With Mr. Selby. I'll tell her."

Marie flitted away, and Talbot waited in the garden. Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, was still laid up with his cold in the sanatorium, which was a sort of holiday to the Third Form, who were taken by Miss Marie in his absence. At the present moment the Third were enjoying—or otherwise—French instruction from Monsieur Morny.

Miss Pinch came out, and Talbot explained, and the good lady hurried away to see Gore. Talbot lingered for a few moments in the garden.

"You are not with the Third now, Marie?"

Miss Marie smiled.

"No; it is French now. I am taking them again when Monsieur Morny has finished."

"How are you getting on with Wally & Co.? The young sweeps!"

"First-rate—now. There was trouble at first, but they quite like me now as Form-mistress. May you stay out of your Form-room now?"

"Well, no; I mustn't, as a matter of fact."

"Then run off at once, you young sweep!" said Miss Marie demurely.

Talbot laughed, and ran off.

He returned to the Shell Form-room. Meanwhile, Miss Pinch had reached the dormitory. She found Tom Merry with Gore, and the latter in a decidedly bad temper.

He declared emphatically that there was nothing the matter with him, and Tom Merry was glad to leave him to the nurse. Gore, out of sorts, was not an agreeable fellow. He was never highly agreeable at any time.

Mr. Linton looked inquiringly at Tom Merry as he came into the Form-room again.

"How is Gore?" he asked.

"He seems all right, sir. Miss Pinch is with him."

"Have you any idea, Merry, what has caused this sudden attack? Gore is a very strong and healthy boy, I believe."

"He's as hard as nails, as a rule, sir. I haven't the least idea."

"You are Gore's study-mate, Talbot—perhaps you have noticed——"

"I've noticed he's looked seedy the last few days, sir," said Talbot. "He hasn't said anything to me about it, though."

"Very well."

Mr. Linton continued imparting instruction to the Shell, but he was evidently a little troubled in his mind about Gore. George Gore was a burly fellow, muscular and hard as nails, as Tom Merry said; about the last fellow at St. Jim's who might have been expected to faint from no apparent cause. It was very puzzling—to the Shell fellows as well as to their Form-master. Most of them intended to swamp Gore with questions as soon as they were free from lessons.

When lessons were over, and the Shell dismissed, George Gore was called into his Form-master's study. He was still looking a little pale, but otherwise quite himself. Mr. Linton eyed him very narrowly.

"You do not seem to find yourself in your usual health, Gore?"

"I'm all right, sir."

"It is not usual to faint."

"I—I was out in the sun, sir, this afternoon, before lessons. I went out without my cap. I suppose that was it."

"I have had occasion to speak to you, Gore, on the subject of smoking. You have been punished for that once. Have you been smoking again?"

"No, sir."

"Very well; you may go. I shall ask Dr. Short to call and see you."

"Thank you, sir!"

And Gore went.

CHAPTER 3.
D'Arcy Knows What To Do.

"WEMARKABLE!"

That was the comment of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form when he heard about the curious happening in the Shell Form-room. A group of juniors were discussing it in the quadrangle—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther and Talbot and Kangaroo—when the chums of Study No. 6 in the Fourth came up, and were duly apprised of the latest news.

"Wemarkable!" repeated Arthur Augustus, with emphasis.

"It's jolly queer!" said Jack Blake. "What did the silly ass want to faint for? Catch me fainting!"

"Never seen a chap faint in the Fourth," remarked Digby, a remark which made the Shell fellows sniff. They took it as a reflection on their Form.

"I know what's the matter with him, though," grunted Herries. Herries did not like Gore, and did not approve of him.

"Well?" said half a dozen voices at once, in inquiry.

"You know the rotter smokes," said Herries. "Smokes like a furnace. That's what it is. It's made him seedy. Serve him right!"

"Might be that," assented Tom Merry.

"Wats!"

"Hallo! What are you burbling about?" demanded Blake, as Arthur Augustus put in that interjection.

"I decline to have my wemarks chawactewised as

burblin', Blake. I don't wish to be personal, but I must observe that I wegard you chaps as duffahs."

"Praise from Gussy is praise indeed!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Pway don't wot, Lowthah! I have alweady wemarked that I considah it wemarkable."

"Well, we all think it's remarkable," said Talbot. "That isn't really news, Gussy."

"I was not alludin' to Goah's peculiah faintin' fit. That is not wemarkable."

"Then what is remarkable?" demanded Monty Lowther. "Are you alluding to your own beautiful accent? That is certainly remarkable."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was not alludin' to anythin' of the sort, Lowthah, as you are vewy well awah. You are an ass, Lowchah."

"Praise from Gussy is——"

"Pway don't intewwupt me. What I wegard as wemarkable is this, that you fellows can't see what's the mattah with Goah."

"Then you can?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rats!" said Kangaroo. "That's my opinion, and you can take it for what it's worth. Rats, and many of 'em!"

"I wepeat, it is wemarkable. Howevah, as you cannot see for yourselves, I will pwoceed to enlighten you," said Arthur Augustus magnanimously. "In any mattah of difficulty like this, you can always wely on a fellow of tact and judgment to get at the twuth. Goah has been a wegulah bear with a sore head evah since last Wednesday. He has been gettin' wottener and wottener all the time. You wemembah I asked him to tea on Saturday, to buck him up——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see nothin' to cackle at. He wefused wudely. Well, my ideah is that Goah is in a fwightful fix," said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Go hon!"

"I am speakin' sewiously. Have you fellows forgotten—pway don't tip my hat behind, Lowthah; I wegard it as a sillay joke—have you chaps forgotten that last Wednesday we found Goah playin' cards—gamblin' in the most disgustin' mannah—with that wascal Tickey Tapp."

Tom Merry started a little.

"What about that? We ragged that rotten sharper, and made him clear off. He's gone—gone for good."

"Pewwaps he isn't gone for good," said Arthur Augustus. "Now, we all know what a wottah he is. If you fellows weflect, you will notice that Goah has been cawwyin' on in this wemarkable way evah since he was with Tickey Tapp that day. Now this aftahnoon it has come to a climax; he is quite ill. I wegard it as certain that that wascal is the cause of it. It is vewy pwob that he has won all Goah's money, and put him into difficulties."

"He's certainly won his money," said Kangaroo. "Tickey Tapp isn't in the card-sharping business for his health. He plays to win."

"Yaas. Goah may even owe him money."

"But that wouldn't account for all this," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows. "The rotter has cleared off, I tell you. Didn't we hunt about for him on Saturday afternoon, and find that he was gone. We even asked the landlord of the Green Man, and he had hooked it from there."

"Yaas, quite so."

"Well, ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I am suah that I am on the wight twack. There is one thing that has not stwuck you. Suppose Goah owes that wascal money——"

"That wouldn't hurt him, as the man's gone."

"But suppose he's come back, duffah?"

"He hasn't come back."

"I wegard it as extwemely pwob that he has come back, and that that sillay ass Goah is in a state of tewwah."

"My hat!" said Manners. "It must be a really enjoyable experience to go the pace, and have a giddy time, judging by Gore!"

"Howevah, we shall soon know for suah," said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin' to find out."

"How?" demanded Tom Merry.

"I am goin' to the Gween Man."

"You're jolly well not!" said Blake warmly. "That beastly pub's out of bounds, and a prefect would be sure to spot you."

"I am goin' to wisk that, Blake. Goah is a wottah, but he is a St. Jim's chap, and we are bound to stand by him in this mattah. We wagged that wascal Tickey Tapp once, as a warnin'. If he has come back, we're goin' to wag him again, and cleah him off. Then Goah will be all wight."

The chums of the School House looked very thoughtful. It had been quite clear to them that Gore was troubled in his mind the last few days. It was possible that Arthur Augustus had hit on the explanation.

There was no doubt that Gore had gambled with the cardsharper Tickey Tapp the week before. Tom Merry & Co. had found them, and had ragged Tickey Tapp in the most thoroughgoing manner, as a warning that his presence was not required in the neighbourhood. It was a somewhat high-handed proceeding, but it seemed to have been effective, for the rascal had certainly cleared off.

Arthur Augustus walked away to the bike-shed, leaving his chums discussing the matter. He came back wheeling his bike.

"Hold on!" called out Blake. "Haven't I told you you're not going there, fathead? You can leave it to us."

"I wefuse to leave it to you, Blake. You would get yourself into some twoble. In a mattah like this a fellow of tact and judgment is wequired."

"Look here——"

"Wats!"

"But suppose you find him——" began Tom Merry.

"In that case I shall give him a feahful thwashin', as a warnin——"

"You ass——"

"Wats!"

Blake made a rush after Arthur Augustus as he wheeled the machine down the drive. D'Arcy promptly jumped into the saddle and pedalled away.

"Stop!" roared Blake.

"Wats!"

Blake put on a spurt. Arthur Augustus went sailing cheerfully through the doorway, and turned into the road for Rylcombe. He looked back and waved his hand gracefully to Blake, who shook his fist in response.

"Wait for us!" yelled Blake.

"Wubbish! You can leave it to me."

"Oh, you fathead——"

"Au wevoir, deah boy!"

Blake made a rush in pursuit. Arthur Augustus grinned, and his pedals whizzed round like lightning. Blake was a good sprinter, but he had to give it up. He stopped in the road, panting, and Arthur Augustus vanished round a bend in the lane, towards the village.

"The silly ass!" growled Blake breathlessly, as he returned to the gates, where the rest of the Co. were watching him with grinning faces. "If I'd reached him I'd have mopped him off that bike and squashed him! The howling ass! If he gets into a rag with those blighters at the Green Man they'll make shavings of him. Let's go after him."

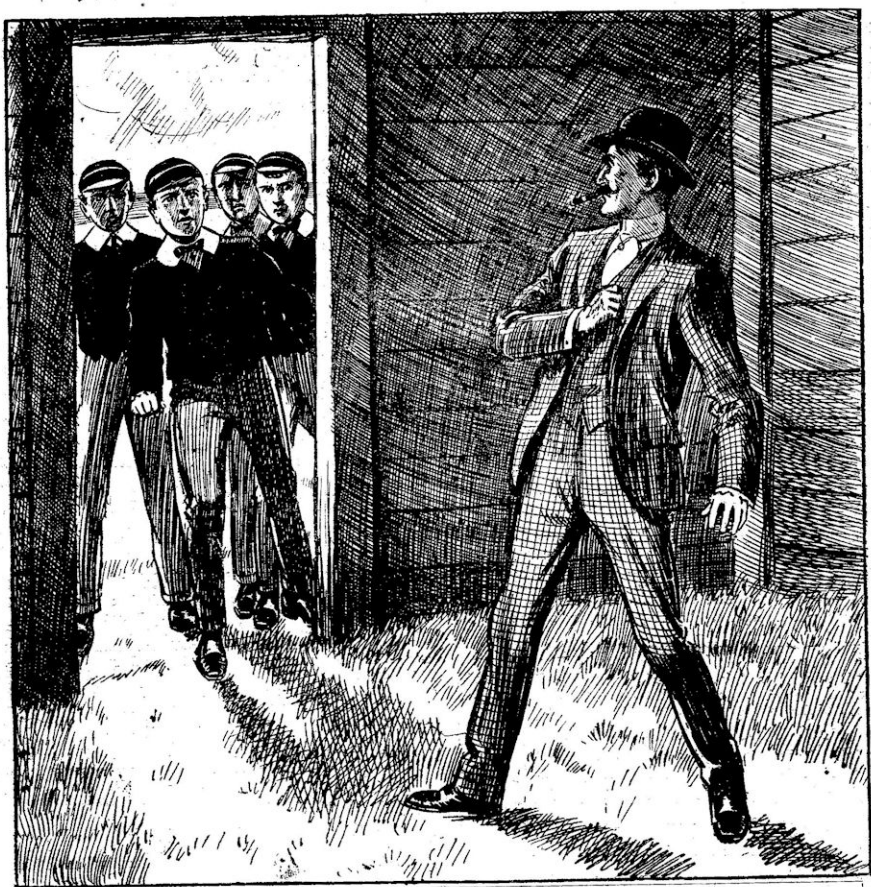
"May as well," said Tom Merry. "Come on, Talbot! Where's Talbot?"

Monty Lowther gave a chuckle.

"I saw him talking to Miss Marie a few minutes ago——"

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, the rest of you!"

And the juniors sauntered down the sunny lane towards Rylcombe, to get the noble Gussy out of the trouble he was hunting for.



There was a clattering of bicycles outside the old hut, and Tickey Tapp started to his feet. Four juniors appeared in the doorway. Tickey Tapp changed colour a little as he saw Talbot. "Toff! You!" he ejaculated. "Yes," said Talbot. "Quite a 'appy meeting," said Tickey Tapp, recovering himself. (See Chapter 11.)

CHAPTER 4.
A Fearful Thrashing!

"BAI Jove! Spotted, begad!"

Arthur Augustus jammed on his brake.

The swell of the Fourth had covered the distance from St. Jim's in record time. He was determined to carry out that little enterprise without delay. He felt that it was up to him. It was Arthur Augustus who had first spotted the presence of the sharper Tickey Tapp in his old haunts. It was Arthur Augustus's brilliant suggestion that the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's had tracked down Tickey Tapp, and ducked him in the pond on the moor, as a dramatic warning. And Arthur Augustus felt that it was best for the matter to remain in his hands.

If Tickey Tapp, after being warned off, had returned, D'Arcy was the man to spot him and bring him to light, he was convinced of that, and he had a fear that the other fellows would bungle it somehow. They were not so liberally endowed by Nature with the valuable gifts of tact and judgment.

Arthur Augustus expected to be successful, but his success was, as a matter of fact, ridiculously easy; for as he came in sight of the delectable inn called the Green Man, the haunt of all the disreputable characters in the neighbourhood, he caught sight of a fat and disagreeable countenance at an open window, and recognised Tickey Tapp. The sharper was smoking a big black cigar by the open window of the billiard-room, and commenting upon a game that was going on within.

The swell of St. Jim's jumped off his bicycle. He leaned the machine against the horse-trough outside the inn, and approached the building. At that moment, and with such an object in view, Arthur Augustus could not pause to consider that the inn was strictly out of bounds for all St. Jim's fellows, and that if a master or prefect should see him entering it, it would mean serious trouble for him. Reckless of possible consequences, the elegant Fourth-former marched in, and met Mr. Joliffe, the landlord, inside.

Mr. Joliffe stared at him. He knew Arthur Augustus very well by sight, but he had never expected to meet

him as a visitor. D'Arcy did not share the tastes of Levison of the Fourth or Cutts of the Fifth, and he never honoured that rendezvous of "black sheep" with a visit before.

"Arternoon!" said Mr. Joliffe, in surprise. "Glad to see you, Master D'Arcy. This is really kind of you to drop in like this 'ere."

"I have not dropped in, Mr. Joliffe," said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "I have come in to see a person who is here."

"Friend of yours here?" asked Mr. Joliffe affably.

"Certainly not. The wascal is no fwiend of mine. I desiah to see a beastly wottah named Tickey Tapp."

"No such person 'ere," said Mr. Joliffe, shaking his head.

"I have just seen him at the window, Mr. Joliffe."

"So you can't take my word—wot?" said the landlord. "There's the door, Master D'Arcy. You can walk out or you can be put out!"

"I wefuse to walk out till I have seen that wottah, and as for bein' put out, if you twy anythin' of the sort, I shall thwash you."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the innkeeper.

"Weally, Mr. Joliffe——"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus passed Mr. Joliffe and strode on towards the billiard-room, leaving the stout innkeeper roaring with laughter. The junior came into the billiard-room, where two horsey-looking men were playing and Tickey Tapp was looking on. A greasy-looking marker was watching the game.

All four men stared at the elegant junior, who certainly looked very much out of place in that shady den. The man who was making a break suspended his game, and Tickey Tapp half-rose to his feet. Tickey Tapp had not forgot that ducking on the moor, and there was no love lost between him and the St. Jim's fellows.

"My word!" said Tickey Tapp. "Wot are you doin' 'ere?"

"I have come to see you, you wascal!"

"Wot!"

"I wequiah a few words with you, Mr. Tapp," said Arthur Augustus, jamming his famous monocle into his eye, and fixing it upon the astonished sharper. "I wathah thought I should find you heah, and I was wight. Last week my fwiends and myself ducked you, for your fwightful cheek in hangin' wound our school."

"I ain't forgotten," said Tickey Tapp, making a sign to his companions.

The two players edged round, getting between Arthur Augustus and the door. Arthur Augustus did not observe that little manœuvre.

"You have had the nerve to come back heah?" pursued D'Arcy.

"It's a free country, ain't it?" asked Tickey Tapp. "I suppose this 'ere isn't Prooshia, is it? Can't a man live where he likes—wot?"

"Not a wascal like you! We wefuse to have you anywhah neah our school!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tickey Tapp. "Go on! Gents, this 'ere is the Tsar of Rooshia, and these 'ere are his borders! Go on, Master D'Arcy! I like this 'ere!"

"You are a wascal! You have made a chap in our school play cards with you!"

"He didn't need much making!" grinned Tickey Tapp. "Precious lot of young blackguards there are in your school, Master D'Arcy! Reg'ler den of young reprobates, I call it! I've been thinkin' of sending some tracts there!"

Arthur Augustus's eyeglass almost glittered with rage.

"You uttah wottah! You—you——"

"Got it!"

"I did not come heah to banday words with you, you feahful cad! I came to tell you that you have got to cleah off!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"And if you do not go at once I shall give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"It a man your own size!" grinned Tickey Tapp. "Don't be 'ard on a little cove like me!"

Arthur Augustus dropped his eyeglass, and pushed back his cuffs.

"Are you goin'?" he asked.

"Am I going, pals?" asked Tickey Tapp, appealing to his friends.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Then put up your hands, you wottah!"

Tickey Tapp yelled with laughter. But he suddenly ceased laughing as the swell of St. Jim's rushed upon him, hitting out. He put up his hands then, and there was a wild and whirling scrimmage for a few moments. Tickey Tapp had supposed that he would be able to "mop up" the floor with the schoolboy, but he discovered that, man as he was against a boy, he was getting the worst of it. The elegant Arthur Augustus was a good boxer, and he was perfectly fit, and Tickey Tapp was very flabby, and out of condition. A whirlwind attack drove him, staggering, round the billiard-table, and he yelled with pain and wrath as he caught D'Arcy's left with his nose, and D'Arcy's right in his eye.

Had the two been by themselves, Tickey Tapp would inevitably have received the "fearful thrashing" Arthur Augustus designed for him. But before the "scrap" had lasted a minute and a half Tickey Tapp's friends came to the rescue. They rushed upon Arthur Augustus from behind, and collared him.

D'Arcy struggled furiously in their grasp.

"'Old 'im!" yelled Tickey Tapp. "My word! I'll make him wriggle for this 'ere! 'Old 'im! We'll duck him in the trough, by gum!"

"Welease me, you wottahs! Faih play, you cads!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"There was a dozen of you on to me last week!" grinned Tickey Tapp, mopping his nose, which was streaming. "The boot's on the huther leg now, my young pippin!"

"That was not a fight; that was a wag," said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, this 'ere ain't a fight; this 'ere is a rag, as you call it!" grinned Tickey Tapp. "You ducked me. One good turn deserves another! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Welease me, you disgustin' wottahs! You are makin' my jacket dirty with your howwid hands!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Chuck 'im out!" roared Mr. Joliffe from the doorway. "I'll teach the young 'ooligan to come kickin' up a row in a respectable public-'ouse! I'll give 'im in charge!"

"Yes; 'ave him locked up!" said the billiard-marker.

Arthur Augustus gasped. For the first time it occurred to him that he had been taking the law very much into his own hands in invading Mr. Joliffe's premises in this way. Not that Mr. Joliffe, as a matter of fact, intended to call in the village policeman to his aid. Mr. Joliffe did not like having any dealings whatever with the police. The gentlemen in blue were his natural enemies.

"Outside with 'im!" said Tickey Tapp. "Chuck him into the trough, and then call a policeman!"

"Oh, you wottahs!"

Arthur Augustus was whirled to the door, quite powerless, with the three pairs of dirty hands grasping his noble person.

In a struggling bunch, Arthur Augustus and Tickey Tapp & Co. came whirling out of the doorway of the inn.

Arthur Augustus's hat was gone, and his collar had been torn out in the tussle; his hair was rumpled, and his waistcoat burst open. He looked very nearly as disreputable as Tickey Tapp and his friends. Still struggling, he was rushed towards the horse-trough.

"Oh, cwumbs! You wottahs! Gweat Scott!"

"Duck 'im!" yelled Mr. Joliffe.

Arthur Augustus resisted desperately. Two or three carters and half a dozen village urchins gathered to look on, in great excitement and enjoyment. A gentleman who was coming down the High Street also paused to see what was going on. It was Mr. Carrington, the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's. Mr. Carrington simply jumped at sight of a St. Jim's junior engaged in that disgraceful scuffle outside the lowest public-house in the place.

Splash!

"Yoooooooop!"

Arthur Augustus swamped into the flowing trough. He

disappeared for a moment, and then sat up, spluttering and gasping. Tickey Tapp & Co. howled with laughter. Revenge is sweet, and Mr. Tapp had not forgotten his own ducking.

"Gwoooooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

Mr. Carrington came striding up. His brow was black as thunder.

"D'Arcy, what does this mean? Get out of that trough instantly, you disgraceful boy! What does this mean, you young reprobate?"

"Cawwington, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus feebly. He scrambled out of the trough.

CHAPTER 5.
Fairly Caught!

MR. CARRINGTON stared angrily at the drenched, dripping junior.

Arthur Augustus stood before him, soaked to the skin, as untidy as it was possible to be, and gasping for breath. D'Arcy's appearance at that moment would not have done credit to a reformatory.

The sporting gentlemen of the Green Man grinned at one another. But for the arrival of Mr. Carrington, D'Arcy would have been flung into the trough again. But they did not venture to lay hands upon him in the presence of the Housemaster of St. Jim's. And Mr. Carrington's expression showed that D'Arcy was booked for worse trouble than Mr. Joliffe's friends could provide him with.

"What does this mean, D'Arcy?" thundered the Housemaster.

"Gwooh!"

"What are you doing here? How dare you come here?"

"Gwooh!"

"You are well aware that this place is out of bounds. You shall answer for this to the Head!"

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Young reprobate, sir," said Mr. Joliffe, touching his hat to Mr. Carrington with an air of mock respect. "I'd be obliged to you, sir, if you'd take him away quiet. I does my best to keep my 'ouse quiet and respectable, and when a young gent comes into my billiard-room kickin' up a row——"

"You have no right to admit a schoolboy to your place," the Housemaster exclaimed angrily.

"Well, I like that!" said Mr. Joliffe, with righteous indignation. "I appeal to these 'ere gents, if that young feller didn't shove his way into my 'ouse, without so much as saying 'By your leave,' and make a row all on his own. I 'ad to arsk my friends 'ere to put him outside, he was that violent. Any gent as 'behaves hisself is welcome in my 'ouse, but I can't 'ave rowdies 'ere—I've got my licence to think of."

Mr. Carrington was almost pale with anger. To be read a lecture by the disreputable landlord of the Green Man was a little too much.

"All I asks, sir," pursued Mr. Joliffe victoriously, "is that you'll keep your young gents in horder, and not let 'em come kicking up a row in my public-'ouse. I'm a pore man, and I can't afford to risk my licence. I'd go a long way to oblige a 'igh-sperrited young gent, but I dror the line at a row in the billiard-room."

"Have you been in this man's billiard-room, D'Arcy?"

"Wow! Yaas."

"Did you make a quarrel there?"

"Ow! Yaas!"

"Disgraceful!" ejaculated Mr. Carrington. "Revolting. You shall suffer for this. Mr. Joliffe," continued the Housemaster, with a visible effort, "I apologise for the conduct of this boy in your house."

Mr. Joliffe waved his hand airily.

"Don't mention it, sir. It's jest wot I should 'ave expected from a gent like you, sir. I don't want to make no complaint, but, you see, there's my licence——"

"Exactly—yes—yes."

"You see, if my 'ouse gets a rowdy name, through the goings-on of your young gents, I might lose my licence," said Mr. Joliffe, with great enjoyment.

Mr. Carrington almost writhed with shame and rage. A St. Jim's junior to bring disgrace upon the lowest den of blackguards in all Sussex—Mr. Joliffe to be afraid of losing his licence owing to the conduct of a St. Jim's fellow—it was more than intolerable. Mr. Carrington's furious glare simply burned the unfortunate Arthur Augustus.

"Go back to the school at once, D'Arcy. I shall take you before the Head immediately I return!" he snapped.

"Bai Jove! I——"

"Not a word—go!" thundered Mr. Carrington.

"Hallo! What the deuce——" Tom Merry & Co. came up with a run. They had just arrived—a little late on the scene. The sight of Mr. Carrington on the spot struck them with dismay.

"Merry, take this boy back to the school immediately!" snapped Mr. Carrington, and, with a final black frown at Arthur Augustus, he walked away.

Tickey Tapp & Co. and Mr. Joliffe went back chuckling into the Green man, to celebrate their triumph. Certainly, Tickey Tapp's assailant seemed likely to suffer severely for his warlike visit to the Green Man.

Tom Merry & Co. drew Arthur Augustus away, Kangaroo wheeling his bike. The juniors were utterly dismayed.

"What have you been doing?" gasped Blake.

"I've been doin' my dutay," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I have been thwashin' Tickey Tapp."

"In that place!" howled Tom Merry.

"Yaas. I saw him in the billiard-woom, and went in for him."

"Oh, you idiot!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"And Carrington caught you," said Digby.

"Yaas. The wuffians wushed me out, and ducked me, and then Cawwington came up. That was wathah unfortunate."

"Rather unfortunate!" groaned Blake, "why, you thundering ass, you may be sacked for this. Oh, my aunt."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Better get on your bike and scorch it," said Kangaroo. "You're wet through—you'll be catching cold."

"Yaas, that's a good ideah."

Arthur Augustus jumped on his machine, and pedalled away. He was beginning to shiver, and he was certainly in danger of catching cold. Tom Merry & Co. followed him, in dismay and apprehension. What would happen to Arthur Augustus worried them terribly. What excuse could he offer for his conduct—for entering a disreputable den that was strictly out of bounds, and getting into a fight there with a gang of hooligans? It might mean the sack!

They arrived at the school in gloomy spirits. Talbot of the Shell was in the gateway, and he greeted them with an inquiring look.

"What's the matter with Gussy?" he asked. "He's just gone in, looking as if he'd been through a mangle, and wet to the skin."

Tom Merry explained glumly.

Talbot's eyes gleamed at the mention of the name of Tickey Tapp.

"So that rascal is there?" he said.

"Yes—he seems to have come back. Of course, we were going to rag the cad; but—but going into that public-house to tackle him—it was just like Gussy," groaned Tom Merry. "Goodness knows what will happen now."

"If Gussy explains what he went for——" began Blake.

"He must not mention Gore," said Talbot quickly.

"Oh, no! It's all Gore's fault, though," said Blake savagely. "The rotter deserves to get the boot."

"Well, Gore didn't ask us to chip in," said Tom Merry. "In fact, I fancy he's got his back up about our chipping in. We can't put it on Gore. But if Gussy blurts out something to the Head—and you know what an ass he is——"

"Let's go and see him," said Talbot.

They found Arthur Augustus in the Fourth-Form dormitory. He had changed his clothes, and was brushing his hair. The chums of the School House looked at him, and Arthur Augustus looked at them.

"Well, this is a go!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, it does seem wathah a go!" agreed D'Arcy calmly.

"Carrington will take you to the Head!"

"Yaas, he told me so."

"What are you going to say?"

"The Head is entitled to an explanation," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I twust that he will appwove of my conduct when I explain to him."

"Oh, my hat!"

"But if you mention Gore, that silly ass will be bowled out and sacked," said Manners.

"And the fellows will call it sneaking," said Herries.

"I twust, Hewwies, that you do not wegard me as capable of sneakin'," said Arthur Augustus, with chilling dignity.

"I regard you as capable of making a howling ass of yourself," said Herries, with a grunt.

"Weally, Hewwies——"

Toby the page put his head in at the door.

"Master D'Arcy 'ere?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"You are wanted in the 'Ead's study, Master D'Arcy."

"Vewy well."

"Perhaps we'd better go with the duffer," said Blake, looking doubtfully at his comrades.

"Wats! You would only put your foot in it, Blake. It will be all wight. The Head is an old sport, and he will undahstand perfectly."

"We'll all go," said Tom Merry resolutely.

"Wubbish! I wefuse to take you."

"Fathead! Come on," growled Tom Merry. "We'll see you through."

And, in spite of Arthur Augustus's objections—due to a fear that his chums would put their foot in it—the whole party accompanied him to the Head's study, to "see him through."

CHAPTER 6.
Before the Head.

"HOLD on a minute, you chaps!"

Gore of the Shell was in the passage. He stopped the juniors as they reached the stairs.

Gore's face was deadly pale, and there were beads of perspiration on his brow. His eyes had a wild look. In spite of themselves, the chums of the School House paused. They were not feeling amiable towards Gore at that moment. It was the wretched amateur blackguard of the Shell who was the cause of all the trouble. But his ghastly look almost alarmed them.

"What's the matter?" said Tom Merry. "We can't stop now; we've got to go to the Head. At least, D'Arcy has; and we're going with him."

"I—I must speak to you!" panted Gore. "There's something up. I—I saw Carrington speaking to the Head. They—they've found out something——"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"I—I——" To the astonishment of the juniors, Gore burst into a sudden flood of tears. "It's all up with me, I suppose. I—I'd better cut."

"Cut!" said Talbot.

Gore made a movement to go, but Talbot caught him by the arm and stopped him.

"Don't be an ass, Gore! What's the matter with you?"

"I—I thought you chaps might know what was up," groaned Gore. "I—I suppose—I know what it is, but—but——"

"It's nothing to do with you," said Blake.

"Not with me! How do you know?"

"It's Gussy!"

"D'Arcy! How could it be D'Arcy? Do you mean to say that they suspect D'Arcy?" Gore exclaimed, in a shrill, breaking voice.

"Suspect him!" said Blake, in wonder. "They know it! Carrington caught him."

"Caught him!" stuttered Gore.

"Yes, he came up just as those rotters chucked him out."

"What! I don't understand. What has D'Arcy been doing, then?"

"I went down to the Gween Man to give Tickey Tapp a feahful thwashin'," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "Unfortunately, Cawwington awwived on the scene."

Gore gave a sob of relief.

"Then—then it isn't——"

"Isn't what?" asked Tom Merry, wondering if Gore was losing his senses.

"N-n-nothing," stammered Gore—"nothing. M-my nerves are a bit out of order, that's all. Of course, you won't mention anything about my meeting Tickey Tapp the other day; you couldn't sneak about me."

"We're not likely to," said Tom Merry drily.

"You can wely on that, Goah. I wegard you as havin' acted like a wottah, but we certainly do not intend to betway you."

"Thanks!" muttered Gore. "It's all right. I know you won't!"

Gore hurried away, leaving the juniors wondering.

"I really believe that chap's going off his rocker," said Tom Merry soberly. "He ought to be seen to. Come on!"

They made their way to the Head's study. Tom Merry knocked, and the whole party marched in. Mr. Carrington was in the study with the Head, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth—D'Arcy's Form-master.

Dr. Holmes's brow was stern. He did not seem gratified by the invasion of eight juniors when he had sent for only one.

"I sent for D'Arcy!" he rapped out.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "But we——"

"All but D'Arcy leave the study at once."

The Head's tone was final, and the juniors had to obey. They retired from the study, and closed the door, and waited in the passage. That Arthur Augustus was the soul of honour, they knew; but they knew, too, that he might let Gore's name slip without intending to do so. And that meant nothing short of expulsion for the wretched black sheep of the Shell. And they were intensely anxious about D'Arcy himself. The fault he had committed was serious, though he did not seem to realise how serious it was. What view would the Head take of it?

The Head seemed to be taking an extremely severe view. His usually kind face was like thunder as he fixed his eyes upon Arthur Augustus.

D'Arcy stood before him quite erect and calm. He had done nothing to be ashamed of, and there was no shame on his noble countenance. He hoped that the Head would regard the matter as a "sport." But if the Head didn't, the swell of the Fourth was quite prepared to face the music.

"D'Arcy, you are aware that I have received a most serious report from your Housemaster. You have visited a disreputable place in Rylcombe which is strictly out of bounds. There you entered into a disgraceful disturbance with a party of low ruffians. The landlord of the place complained to Mr. Carrington that he considered his licence in danger, owing to the conduct of a boy belonging to this school—yourself. I am prepared to hear whatever explanation you have to offer. But I warn you that unless you satisfy me, I shall have no alternative but to send you away from the school."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus involuntarily.

"Your Form-master speaks highly of your character, D'Arcy, and from my own observation I have always regarded you as a lad of high principles. I am, therefore, prepared to listen to you with patience."

"Thank you, sir! I twust that I shall nevah give Mr. Lathom weason to change his opinion of me," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I admit that appeawances are against me, sir, but I hope to be able to convince you that I have done nothin' w'ong."

"You went to that public-house——"

"Yaas, sir."

"Knowing that it was out of bounds—"

"I had a vewy particulah weason, sir."

"That is no excuse. But what was your reason? I understand that you entered into a quarrel in the billiard-room. Were you playing billiards there?"

Talbot moved towards the door. Then Gore gave a cry. "Stop! I can't let you do it, Talbot! I can't let you take the risk! It's a shame—a rotten shame!" (See Chapter 11.)

"Gweat Scott! Playin' billiards at that wascally place! Weally, sir——"

"Then why did you go?"

"I went there to see Tickey Tapp."

"Who is he?"

"A wotten, low blackguard, sir—a fellow who plays cards for money, and gets sillay youngstahs to gamble with him."

The Head started.

"If this is your explanation, D'Arcy, you are hardly improving matters. Is it possible, D'Arcy, that you went there to gamble with this man?"

"Certainly not, sir. I wegard gamblin' as bad form. I have fwequently spoken to my eldah bwothah, old Conway, about playin' bwidge."

"Never mind your elder brother now," said the Head, his face relaxing a little, in spite of himself. "Why did you go to see this man, whom you describe yourself as a most objectionable character?"

"To thwash him, sir."

"What!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Lathom, blinking over his spectacles at his hopeful pupil.

"To—to thrash him!" said the Head. "Then Mr. Joliffe's complaint is well founded, that you made a disturbance in his house?"

"Certainly not, sir! I had no intention whatevah of makin' a disturbance. If Tickey Tapp had not acted like a beast I should have thwashed him and came away without makin' the slightest disturbance. But all the wottahs set on to me, and thwew me into the twough, and uttahly wuined my clobbah—I mean, my clothes."

"Never mind that, D'Arcy. It appears that you went to this public-house to assault a bad character there."

"That—that isn't exactly how I looked at it," said Arthur Augustus, rather dismayed at this way of puting it. "I was goin' to thwash the wascal, sir; and if you knew the weason I am quite suah you would appwove of it."

"Very well; tell me the reason. How did you come to be acquainted with this character in the first place?"

"I decline to admit that I am acquainted with him. I know the cad by sight, that is all, because I have seen him loafin' about."

"Then you have never had any dealings with him?" said the Head, evidently relieved.

"That would be quite imposs, sir. I twust you do not suppose that I am that kind of a wottah?"

"It is for you to prove that you are not that kind of boy, D'Arcy," said the Head severely. "Appearances are very much against you, and you have given no explanation at all so far. I presume you did not go there to assault this man Tapp because he is a bad character?"

"Oh, no, sir! I was wesolved to stop his twicks."

"His tricks! What tricks?"

"Gettin' sillay youngstahs to play cards with him, and gettin' them into twouble," said Arthur Augustus. "We all agweed to do it, sir. We collahed the wascal on the moor last week, and we ducked him, and warned him to cleah out."

"Bless my soul!"

"I told him quite plainly that, if he evah came near the school again, he would be thwashed. Now he has come back, so I went down to the Gween Man to thwash him."

The three old gentlemen looked at Arthur Augustus in silence. It was so evident that the junior was telling the truth that they could not doubt his explanation, extraordinary as it was. It was equally evident that he fully expected the master to approve of the line he had taken.

"And what right have you, D'Arcy, to take the law into your own hands in this manner?" said the Head at last.

"It weally seemed the only thing to be done, sir."

"Am I to understand, D'Arcy, that this man Tapp has dealings with some boy belonging to this school, and that this was the reason of your interference?"

"Of course, sir. Othahwise I should nevah have taken any notice of the fellow."

"Oh!" said the Head.

"I twust you are satisfied, sir? You see, that man is a dangewous wascal, and he might be the wuin of a sillay youngstah who got into his clutches," said Arthur Augustus, speaking as if he were seventy years old at least. "I wegarded is as my dutay to nip it in the bud."

"I believe you, D'Arcy."

"Thank you, sir! I expect you to accept my word, of course."

The Head coughed.

"But you have acted in a foolish, hot-headed, and reckless manner, with a complete disregard of the rules of the school——"

"Oh deah!"

"And I require you to give me at once the name of the boy who has been dealing with this man Tapp."

"Weally, Dr. Holmes——"

"I am quite prepared to believe that you acted in a quixotic manner in the interests of one of your schoolfellows, D'Arcy. But had you proof that you were not mistaken—that you had not, in short, discovered a mare's-nest?"

"I could hardly be mistaken, sir, when I found them together playin' cards."

"That certainly is proof positive. You found them playing cards—this man Tapp and a St. Jim's boy?"

"Yaas, sir."

"When was that?"

"Last Wednesday, sir."

"Who was the boy?"

Arthur Augustus was silent.

"You heard my question, D'Arcy?" said the Head, frowning.

"Yaas, sir."

"Then why do you not answer me?"

"It is quite imposs, sir, for me to give you the chap's name."

"D'Arcy!"

"It would be sneakin', sir. And, besides, I have given him my word not to say anythin' about it. If I should bweak my word, I should be as big a wascal as Tickey Tapp."

There was a long silence. The doctor's hand strayed towards his cane, but he withdrew it again. Mr. Lathom coughed. Mr. Carrington turned to the window, perhaps to hide a smile. Arthur Augustus stood, with his head erect, fearless of consequences. Dr. Holmes broke the silence at last:

"Very well, D'Arcy. You should not have made such a promise, but, since you have made it, I will not question you further upon that subject."

"Thank you, sir. I was suah you would look at it like that."

The Head coughed again. He hardly knew whether to smile or to give Arthur Augustus D'Arcy the licking of his life. Fortunately, he smiled.

"You will take a thousand lines, D'Arcy, and stay in for the next two half-holidays, as a punishment for your lawless conduct!"

"Oh deah!"

"But for my faith in your character, D'Arcy, I should hesitate to believe the extraordinary explanation you have given me. However, I believe you. You may go."

"Thank you, sir!"

Arthur Augustus quitted the study. The three masters looked at one another.

"Ahem! A—a most extraordinary boy!" murmured Mr. Lathom. "But the soul of honour—I am convinced of that."

"My opinion exactly," said Mr. Carrington. "But the boy who has been guilty of a serious fault—doubtless a boy in this House—must be discovered."

"Undoubtedly," said the Head. "I leave that in your hands, Mr. Carrington."

And the Housemaster nodded, with a very grim look.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mystery of George Gore.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY rejoined his chums, who were waiting anxiously in the passage. They greeted him with a volley of questions.

"Sacked?"

"Licked?"

"What's happened?"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "The Head is an old sport. Howevah, he has given me a thousand lines and gated me for two half-holidays. I don't exactly know why, but I didn't argue the point with him——"

"Ha, ha! Not, really?"

"No, deah boys; he did not look inclined to weason it out. Pewwaps I am wewy well out of the scwape, after all."

"Perhaps you are," said Talbot, laughing. "We can whack out the lines."

"Yes; that will only be a hundred or so each," said Blake. "Guessy's got off lighter than he deserved——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"And you didn't let slip anything about Gore?" asked Talbot.

"Of course not, you duffah. I simply explained that I thwashed Tickey Tapp for gettin' a St. Jim's chap to gamble with him. The Head was entitled to know that. But I wefused to mention names, and he let the mattah dwop, like an old sport."

"There'll be an investigation," said Tom Merry uneasily. "Now they know that, they'll be on the track."

"That's all wight. Goah has only got to hold his tongue and keep cleah of such things in the future."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And to-morrow, deah boys, we'll go and look for Tickey Tapp again——"

"What?"

"And if he's still heah, we'll wag him," said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"So you haven't had enough yet?" growled Herries.

"Not until that wascal is dwiven away," said Arthur Augustus. "I am convinced that Goah's wemarkable conduct to-day is due to him. Goah is a wottah; but in this mattah we are standin' up for him."

"You can leave Tickey Tapp to me," said Talbot quietly.

"Wats!"

"There's no need for any more ragging, I mean," said Talbot. "I have only to speak a word to him, and he'll go."

"Eh?"

The juniors regarded Talbot in astonishment. The

face of the handsome Shell fellow flushed under their gaze.

"I'm not talking out of my hat," he said; "I can do it, and I will do it. You remember I told you"—the Toff's flush deepened—"in the old days, when they called me the Toff—when I was what I'd like to forget now—I knew that man. I know enough about him to send him to prison for the next few years, and he knows it."

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry.

"I shall see him to-morrow and warn him to go," said Talbot. "If he does not go, I shall see that the police remove him. In either case, he won't trouble us any more."

Tom Merry slapped his chum on the shoulder.

"Ripping! That will settle Tickey Tapp!"

"Yaas, wathah! Under the circs, I am willin' to leave it to Talbot."

"We'll jolly well scrag you if you don't!" growled Blake.

"I should wefuse to be scwagged, Blake——"

"Oh, come and have tea, and dry up!" said Blake. "I've a jolly good mind to bump you bald-headed for nearly getting sacked and worrying your old pals till their hair turns grey. Shut up, and come and have tea!"

And the juniors proceeded to Study No. 6, greatly relieved by the way the matter had turned out. It was quite a merry tea-party, and there was a buzz of cheerful voices in the study when Gore's pale and harassed face looked in.

"Come in, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

Gore shook his head.

"I haven't come to tea. Is it right?"

"Wight as wain!"

"You—you didn't let my name slip?" faltered Gore.

"Wats! Of course not. But the Head knows that Tickey Tapp has been gamblin' with a St. Jim's chap now. You will have to be awf'ly decent aftah this, Gore. I hope it will not be too gweat a stwain on you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, Gore," said Tom Merry. "You've only got to keep clear of the fellow and nothing can come out."

"Keep clear of him," muttered Gore, with a ghastly look—"keep clear of him!"

Tom Merry rose to his feet. He drew Gore into the study, and closed the door. Gore was trembling.

"Look here!" said Tom. "You've got to keep clear of him or you're a goner. Carrington will be watching like a cat after this. Why can't you keep clear of him?"

Gore did not reply.

"Does this mean that you owe him money?"

No answer.

"If it does," said Tom Merry, "you can rely on us. We've taken a hand in this without asking your consent, and it's up to us to see you through. If you owe the man money, we'll raise it somehow, and you can get rid of him. Now, then——"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite appwove."

"Is it that, Gore?" demanded Blake.

"No."

"Then, what is it?"

"Nothing."

Gore opened the door and left the study without another word. The chums looked at one another uncomfortably.

"Blessed if I don't think the chap's mad," said Blake uneasily. "He can't be in his right senses to look like that. He gives me the creeps."

The juniors finished their tea less cheerfully. After tea Talbot went to his own study. Skimpole was there, deeply immersed in a learned volume on the subject of entomology—which was the latest "ology" the brainy man of the Shell had taken up.

"Seen Gore?" asked Talbot.

Skimpole blinked up over his glasses.

"Yes. He was very rude to me," he remarked. "I do not understand Gore at all lately, Talbot. His manners are dreadful. Do you know, I should almost think that Gore had something on his mind."

Talbot smiled slightly. That fact, which was beginning to be remarked upon by the whole House, was dawning upon Skimpole's mighty brain at last.

"I asked him if he was going to do his prep, and he said, 'Hang the prep!' and called me several impolite names," said Skimpole. "Seeing that his nerves were out of order, I offered to calm him by reading out a chapter of my book—a very interesting book about entomology. He pitched the book into the fender, Talbot. I really thought for a moment he would pitch me after it, and I was quite alarmed. Fortunately, he went out. If this goes on, I shall have to think seriously about changing into another study. Gore is really growing quite intolerable."

And Skimpole shook his head solemnly and sorrowfully.

Talbot sat down to his preparation and waited for Gore to come in. But Gore did not appear; neither was he in the common-room when Talbot went downstairs. He did not appear till bedtime, when he came in out of the dusky quadrangle, and went directly to his bed without a word to anyone.

Talbot gave him an anxious look in the dormitory, but Gore did not notice it. He was still very pale, and his eyes were feverish. All the Shell fellows were commenting on it—his fainting-fit of the afternoon had not been forgotten. The school doctor had called to see Gore after lessons, but it appeared that he was not ill. What was the matter with him was a mystery; but it was becoming a subject for general remark. The juniors were beginning to think that George Gore was going "off his rocker," as they expressed it.

Gore had turned in, in silence. His eyes seemed to be turning from his pillow with a strange, intent suspiciousness. If he caught an eye turned upon him, he scowled savagely and threateningly.

Monty Lowther happened to rest his hand upon the chair where Gore's jacket was folded, for a moment. There was a sudden exclamation from Gore.

"Let my jacket alone!"

Lowther spun round in astonishment.

"Eh? What's the row?"

"Don't touch my jacket, hang you!" shouted Gore, sitting up in bed. "Let it alone!"

Lowther stared at him, and burst into a chuckle.

"I'm not after your smokes, Gore, old chap," he said. "I wouldn't touch 'em with a barge-pole—honour bright! Gentlemen, anybody want a smoke before going to bed?" added Lowther, taking up Gore's jacket, and holding it aloft.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore made a single bound from his bed, and clutched the jacket from Lowther with one hand, and dealt him a savage blow with the other.

The blow was so unexpected that it stretched Lowther on the floor of the dormitory. He gave a yell of surprise and rage.

"Why, you cad——"

"Let my things alone," hissed Gore.

Lowther sprang up furiously. He made a jump at Gore, and the next moment they were hitting out furiously.

"Cave!" sang out Clifton Dane. Kildare of the Sixth came into the dormitory to see lights out.

"What's that row? Stop it, you young sweeps," exclaimed Kildare angrily. "Take a hundred lines each."

The two combatants separated, panting.

"All serene, your Highness!" said Lowther breathlessly.

"Get into bed—sharp!" said Kildare.

The Shell fellows turned in. Gore took a pocket-book from his jacket, and placed it under his pillow, apparently for safety. Lowther's eyes blazed as he saw the action. He understood now the cause of Gore's sudden fury.

Kildare put the light out and left the dormitory. Then Monty Lowther's voice was heard from his bed.

"Gore, you sneaking cad——"

Gore did not answer.

"Did you think I was going to touch your pocket-book, you skulking worm?" shouted Lowther. "By Jove! I'll——"

"Oh, go to sleep," said Tom Merry.

"Did you see what the cad did?" howled Lowther. "Putting his pocket-book under his pillow, because I

picked up his jacket? Does he think I was going to steal it? The rotten, gambling cad! If you're not a funk as well as a sneaking cad, Gore, get up, and I'll——"

No word came from George Gore. Lowther's indignant voice rang through the dormitory.

"Chuck it, Lowther," murmured Talbot, "the chap isn't well——"

"Must be mad, I think," said Lowther, with a snort. "The sooner they take the silly lunatic away to an asylum the better."

And as Gore refused to be drawn, Lowther snorted again with indignation, and settled down to sleep. The Shell fellows dropped into slumber one by one, but there was one fellow who did not sleep. Through the long, weary hours of the night, George Gore's sleepless, burning eyes looked dully into the darkness.

CHAPTER 8.

Under a Suspicion!

GEORGE GORE turned up at classes as usual the next day.

Some of the fellows had expected that he would be sent into the sanatorium. It was plain to all eyes that he was not himself; though what could be the matter with him was a puzzle. He was not ill in body—Dr. Short had found nothing the matter with him. He seemed in a run-down state, that was all. If Gore had been "swotting" hard for an examination, it would not have caused surprise, but Gore was doing nothing of the sort. It was not in his line to "swot" by any means. That he had some trouble on his mind seemed clear; but Mr. Linton had questioned him, kindly enough, and Gore had stated sullenly that he was just the same as usual, only feeling a bit run-down. It did not seem clear what trouble the junior could have on his mind—and Gore flatly denied the suggestion, when his Form-master questioned him. During the morning Mr. Linton glanced several times at Gore a little oddly, but spared him the Form work. Gore did scarcely anything all day. It was a relief he was thankful for, for he could not put his mind into lessons.

After morning lessons, when the Shell fellows were dismissed, Mr. Linton made a sign to Gore to remain behind when the rest of the Form filed out. Gore stopped at the Form-master's desk sullenly.

"I hope you are feeling better to-day, Gore," said Mr. Linton, in a tone of unaccustomed kindliness.

"I'm all right, sir."

"Now, I am going to speak plainly to you, Gore," said Mr. Linton. "When I spoke to you before I asked you whether you had anything weighing on your mind."

"What could I have, sir?" said Gore.

"I do not quite see, but I am aware that a Form-master does not see everything," replied Mr. Linton. "I should like my boys to regard me as a friend as well as a master. You have perhaps some little money troubles. I advanced you fifteen shillings to pay for your new bat last week——"

"I—I shall have that next Saturday, sir."

"That is of little moment, Gore. You may have contracted some small debt carelessly and thoughtlessly, in a similar way. It would be foolish to do so, but it is not a crime. If that is the case, tell me the whole matter, and we will see what is to be done."

Gore looked at Mr. Linton in surprise. He had never expected kindness from the somewhat cold and severe master of the Shell.

"You are very kind, sir," the junior faltered, "I—I'd tell you at once, sir, but it's all right. I don't want money."

"Very well! It is not that. Now, Gore, I will mention another matter. It appears that a boy in this school, at present unknown, has had dealings with a certain rescally sharper named Tapp——"

Gore set his teeth hard together.

"The Housemaster has acquainted all the masters and prefects with the matter, in the hope of discovering the foolish and reckless lad. I think I may say more, Gore, that if the boy in question should make a frank confession to the Head, he would find Dr. Holmes lenient. Need I say more?"

"I—I don't understand you, sir."

"I will make my meaning clearer. You have been in a state that has attracted general attention for some days, without any apparent cause. It appears to be due to some matter weighing on your mind. If you have been guilty of foolish conduct, I can well believe that remorse would trouble you. If you have done wrong, I am quite prepared to believe that you have repented, and I can answer for it that the Head would take a lenient view, upon the representations I should make to him. I ask you to answer me frankly, Gore, for your own peace of mind."

"I've nothing to tell you, sir."

"To be quite plain, are you the boy who is known to have had dealings with this man Tapp?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Linton eyed him narrowly. Gore was looking pale and harassed, but he had been looking like that for days past, especially since the fainting scene in the Form-room the previous afternoon.

"If you have anything on your mind, Gore, that it would be better to confess, you had better speak out."

"I have nothing, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Linton. "I must accept your assurance, Gore. I must attribute your very peculiar conduct to your personal health, I suppose. You are certainly not in a fit state to attend to your lessons. If you like, it could be arranged for you to go home for a few days for a change."

"I should like that, sir," said Gore, brightening up a little.

"Very well. I will speak to the Head, and you may take the afternoon train."

Gore started.

"This afternoon! Oh, no!"

"What do you mean? You have said that you wished to go."

"I—I thought you meant to-morrow, sir," stammered Gore.

"You would rather wait till to-morrow?" said the Form-master, puzzled. "I understand you less than ever, Gore. You are certainly a very strange boy!"

"I—I'd rather not go, now I think of it," said Gore, his face flushing. "My—my pater doesn't care much about me at home, and—and he won't be very glad to see me in the middle of the term. I—I'd rather not go, thank you, sir."

"Very well, Gore," said Mr. Linton.

And Gore left the Form-room.

Gore's last words, concerning his pater, had moved the Form-master. He had seen Mr. Gore, and he understood that the junior might not be keen to face that exceedingly grim and hard-fisted old gentleman if he could help it. Mr. Gore was a Roman parent, and a devoted believer in the ancient barbarous maxim about sparing the rod. Mr. Gore had never run any risk of spoiling his child by sparing the rod—rather the reverse. It was just possible that some of George Gore's unpleasant traits were due to the grim severity of the Roman parent.

Mr. Linton remained for some time in thought. As soon as he had heard of the unknown St. Jim's fellow who had been in difficulties with Tickey Tapp, he had thought of Gore. Remorse for wrong-doing and fear of the consequences would have caused the strange change in the Shell fellow undoubtedly. And Mr. Linton was not wholly satisfied by Gore's denial. Yet, if the boy had a fault to confess, mere prudence should have made him confess it at a moment when he was secure of being dealt with leniently; he must have seen that that would be better for him than risking discovery and condign punishment. Mr. Linton could not make it out, but he resolved to keep a very keen eye on George Gore.

Gore "mooched" off by himself when he escaped from the Form-room. He was not seen again till dinner-time, and immediately after dinner he disappeared once more. He had fallen into the habit of taking solitary walks, apparently brooding over his secret trouble, whatever it was.

He came in to afternoon classes a minute or two after

the rest, and took his place without any remark from Mr. Linton on his unpunctuality. He was spared lessons, for the most part, the Form-master showing him every consideration. The Shell fellows were surprised at seeing Mr. Linton in this new light. They had never supposed that there were kindly human feelings under that cold and severe exterior.

During the afternoon the Head came in for a few minutes to speak to Mr. Linton. Several of the fellows who were near Gore noticed that his face became white, and a hunted look came into his eyes. He sat with his eyes fixed upon the Head, with terror in his look, as the old gentleman chatted with the Form-master. Tom Merry tapped him on the arm.

"What's the matter, Gore?" he whispered. "Buck up, for goodness' sake! The Head will spot you!"

Gore looked at him stupidly, and made a visible effort to pull himself together. A feverish shudder ran through him from head to foot.

He gave almost a sob of relief when the Head left the Form-room. The Terrible Three exchanged glances. Why had the sight of Dr. Holmes filled Gore with that sudden, unmistakable fear? He must have supposed, for the moment, that the Head's visit was in connection with him. But why? And why should it scare him to that extent?

The juniors realised that Gore was in deeper waters than they had dreamed, though the mystery baffled them. But even Monty Lowther, who had not forgotten the incident in the dormitory, and naturally resented it, felt his resentment die away now. What had Gore done?

Lessons ended at last, and Gore went to his study. Talbot paused in the passage to speak to the Terrible Three.

"Will you fellows ask Skimmy something about entomology?" he asked.

"What the dickens for?" demanded Lowther. "If we start him he'll never stop."

Talbot smiled.

"I want him kept out of the study for a bit. I'm going to speak to Gore."

"Oh, all serene!"

"Something ought to be done for that chap," said Tom Merry. "I can't say I like him very much, personally, but he's in a rotten state. I can't help thinking that he's done something—something awfully serious. He was like a sheet when the Head came in."

"I noticed it," said Talbot quietly.

"We've all asked him, and offered to help him out," said Manners. "He won't say a word. I'd be glad to lend a hand, if we could do anything. Blessed if I don't believe his brain's turning!"

"I should not be surprised if it were," said Talbot. "But he's not a bad chap, in the main, and I want to see him through, if it can be done."

"He's been more decent since you came here," said Tom. "You seem to have a good influence, Talbot, old chap. It's the same with Levison."

"Rather a compliment for the Toff!" said Talbot, with a grim smile.

"Talbot——"

"But it's because of that that I think he may speak to me, when he wouldn't to anybody else," said Talbot quickly. "I've been through things that you fellows haven't, and—and, if Gore's made some awful bloomer, he may tell me; he may know that I should understand him better. Whatever he's done, it can't be worse than what I've done in the old days."

"Don't speak of that."

"I wouldn't, Tom, only I meant to explain why Gore may have confidence in me. He won't expect me to be shocked and disgusted as you fellows would be, rightly enough. Keep Skimpole on entomology for a bit."

"Right-ho!"

During the next half-hour Skimpole of the Shell had the time of his life. Three fellows, who had never betrayed the slightest interest before in his scientific pursuits, listened to Skimpole on entomology with grave and devoted attention, hanging to the words that flowed, polysyllabically, from Skimpole's learned lips.

CHAPTER 9.
Gore's Secret.

TALBOT entered the study, and closed the door behind him.

Gore was seated, or, rather, huddled, in the armchair, his gaze fixed before him, dully and unseeingly. He glanced at Talbot as he came in without interest. There were thick beads of perspiration on the junior's brow.

Talbot sat on the corner of the table, and regarded him. Gore's look would have touched a harder heart than Talbot's. And Talbot had an understanding of the wretched boy which his chums could not be expected to have. The Toff, trained up from early youth among criminals, a cracksman himself until the awakening came in his life, was not likely to be hard in his judgments upon anybody. Since the day when the light had come to him, when he had thrown his old life behind for ever, the Toff had been as straight as a die. The past seemed to him like some black and evil dream. But it had left him with a sympathy and understanding for weaker natures.

"Gore, old chap"—Talbot's voice was very quiet, almost affectionate—"Gore, this won't do. Won't you let me help you out?"

"You can't help me," said Gore dully.

"This can't go on," said Talbot. "You're getting the attention of the whole House fixed on you. Even some of the New House chaps have noticed it."

Gore gave a hard laugh.

"I know. It's my luck. I meant to keep up a good face on it; not to show a sign. And I couldn't. I can see now that the game's up. Everybody's wondering what's the matter with me. When it's found out, they'll think of me at once. They're sure to."

"When what's found out?"

"I dare say you'll know soon enough. I wish I was dead!" groaned Gore, letting his face fall into his hands.

"I think I can help you," said Talbot.

"You can't! Nobody can help me."

"I'll tell you something, Gore. Of course, I can guess all this is in connection with that scoundrel Tickey Tapp."

"I dare say the whole House knows that, or guesses it," said Gore bitterly. "Oh, what a fool I've been!"

"You know something about my past, Gore; all the fellows do," went on Talbot quietly. "You know that I was brought up among a gang of thieves, and never chucked it over till I came to this school. That I should be hunted now, if I had not been granted the King's pardon. You know that, Gore."

"I know," said Gore. "You're different from me. You never had a chance, and you made one for yourself. I've every chance, and I've ended where you began."

"So bad as that?" said Talbot.

"Yes!" said Gore desperately; "so bad as that! I know you'd help me if you could, Talbot, though deuce knows why. We've never been specially friendly. Still, I never was down on you as some of the chaps were at first."

"And I haven't forgotten that, Gore. I want to help you. And I think I can. I was going to tell you in the den where I used to meet the gang, the rookery in Angel Alley, Tickey Tapp used to come sometimes. I knew him then, a little."

"You knew him?"

"Yes. And I know enough about him to send him to prison, if I choose. Last week I met him near the school, and knew what his game was here. I warned him that he had to go, or else I would see that the law had its due. He went; but he has come back. I am going to see him again to-day, and finish with him. Now, I've guessed what's the matter, Gore. You lost your money to him the other day——"

"Yes."

"And gave him I O U's for more?"

Gore nodded.

"I've been thinking it out," said Talbot, "and I concluded that it was that. You are afraid of the use he may make of your paper. Well, I can get it back for you. No need for you to pay him what he's swindled

you out of. A good sum, I dare say. I can make him give me your paper, and leave this neighbourhood for good."

"You can do that?"

"Yes; quite easily. You have only to give me a description of the paper, and I will see that he hands it over. He will choose that or arrest. And I know him well enough to know which he will choose," said Talbot. "You needn't have any scruples about not paying him. He has cheated you."

"Well, he couldn't have," said Gore. "You see, I didn't wholly trust him, and I took my own cards, a new pack; not marked, you know."

Talbot laughed.

"Poor old chap! You're not quite up to the form of a rascal like that. Before the cards had been in his hands ten minutes he had marked all the court cards."

"How could he do that?"

"With his thumbnail. It's an old trick."

"I—I never thought of anything like that. I—I never heard of such a thing. How do you know——"

"I know a good many things, Gore, that you're jolly lucky not to know," said the Toff quietly; "and that you may pray that you never will know. As for this special trick with cards, I've caught Tickey Tapp playing it when I played with him myself, in the old days."

"The villain!" said Gore. "Oh, the awful rascal! He—he made out that I was swindling him, because—because I hadn't the money to pay on my paper. And—and I suppose he was swindling me all the time."

"He plays to win," said Talbot. "That's his business. And he could hardly live upon losses, could he? You needn't pay him a cent. Let him keep the cash he got out of you if you like. But if you paid him anything you would be an idiot. Leave it to me to get the papers back, and see you clear. And I guarantee that you shall never see the rotter again. He'll go after I've talked to him."

Gore groaned.

"Doesn't that see you clear?" exclaimed Talbot.

"No."

"But—but why——"

"I've got to see him to-day, to take him fifteen pounds——"

"Where?"

"At the old hut on the moor, at six."

Talbot's brow grew stern.

"I will go instead of you, Gore. And I promise you that I will bring your paper back, and that Tickey Tapp will never trouble you again. Surely that will see you clear."

"It's too late."

"I don't catch on. If you mean you haven't the money, that doesn't matter. There's no money needed."

"I've got the money," faltered Gore.

"You've got fifteen pounds?"

"Yes," groaned Gore.

Talbot drew a deep, deep breath. He understood it all at last. It was clear to him now, the position in which the wretched junior was placed.

"The money isn't your own, then, Gore?"

Gore nodded wretchedly.

"Then, thank Heaven, I've spoken to you in time!" said Talbot fervently. "You were mad to take it, Gore. But you've been half out of your senses, and if you put it back again you needn't reproach yourself too much. Put it back at once where you took it from."

"I can't."

"Oh, yes, you can. It can't have been missed yet, or there would have been a row about it. It's not been missed."

"Not yet," said Gore. "Oh, I've been in fear of it every hour—every minute. When the Head came into the Form-room, I thought——" He shuddered. "When Lowther touched my jacket last night—— You understand? Suppose he'd seen it? Suppose anybody knew I had it——"

"I understand," said Talbot, gently enough.

"I've hidden it a lot of times," said Gore wretchedly, "stuck it into corners for safety, and then it haunted me. I—I was afraid somebody might find it, and then I shouldn't have the money to pay Tickey Tapp, after making myself a thief to get it. So I always went and fetched it again. I've got it in my pocket now. Eighteen pounds! It's more than I needed, but I just grabbed it, you know. He—he said—Tickey Tapp, you know—he said I could get the money somehow. He said there were a lot of fellows here with money, and I could——"

"The villain!" said Talbot.

"But—but I never meant to—I swear I didn't! I couldn't! I'm not a thief!" said Gore, in a husky whisper. "I'm not; I never meant to be. But there was the money under my very eyes all of a sudden. I—I think I must have gone dotty for a minute. I whipped away with it, and after that it was too late. But I swear I never really meant to steal."

"Of course you didn't," said Talbot, touched to the heart by the misery and remorse in the unhappy boy's face. "I know how you feel, Gore, because I've been through it. There are things in my life I'd give my right hand to undo. But if I get you out of this fix, that's something towards making up. All you've got to do is to put it back."

"I can't, I tell you."

"Why not?"

"It can't be put back. It's impossible!"

CHAPTER 10.

Too Late!

THERE was a long silence in the study.

Gore's face had fallen into his hands, and he was sobbing, with dry sobs that shook him from head to foot. If ever a foolish transgressor repented of his wrong-doing, George Gore repented now. The suffering he had gone through for the past few days had been a punishment as great as his crime. And now that help had come—when he was offered a way out—it was too late!

Too late!

Talbot's face was very grave now. He had undertaken to help the wretched junior, and he realised for the first time the extent of his self-imposed task. But he would not give up.

In the old days the Toff, the prince of cracksmen, had never wanted for courage and determination. And he had not lost those those qualities in his new life.

"Tell me all about it, Gore," he said at last. "You're not in a state to think it out. You're upset—jolly near in a fever. I dare say I could manage it for you. I'd do anything I could."

"It can't be done."

"Whose is the money?"

"The Head's. I got it last Thursday. It's nearly driven me mad since then," said Gore hoarsely. "I'd have made up my mind to chance it with Ticky Tapp if I could have put the money back, but I couldn't."

"Where did you get it, then?"

"From the safe."

Talbot started.

"You must be dreaming, Gore. You could not have opened the safe."

"Of course I couldn't," said Gore. "It was open. Don't you remember—last Thursday—I cheeked Linton, and he sent me with a note to the Head for a licking? I—I came back and apologised to Linton, and nobody knew I'd been to the Head's study at all."

Arthur Augustus dropped his eyeglass, and pushed back his cuffs. "Are you going?" he asked. "Am I going, pals?" asked Tickey Tapp, appealing to his friends. "Haw, haw, haw!" "Then put up your hands, you wottah." (See Chapter 4.)

"I remember," said Talbot. "Do you mean to say that you did go to his study, after all?"

"Yes. I lied," said Gore, with desperate frankness. "Lies come pretty easy when a fellow's done worse. I had been in the study. The Head wasn't there. He must have opened his safe to put something in—there was a registered letter lying on his desk that he'd just opened—then I suppose he was called suddenly out of the study. Anyway, he wasn't there, and the safe door was unlocked. It was rotten careless of him. He had no right to be careless like that," muttered Gore, with a miserable attempt at self-justification. "He'd no right to tempt a chap——" He broke off again. "But it's no good talking. I oughtn't to have touched the safe. I shouldn't have thought of doing it, you know; only just then, while I was waiting, and the Head never came back, it came into my mind what Tickey Tapp had said; and then he was going to show my paper to the Head if I didn't pay up, and get me sacked out of revenge, the beast! I—I thought there was lots of money in the safe. I just had a look. I—I think I was mad then. I—I saw the bundles of currency notes. I—I——" Gore stammered incoherently. "Oh, what a beast I was—what a beast! But I was nearly mad with fear of what that villain would do if I didn't pay him. I collared the notes, and cleared out."

Talbot was silent.

"Then I seemed to get calm," said Gore. "I don't know how—a sort of coolness. I felt that I was such a villain, it didn't matter any more. I went into the quad for a bit, and then came back and buttered up Linton, and nobody knew I'd been in the Head's study at all. I only had to keep a good face on it, and I thought I was safe enough. But I couldn't keep a good face on it, you know. It's nearly driven me mad. All the fellows have noticed there's something up with me. I can't help it."

He broke off with a sob.

"You see, I—I ain't really a thief. I can't stand it. Every time a chap looks at me I think he's spotted me. I haven't been able to sleep at night. If I could have put it back, I'd have done it and chanced it; but, you see, I couldn't. I can't open the safe. The Head wouldn't be likely to leave it open another time, you know. I—I've sneaked into his study two or three times to see if—if he had, but it was no go. Of course he wouldn't."

Talbot's face was grim. His heart ached for the wretched junior. He understood the sufferings that had followed that moment of madness.

The matter was worse than he had dreamed. The junior had taken money that did not belong to him under the threats of the card-sharper, and he had taken it from a place where it could not be returned. He had repented, but his repentance came too late—not because

he had kept or used the stolen money, but simply because the iron door of the safe barred the way.

"The Head hasn't missed it yet," went on Gore huskily, "but it may come any day. When he does, of course there'll be a row, and every fellow in the House will guess what's the matter with me. They'll know. I ain't a criminal. I can't keep it up. If I'd been able to put a good face on it I might have been safe enough. But I couldn't. I've felt as if my brain would turn thinking of it. That's why I went off into a faint yesterday. I'm not the fainting sort—you know that. But it's driven me wild."

Talbot pressed his hand to his brow.

What could be done?

There seemed no way out. Even the Toff, cool and clear-headed and resourceful, was beaten.

Gore looked at him, with a haggard face. He read the hopeless perplexity in Talbot's looks.

"You can't help me," he said. "I told you you couldn't. It wasn't any good telling you about it, though it does make me feel easier to tell somebody. I wonder the Head hasn't missed the money. I suppose he had set it aside for some account, and it's not due yet or something. But he may miss it any day. And I can't put it back—I can't put it back!"

He broke off, with a groan.

"I knew you couldn't help me. I'm past help—I told you that when I spoke to you before. It must come out, and they'll know it was me. And I daren't go home—my father's as hard as iron. If I disgraced him, he wouldn't take me in very likely. I shall have to run away. I wish I'd gone before. I'd better go before it comes out. Don't you think so?"

Talbot shook his head.

"What's the good of staying, to be arrested perhaps?" said Gore. "I tell you, they'll know it was me. Don't you think they will?"

"Well, yes. You've given yourself away plainly enough," said Talbot. "Besides, they might suspect somebody else—and they—I think you'd own up."

"I—I thought of that, too," said Gore miserably. "I thought they might suspect you, Talbot——"

"I?" exclaimed Talbot, with a start.

"Because you can open safes, you know, and all that. But—if you'd been suspected, I would have owned up. I—I think I would."

Talbot looked at him very curiously.

"This will want thinking out, Gore," he said abruptly. "I'll get off now and see Tickey Tapp, and settle with him, or I shall miss him—the time's getting on. I'll see you when I come back."

"Do you know what came into my head yesterday—when I was queer in the Form-room?" said Gore huskily.

"What?" asked Talbot.

"The pond—that pond on the moor where the fellows ducked Tickey Tapp. I—I thought of that—as the way out."

"Don't think of anything of the sort," said Talbot sharply.

"It's that, or running for it."

"There may be some way out," said Talbot. "Wait till I come back—I may be able to think of a way. I've been in tight corners before, and I've always come out of them. Leave it to me, and pull yourself together."

"You can't help me."

"I'm going to try." Talbot slipped from the table. "Wait till I come back."

"Hold on!" said Gore hurriedly. "I—I say, you won't say a word? I've trusted you—you made me tell you——"

"Of course I sha'n't say a word."

"You promise? I know you'll keep your word."

"You could trust me without that, Gore—but I promise."

"You see, I mightn't be suspected after all; or—or the Head might leave his safe open one day, and I might have a chance of putting it back—you never know."

"No one shall know anything from me, Gore."

Gore nodded; he knew that Talbot's word was sacred.

"Keep your pecker up," said Talbot. "You'll be rid of Tickey Tapp, anyway, and have your paper back. And I'll find a way out for you—somehow."

Talbot quitted the study, leaving a ray of hope in the breast of the wretched Gore. The Toff hurried down the stairs. The Terrible Three met him in the hall.

"Well?"

"I've got to go out," said Talbot. "You fellows can come if you like, I'm going to finish with Tickey Tapp."

"Hear, hear!"

The chums hurried for the bicycles, and in a few minutes they were speeding away to the moor, to keep the appointment Tickey Tapp had made with Gore of the Shell.

CHAPTER 11.
The Only Way!

TICKEY TAPP was smoking a big black cigar in the old shepherd's hut on the moor, and waiting. It was close on six, the hour of his appointment. At that hour, George Gore was to arrive with fifteen pounds for the card-sharper, or take the consequences. Tickey Tapp had very little doubt that his victim would bring the money.

There was a clattering of bicycles outside the old hut, and Tickey Tapp started to his feet. Four juniors appeared in the doorway.

Tickey Tapp changed colour a little as he saw Talbot.

"Toff! You!" he ejaculated.

"Yes," said Talbot.

"Quite a 'appy meeting," said Tickey Tapp, recovering himself a little. "We'll 'ave to talk over old times, and these young gents can 'ear."

"I haven't come to talk to you," said Talbot. "I've come here instead of Gore."

Tickey Tapp looked very unpleasant.

"So the young 'ound has told you about it?"

"Yes; I made him."

"He'll be sorry for it, Toff."

"He will not be sorry for it," said Talbot. "You swindled him the other day of all his money, and made him sign I O U's. You've threatened to send them to Dr. Holmes, and get him expelled, unless he pays you fifteen pounds to-day."

The Terrible Three understood.

"So that's what was the matter with Gore?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Poor beast!" said Manners, "where was he to get fifteen pounds from?"

"This scoundrel advised him to steal it," said Talbot.

"The hound!"

"No wonder Gore has been looking pretty sick," said Monty Lowther; "we really ought to have guessed it was something of the kind."

"Luckily, we know now," said Talbot. "Tickey Tapp, I've come here for the papers Gore gave you."

"Got the money?" sneered Tickey Tapp.

"Not a farthing."

"Then you don't 'andle my property. Let me pass!"

The Terrible Three drew together in the doorway. Tickey Tapp was not to pass just yet. They had not done with him.

"You'll hand me those papers, and you'll get out of this neighbourhood to-night, Tickey Tapp," said Talbot calmly.

"And if I don't?"

"If you don't, we will collar you now, and march you straight to the nearest police-station, where I shall lodge information against you."

The card-sharper gritted his teeth.

"And that's my old pal the Toff!" he said. "That's the Toff, the prince of cracksmen—the young thief who was cracking cribs for thousands, while I was making a pound at a time with the cards."

Tom Merry clenched his hands. Talbot made him a sign to keep back.

"Are you giving me those papers, Tickey Tapp?" he asked.

Tickey Tapp spat out an oath.

"You know I've got to. You know you've got me by the short hairs. But if my chance comes some day, I'll make you sorry for this, Toff."

"Give me the papers."

Tickey Tapp sullenly produced the I O U's, and

handed them over. Talbot examined them carefully; he was on his guard against trickery. He handed them to the Terrible Three, to make sure.

"That's Gore's fist, right enough," said Tom Merry. "No mistake about that."

Talbot nodded, and took the two papers again, and slipped them into his pocket.

"Gore would like to destroy these with his own hands," he remarked. "It would make him feel safer. Tickey Tapp, you're leaving Rylcombe by the train this evening. You understand?"

"I know what I've got to do," said Tickey Tapp; "but I'll remember this, Toff. You got the King's pardon, did you? Yes, that was a move just like you, Toff—just like you in the old days. Always an artful card, the Toff. There'll be a surprise at the school some day—wot?—when the Toff clears off with what's in the safe. What are you waiting for, Toff? Why haven't you done it yet?"

"You had better go," said Talbot.

"Yes, I'll go," said Tickey Tapp venomously. "But I'll remember this when you've cleared out the old gent's safe and mizzled, Toff. I'll 'ave you then, like you've got me now, and I'll 'ave no mercy on you."

"Will you go?"

"I'm going."

"You're not going till you've had a hiding, you rotten scoundrel!" said Tom Merry, his eyes blazing with rage. "Don't stop me, Talbot; I tell you I'll smash him! Put up your hands, Tickey Tapp! You fellows keep back! This isn't a rag; this is a fight, and I'm going to lick him."

Tom Merry rushed at the card-sharper, hitting out. Tickey Tapp put up his hands promptly enough; but they did not serve him very much. The sturdy junior, quivering with indignation and anger, was too much for the flabby rascal. Tickey Tapp was knocked right and left.

After a couple of minutes, a sweeping right-hander hurled him into the corner of the hut, where he lay gasping.

"That's enough," said Talbot. "Come on!"

Tom Merry panted.

"The beast! He isn't half licked yet. But let's get out of this, he makes me sick!"

Talbot gave the groaning rascal a last look.

"I shall make inquiries to-morrow, Tickey Tapp. If you are in Rylcombe, or anywhere in this district, you know what to expect."

Tickey Tapp replied with a curse.

Talbot followed the Terrible Three from the hut. The four juniors remounted their bicycles and bumped over the rough track across the moor.

"That settles him, I think," said Monty Lowther. "He'll be gone to-morrow."

"I am quite sure of it," said Talbot.

"And Gore will be a bit easier in his mind," said Tom Merry. It was his own fault, but a chap can't help feeling sorry for the poor beast. I'm glad it's all over."

Talbot did not reply.

The Terrible Three deemed the matter at an end now, and they were glad it was all over. But it was very far from being all over. But Talbot could not tell even his best chums the terrible secret Gore had confided to him. That had to remain locked up in his own breast. If a way out was found no one but Talbot would ever know; and if a way was not found, there was no need for Talbot to speak—all St. Jim's would know soon enough.

The juniors rode back to St. Jim's, three of them at least feeling quite satisfied in their minds. The Terrible Three wheeled the bicycles away, and Talbot hurried into the School House.

He found Gore huddled in the armchair, as he had left him. The amiable Skimpole was there, talking to Gore. He was trying to cheer him up a little. Gore did not hear a word.

"Skimmy, old man, will you do the shopping for tea?" asked Talbot.

"Certainly, my dear Talbot."

Here's a bob; put another to it——"

"Unfortunately, I gave my last coin to an unfortunate tramp this afternoon. The poor man complained dreadfully of thirst," said Skimpole. "I offered him a healthy draught of water, but he told me his medical man had specially ordered him never to touch water. So I gave him a shilling to purchase milk."

"Well, here's another," said Talbot. "Buzz off, there's a good chap!"

"Certainly. Do you know, Talbot, Levison declared that the poor man would not purchase milk, but some intoxicating liquor with my shilling. I thought that was very suspicious of Levison; don't you?"

"Awfully!" said Talbot. "Cut off!"

The good Skimmy cut off at last. Talbot closed the door after him. Gore gave him a hopeless look.

Talbot placed the two I O U's in his hand.

"Tickey Tapp is gone," he said; "you're hear nothing more of him. Better burn those papers at once."

He lighted a match. Gore held the two papers in the flame, and they were shrivelled up. But the destruction of the fatal paper did not bring a ray of light to Gore's face. He was rid of the card-sharper. Tickey Tapp's power over him was gone; but his own act barred off all hope.

"Thank you, Talbot!" he said dully. "If that had happened last Wednesday I should be out of it. If I'd had sense enough to tell you then! But how could I know you'd be able to chip in like this? I couldn't know. It's too late now. And—and I can't stand it any longer, Talbot. I'm going."

"Home?" asked Talbot.

Gore shuddered.

"And face my father? No fear!"

"Where, then?" asked Talbot quietly.

Gore made a restless gesture.

"Anywhere, to get out of this. I don't care if I starve on the road. I must get out of this, if I'm not to go mad!"

Talbot set his lips.

"There's a chance, Gore," he said. "I told you I'd think it over. I've thought it over. The money must be put back."

"It can't be; the safe is always kept locked. I've told you——"

"You forget," said Talbot, with a somewhat bitter smile, "I can do things that you can't do, Gore. You're talking to a fellow who used to be called the prince of cracksmen."

Gore gave a violent start.

"Talbot! You—you could; you would?"

"To save you, yes," said Talbot steadily. "I can open the safe, without leaving a trace to show it; and I must find an opportunity."

"But the risk!" panted Gore. "Suppose they spotted you opening the Head's safe? Talbot—Talbot, they'd think——"

Talbot's lips twitched for a moment.

"They'd think the Toff had broken out with a vengeance," he said. "I've got to run that risk, Gore."

"You'll do that for me?" muttered Gore brokenly. But there was a flush in his white face now; a new light in his eyes. There was hope in his heart.

"Isn't it the only way?"

"Yes, I know; but the fearful risk!"

"I shall take care; I shall slip out of dorm after midnight."

"But showing a light in the Head's study."

The Toff smiled.

"I sha'n't need a light."

"You're a wonderful chap, Talbot. You—you think you can do it?"

"I know I can."

"I won't forget this," said Gore. "Goodness knows I've never deserved to have you do this for me. If—if it goes all right, Talbot, I sha'n't forget it."

"Keep out of such a scrape another time," said Talbot, "that's all I ask. I should think you wouldn't forget this lesson."

"I'm not likely to forget," shuddered Gore; "I sha'n't forget this all my life. But it seems too good to be true, Talbot."

"Give me the notes."

Gore took out his pocket-book, and passed two bundles of currency notes to the Toff. Talbot counted them.

"Twelve for a pound, twelve for ten shillings," he said. "That's right?"

"That's right," said Gore. "Oh, Talbot, suppose anything happened? Suppose the Head missed them this evening? Suppose they were found on you?"

"I'm not going to keep them on me, fathead," said Talbot. "I shall slip them into a safe place, and take them out again to-night."

"Suppose—suppose they're found?"

"Leave that to me," said Talbot, with a pitying glance at the wretched Shell fellow. Gore's nerves were in rags.

Talbot moved towards the door. Then Gore gave a cry:

"Stop! I can't let you do it, Talbot! I can't let you take the risk. It's a shame—a rotten shame!"

Talbot's handsome face softened very much. If he had needed anything to decide him to take that terrible risk for Gore's sake, it would have been that cry from the unhappy junior. The fellow who was willing to throw away his last chance of safety could not be all bad.

"Give them to me," said Gore. "I'll burn them, and chance it."

"It isn't a chance, old chap, it's a certainty," said Talbot. "The minute the Head knows that he's been robbed, it will come out about what everybody's seen about you the past week. He'll remember leaving his safe unlocked that morning; and it will come out that you were out of the Form-room at the same time. Mr. Linton will remember sending you to the study."

Gore leaned heavily on the table.

"I—I—— Then I suppose I was booked to be found out all the time, even if I hadn't given myself away," he panted.

"I think you were, Gore. You'd make about the worst criminal I know," said Talbot, with a slight smile. "You're not built for it, you duffer. You were booked to be found out the minute the Head missed the notes."

"What a fool I've been—what a silly fool!" muttered Gore. "But you—you are willing to take the risk, Talbot?"

"Yes."

"I oughtn't to let you," said Gore miserably. "I know I oughtn't. But it means so much to me, Talbot——"

"It's settled," said Talbot. "Don't think anything more about it."

He left the study before Gore could reply.

That evening, while Skimpole babbled cheerfully at the study tea-table, Talbot was very silent. He knew the risk he was going to run; and though he did not shrink from it, it made him grave and preoccupied. He knew what he was risking. All he had fought for and struggled for so long—his good name, his honour—the honour so hardly won, and grown so dear to the one-time Toff. Was he called upon to do it? Gore was not even a chum of him. Why should he do this? Yet he did not falter for one moment. He had promised to help the wretched culprit, and he had his word to keep. And he felt, too, that he was called upon to do it. To save Gore from being a thief, as he himself might have been saved if he had found a helping hand in his early years. He knew what was at stake with a terrible clearness. But he did not repent of his resolution.

Gore was very silent, too. There was hope in his heart. But he was haunted by the fear that the Head's discovery that the notes were missing, long delayed, might take place that very evening, before the Toff had had time to save him. At the very last moment the cup might be dashed from his lips.

But the evening passed, and the Shell went to their dormitory. The hour was near now—very near. Gore did not sleep, but he was calmer. If it were still possible that he might be saved, he knew that he could rely upon the Toff.

CHAPTER 12.

The Last Crib.

MIDNIGHT had boomed out dully from the clock-tower. The hours of darkness were wearing slowly by.

One!

Save for the whisper of the wind in the old elm-trees in the quad, there was no sound in the silent night.

School House and New House were buried in slumber.

But in the School House there were some who were wakeful. In the Shell dormitory there was one whose sleepless eyes burned with feverish anxiety, and one who, though sleepless, was calm and collected. As the stroke of "One!" boomed faintly through the night, Talbot of the Shell slipped quietly from his bed.

George Gore sat up, his eyes burning through the gloom.

Faint as the sound was that Talbot made, Gore's feverish hearing did not lose it. All his nerves were in a twitter.

He whispered softly, tremulously:

"Talbot!"

"Yes. Hush!"

Gore slipped out. There were several beds between his and Talbot's, and he was fearful of a sleeper awakening and hearing even the faintest whisper. He groped silently towards Talbot in the darkness. The Toff was dressing quickly.

"You're going, Talbot?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Shall I come with you?"

"It would be no use. You couldn't help."

"But—but the risk——" breathed Gore.

"You'd make it greater," said Talbot. "Get back to bed, old man. Your nerves are out of order. You are trembling now."

"I—I shall feel awful till you get back, Talbot."

"I shall not be long."

"I—I—I oughtn't to let you go. Suppose—suppose ——" shivered Gore.

"No good supposing anything. Get back to bed, and don't make a sound. If one of the fellows should wake there'd be questions asked. Don't give yourself away at the last minute, Gore."

"Yes—yes. But I shall—I shall feel rotten till you get back."

Gore crept away to his bed again. His nerves were twittering, his heart beating irregularly. The anguish of that night was almost too much for Gore. He felt, he knew, that he was on the verge of hysteria, and he had a terrible dread that his self-control would give way.

Talbot finished dressing, and put on the rubber shoes he had placed in readiness. He left the dormitory without a sound. A task that would have shaken any other fellow's nerves was child's play to the Toff. He reflected bitterly that it was like old times as he moved silently down the dark passage. The prince of cracksmen was on the "old lay" once more—"cracking a crib" in the dead of night. Not for the same motive as of old, however. Not for the plunder of the safe, but to replace the plunder that had been taken in a moment of madness by another; to save a wretched and conscience-stricken boy from the horror of becoming a thief. What would the Toff in the old days have thought if he had been told that he would crack his last crib for such a purpose?

In the midst of his happy, careless life as a schoolboy at St. Jim's, while the memory of those black old days was fading from his mind, there sometimes came a bitter pang into Talbot's heart as he thought of the time when he had been the comrade of Hookey Walker and the Professor; when he was an Ishmael, his hand against every man's and every man's hand against him.

It was all over—all past and done with. And now—now he was risking the loss of all that he had won—now that he was playing the cracksman again to save another from shame and crime.

He paused in the dark staircase to listen, and his heart for a moment was bitter.

More clearly than before, at that moment he realised the terrible risk he was running.

For danger to life and limb the Toff cared nothing; but the danger of disgrace, of condemnation, of the horror and pain of his chums, the grief, the scorn of the kind old Head—that thrilled even the iron nerves of the Toff.

Had he a right to run that risk?

For, if by any untoward chance his action should be discovered, he knew that he must be condemned.

He would not be able to explain.

Gore's secret was entrusted to his honour. Even if he was caught in the act at the safe, and supposed—as he certainly would be supposed—to be engaged in an act of robbery, he could not betray Gore. He could not sacrifice his word and his self-respect to save his good name. He could not betray the fellow who trusted to his pledge.

Gore should speak out if that happened, but Talbot smiled bitterly at that thought. Gore would not speak.

He was not a coward, he was not a villain, but he had not the courage to face condemnation and shame. If matters went badly for the Toff that night, who was risking so much for the wretched culprit, he knew that he had no confession to expect from Gore to clear him.

Gore's better nature would drive him to confess, but terror would hold him silent. He would suffer, he would be torn with remorse, but he would be silent.

Talbot knew it.

Had he a right to run the risk? There was yet time. Perhaps, in that dark moment, the Toff faltered.

But it was only for a moment. To return, to tell the wretched boy, who clung to him as to a last straw of hope, that his courage had failed him, that he must take his chance—that was impossible. The time for reflection, for hesitation, had gone by. He had set his hand to the plough, and he could not withdraw it. He could not break faith at the last moment. In common honesty he must fulfil his pledge to Gore.

After all, what was the risk? The House was silent and sleeping. It would not take him a quarter of an hour to accomplish his task. In his first days in the school, when he had come there as the confederate of Hookey Walker, he had made an examination of the Head's safe, and he knew that it would open easily to his hand. The prince of cracksmen had the hand of a magician for such work. To open the safe, to slip back the stolen notes and close the iron door, to hurry back to the dormitory—his work well done—fifteen minutes would cover it all. The Toff did not even require a light for the work; all would be done under the cover of darkness. Where was the risk?

Risk or no risk, he had his work to do, and his hesitation did not last for more than a few seconds.

With noiseless steps, he descended the stairs.

In the dormitory Gore was waiting, huddled in bed, with burning eyes and throbbing heart, choking back the hysteria that was gaining on him. Gore was very near the end of his tether.

And the fellow who was taking the risk—cool, determined, and alert—moved silently in the darkness, unhesitating. Talbot reached the lower passage, and listened once more. Deep silence surrounded him. A creak of the wainscot, a whine of the wind in the quad, that was all.

He reached the door of the Head's study. The door was locked, and there was no key. But in a couple of minutes the door swung silently open.

Talbot entered the study, and closed the door softly behind him. He stood in intense darkness.

The blinds were drawn, and not a glimmer of starlight came into the room. The blackness was impenetrable. But it did not trouble the Toff. From of old he was accustomed to work in darkness, and he seemed almost to possess the peculiar, cat-like gift of seeing in the dark.

Without a sound, without displacing any article of furniture, he groped his way to the iron safe let in the wall.

Five minutes elapsed—five long minutes. Heav big iron door swung open. Talbot drew a deep He felt in his pocket for the bundles of notes.

Suddenly his movements were arrested.

He stood frozen, as a gleam of light penetrat darkness of the study. It came under the door.

Someone was in the passage with a light.

"Who—what——"

Talbot's eyes fixed themselves upon that glim light with a stony look. He had no time to think next moment the study door opened.

A lamp gleamed into the room.

Talbot stood dazed, in despair. Dr. Holmes ca the study, lamp in hand, not seeing for the mom boy as he stood there, silent, motionless. Wh brought the Head there at that hour? Fortu played the Toff a scurvy trick. His face was w death as he stood, waiting for the Head to see him.

It was only a moment before the doctor's gla upon him.

He started violently.

The hand that held the lamp trembled; the k face paled as the doctor took in the scene—the faced junior, standing transfixed, the open door safe, the bundle of notes clutched in the convulsiv

The doctor's face seemed to grow old and worn moment. For several seconds there was a terrible and Talbot could hear his heart beating. Then th spoke, in a low, shaking voice:

"Talbot, what are you doing here?"

CHAPTER 13.
For Another's Sake!

TALBOT was silent.

What was he to say?

Dr. Holmes set down the lamp upon hi and stood looking at him. There was a dazed exp on his face. The kind old gentleman, who had b good a friend to the Toff, had a strong affecti his protege. It had happened that suspicion had upon the Toff more than once, owing to his pas he had been cleared, triumphantly vindicated, a Holmes had said to himself that never again sho faith in Talbot waver—never, whatsoever might apparent ground for suspicion. From the hour the Toff, cleared of suspicion, had returned to the the Head had felt that nothing again could sha faith.

But he had not counted upon this.

The silence in the study lasted a few minute seemed centuries long to Talbot. Dr. Holmes wai him to speak. He did not speak.

It was the Head who broke the silence. His vo tremulous, and Talbot's heart ached as he realise a blow this was to the kind old man.

"Talbot, unhappy boy, have you nothing to me?"

"Nothing," muttered Talbot; "only—only——"

"Speak, my boy!"

"It is not as you think, that is all. But I can't you to believe that, sir. I am not a thief."

The Head smiled sadly.

"You opened that safe, Talbot?"

"Yes."

"Those notes in your hand—they belong to me?"

"Yes."

"Replace them in the safe."

Talbot obeyed.

"Close the safe, Talbot."

The Toff mechanically did as he was told.

The work he had come there to do was done now now he had to pay the price of a too generous acti

"Why did you do this?" said the Head, still ge

Talbot did not reply.

"You came here to rob me?"

Talbot shivered.

He knew that he must be condemned, of course. There was only one way to save himself—to betray the wretched boy who at that moment was quivering with fear and anxiety in the dormitory. For a moment the confession trembled on Talbot's lips. Why should he be condemned, he, the innocent, to save the guilty? Had he a right to let the good old man's faith in him crumble to ashes? There were others to suffer as well as himself—for he saw that the Doctor was suffering—and his chums, on the morrow—what would they think—what would they feel?

The tears started to the boy's eyes. It was all over now. What his enemies had been unable to accomplish he had done with his own hand, for another's sake.

But the confession, thought it rose to his lips, remained unuttered. He knew that he could not betray the fellow who trusted to his honour. Whatever should happen, he could not do that.

"Talbot, this is a blow to me. I trusted you! Once my faith in you was shaken, and I repented of my doubts. But how can I doubt now?"

"I—I know, sir! But—but—I don't expect you to believe me, but—but it is not as you think. I did not come here to rob you."

"Then why did you come?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

The Head made a weary gesture, dismissing the subject. He could not believe that statement, absurd on the face of it. How could he believe it?

That was impossible.

And the Head thought that he understood. In spite of Talbot's long and resolute struggle to throw behind him the wretched past, his early training had been too much for him. The old instincts of the Toff had broken out. Once a thief, always a thief! The old confederate of Hookey Walker and the Professor, try as he might, could not change. His fate was fixed. That was the Head's thought, and his feeling now was not anger, it was not scorn, it was grief and compassion.

"Do not say any more, Talbot," he said quietly, "you know that I cannot believe you. I find you here with my safe open, past midnight, with my money in your hands. My boy, I will not ask you why you have done this; I know only too well. Unhappy lad!" The Head's voice trembled a little. "This is a harder blow to me than you could have believed, Talbot. I had every faith in you. I had resolved that nothing should induce me to doubt you again. But I cannot doubt the evidence of my own eyes."

Talbot was grimly silent.

"I am not even angry with you," went on the Head; "for I believe—I still believe—that you have struggled hard against this. I cannot think that it was all hypocrisy—I am assured that you meant well, that you have fought hard to keep to the right path, that you have done your best. You have failed, and the fault lies with those who trained you in your early years—far more than with you. After this, you cannot remain at the school——"

Talbot quivered.

He had expected it—he had known that it was coming, but it struck him like a blow in the face.

He was to go!

"You cannot remain here," resumed the Head. "But I shall remain your friend, Talbot. No effort on my part shall be wanting to save you from falling back into what you once were. You must go, but you must keep me informed of your movements. You must let me help you, and you must promise me that you will try to do right."

Talbot almost choked.

The kindness of the man who believed that he had come there to rob him went like a dagger to his heart. He was innocent; but the Head could only believe him guilty, and he could not defend himself. And the Head, believing him guilty, could make such allowances for him—could still be kind to him.

"When you were sent away before," said the Head, "you were innocent. I believed that you had been guilty of dishonesty and ingratitude—that your life here had been a lie, a hypocrisy from beginning to end. Then I condemned you. But now I understand you better. I know that you have striven to do right. I know that this—this has happened in spite of your better nature. And knowing this, Talbot, I shall still have faith in you, and hope that you will try to deserve it."

"I can't explain, sir," said Talbot hoarsely, "but it's not as you think. But I won't say any more—you cannot believe me. I cannot expect it. I can only thank you for your kindness, knowing how this must appear to you. Before I go, I—I want to ask a last favour."

"You may ask anything, my dear boy. Heaven knows I would do anything to help you, after the struggle you have made to break with your unhappy past, for I know how bitter that struggle has been."

"Then let me go quietly. Don't let Tom Merry and the rest know what you have seen to-night," muttered Talbot. "Don't let them think me a thief."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"The matter shall not even be mentioned, Talbot. When you leave here you shall have a chance to be honest. You shall not be dragged down by the burden of what has happened to-night. Not a word shall be said."

"Tom—will ask—he will be curious—he will miss——" Talbot's voice broke, as he thought how much his chum would miss him, and how he would miss Tom Merry. But it was too late to think of that.

"It shall be said that you have left, and no explanation shall be given," said the Head quietly.

Talbot drew a deep breath of relief. At least, he would escape the worst—his chums would not think ill of him. They would be puzzled, perplexed; but they would not think that he had been turned out of the school as a thief.

"Thank you, sir! That is all I ask."

"You may rely upon me, Talbot. Your regard for your friends' opinion shows me that there is much more good than evil in your nature. Do your best, my poor boy, and Heaven will give you strength to win."

"I—I will go," said Talbot. "I—I don't want to see any of the fellows first—they will ask questions. Let me go before morning."

"It shall be so. It will be best. You shall have money for your needs——"

Talbot shook his head.

"I do not want that, sir."

"Nonsense, Talbot. I shall not let you starve. You must have money."

"I cannot take it from you, sir."

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"Talbot, you were taking money from my safe, yet you will not accept money from me as a gift. I cannot let you go from here penniless. It would be plunging you into what I want to save you from."

"I cannot take anything from you, sir," said Talbot firmly. "I am not penniless. I have something left of my scholarship allowance—a few pounds. That will suffice until I can get work."

"You must be guided by me in this, Talbot. You are the holder of a founder's scholarship, and the allowance attached to it is your property. I am afraid it must be forfeited now. But at present—— I will give you a sum equal to your next allowance, at least. I will not allow you to refuse."

"But——"

"You must do as I say, Talbot. When you leave here you will have twenty pounds, and that will keep you from want, and from worse than want."

Talbot raised his head proudly.

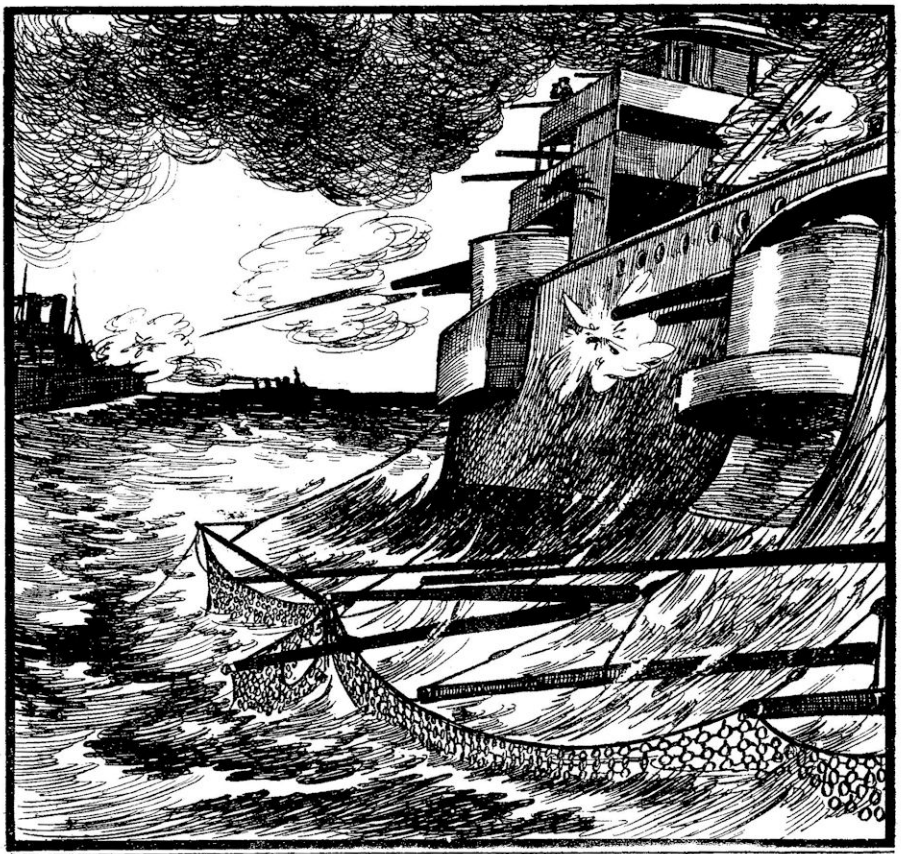
"You need not fear that, sir. I shall not steal."

"I hope not, Talbot," said the Head, with a sigh. "As I have said, I trust you to do your best. If I should hear that you have failed it would be a great blow to me. I shall hope for the best. And remember that when you are in difficulties you have always a friend in me. And the money you are entitled to you will take."

"I—I will do as you wish, sir," said Talbot dully. "Let me go at once. I—I could not face them in the morning."

"As you wish, Talbot."

The thought of George Gore came into Talbot's mind. He was waiting in the dormitory—sleepless, feverish. He must have a word with Gore before he left St. Jim's. And there was one ray of hope in his heart, faint and feeble, but it was there. Gore might speak. Would he be



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coward enough to let Talbot suffer for his sake? But as he thought of the trembling, shivering boy, Talbot felt that the hope was a delusion; Gore would not speak.

The Head had sunk into a chair. Talbot passed him, and left the study. The Head did not move. His heart was heavy. Almost he wished that he had not made the discovery; that he had been left his faith in the boy he had befriended, even if his faith was a mistake. It seemed like fate; as if he had had a premonition of this. Chance had revealed this miserable truth to him. He had been sleepless. He had come down, perturbed and uneasy, for a book, that was all. When he could not sleep, the Head was accustomed to poring over his beloved Æschylus, and that night he had left the volume in his study. It was the blindest chance that had led him there. But it seemed to him now that he had had some presentiment; that Fate had led him to the spot where the boy he had trusted was robbing him. The book lay now, unheeded, on his desk. The Head had forgotten it. The discovery of the Toff's perfidy had dazed him. He sat silent, heedless, his heart heavy with pain, and moisture glistening in his kind eyes.

CHAPTER 14.

"Good-bye, St. Jim's!"

A HURRIED whisper greeted Talbot as he came back silently into the dormitory.

Gore was sitting up in bed, his eyes strangely bright. He did not hear the door open, but he knew that Talbot had come in. The Toff glided silently towards his bed.

"Talbot! You are safe?"

"I am here."

"It—it is all right?" breathed Gore.

He was shaking as he sat. The Toff, heavy as his own heart was with bitter trouble, looked at him compassionately. After all, he was stronger to bear a burden than this wretched boy, whose courage was gone, whose terrors had driven him to the verge of insanity.

"You are safe," said Talbot, in a low voice.

Gore panted.

"Hush! Don't waken them," said Talbot, with almost a groan.

Tom Merry, his old chum, was sleeping, the sound sleep

of healthy youth, and he had to go without a word of farewell, without a word of explanation

"You put the notes back?" breathed Gore.

"Yes."

"Then I—I'm safe?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven!" Gore sobbed silently. The relief was almost too much for him.

Talbot stood silent, looking at him in the gloom. Should he tell Gore what had happened in the Head's study? The wretched boy had enough to bear—what was the use of adding to his torments? For that he would never find the courage to admit his own guilt was a certainty. To ask Gore to go to the Head now, to tell him the truth—that was as good as breaking his pledge. And Gore would not go. Indeed, the boy was in so hysterical a state that the mere suggestion might be too much for him Let him, at least, have peace for that night.

In the morning Gore would know that Talbot had gone. He would know why; he could not fail to know why. Then, if he chose, he could speak.

But Talbot had no hope that he would speak. Whatever remorse he suffered for his silence, he would not speak; he had not the courage for that

"Go to sleep now, Gore," said Talbot quietly. "Get to sleep. You'll be like a limp rag in the morning. You're safe—quite safe."

"God bless you, Talbot! You've saved me; and I'll never forget this. I—I don't know what would have become of me. If I'd been kicked out, I shouldn't have dared to go home. God bless you!"

"Go to sleep," said Talbot miserably. "Good-night, old chap!"

"Good-night, Talbot!" breathed Gore.

He settled his weary head on the pillow. His heart was light, his nerves were calming. He could sleep now.

He did not hear Talbot leave the dormitory again. He supposed that the Toff had gone back to bed. Talbot stepped out of the room, and drew the door silently shut. His heart ached at leaving his old friends thus, but there was no other way. What would Tom Merry think in the morning, finding him gone—gone for ever, without a word? What could he think?

And it could not be helped. Better that Tom should be puzzled, angry and resentful perhaps, than that he should know the reason why Talbot was going. The happenings of that night, at least, Tom Merry would never know.

Talbot moved away from the dormitory with a heavy heart. He found his coat, his cap; from his study in the Shell passage he took a few things he prized, and that he could carry with him. He looked round the study with dim eyes; there was Gore's old bat in the corner, Skimpole's volume of entomology on the table—he would never see old Skimmy again! The tears rose to his eyes; he forced them back. He was leaving it all for good—leaving all that made life worth living to him.

And Marie, too, his girl-chum—without a word of farewell to her. That thought made him falter as he stood in the dark passage. He could write to Marie; he could tell her enough to know that she would believe in him. But never to see her again—to go out into the lonely world without a word!

But it had to be!

He paused outside Tom Merry's study, thinking hard. He could not speak to his chum before he went, but he could leave a word—one word to let Tom know that he had not forgotten him when he went. He entered the study and struck a match. In the glimmer of the gas—half turned on—he wrote a few lines upon a fragment of impot paper, and slipped it into Tom Merry's Latin grammar—Tom was certain to find it there on the following day.

He turned out the light and left the study. He moved like a fellow in a dream; it almost seemed to him that this was some evil dream, from which he must awaken when the rising-bell clanged out over St. Jim's.

The Head was waiting for him.

He placed a little packet in the junior's hand; Talbot slipped it into his pocket. He could not refuse that last kindness from the kind old man who had trusted him and who believed that his trust was betrayed. The trouble only too visible in the old gentleman's face went to his heart. The Head believed him guilty, yet he could find excuses for him, could still be kind. Talbot's heart was too full for words; it was all he could do to keep back his tears.

In silence the Head opened the great door. In the quadrangle the stars were glimmering. The fresh breeze blew coldly on Talbot's face.

"Good-bye, my boy! You will write; you will not leave me in ignorance of what you do and what happens to you. And—and you will try to justify the faith I still feel in you," said the Head, in a faltering voice.

"You shall never need to repent your kindness to me, sir," said Talbot.

Dr. Holmes shook hands with the Toff, and the boy descended the steps into the quadrangle. The doctor gazed after him—at the stalwart figure in the overcoat, with the wallet over his shoulder. Talbot walked erect; he did not look like one with a burden of guilt upon his soul. If there had been room for doubt the doctor would have doubted, but there was none. He could not doubt what he had seen with his own eyes.

The door closed.

Talbot swung himself lightly over the gate and dropped into the road. Stars glimmered over his head, the night was fine and soft. Often of old the Toff had known such a night, he had been abroad at such an hour. But the thrill of adventure of the old life was gone, his heart was heavy in his breast.

He paused at the turning of the lane to look back. In the starlight the grey, old tower of St. Jim's rose above the trees, the stars gleamed in glimmering old windows.

For several minutes the boy stood looking back—looking his last upon the old school he loved so well.

He stirred at last.

"Good-bye," he whispered—"good-bye, St. Jim's!"

He turned and strode away into the night.

In the School House Tom Merry was sleeping, dreaming, perhaps, but never dreaming that his chum was faring alone into the night—an outcast for another's sake!

THE END.

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A CATCH SOMEWHERE.

McTavish (reading a complimentary ticket for a concert given him by a friend): "'The holder of this ticket is expected to buy a programme.' Hoots! I micht hae kenned there was some catch in it!"—Sent in by H. Vass, Vancouver, Canada.

THE WAR'S INFLUENCE.

Brigson was an ardent chess-player, but reading so much war news has greatly influenced his style of describing the tactics of his favourite pastime.

"If," he said lately, "I advance to 1at. 4deg. N., long. 3deg. W., to torpedo his queen, she'll wreck my bishop with a long-range shot from her 13.5's. If I open fire on his knight, he'll mine my rook. If I engage his rook, he'll bombard my king. If I execute a masterly retreat, my bishop will have the full benefit of his broadside; and if I do anything else, he'll torpedo my queen. I'm blessed if I see what to do, anyway!"—Sent in by T. Appelbee, Golder's Green, N.

NO WARNING TO THE ENEMY.

For the benefit of English, French, and German passengers who travel between the coast and London on the South-Eastern Railway, the following notice is prominently displayed in the carriages:

"Do Not Lean Out of the Window."
"Ne pas se pencher au de Hors."
"Nicht Hinauslehnen."

At New Cross Station, where two boys got into a compartment, one of them produced a strip of stamp-edging and stuck it over the "Nicht Hinauslehnen."

"Why have you done that?" asked an elderly passenger.

"Because," said the boy, "if any German wants to lean out of the window and get his napper knocked off—why, let him!"—Sent in by Miss M. Jones, Liverpool.

SLIGHTLY MIXED.

The following is an extract from a schoolboy's essay on "A Country Holiday":

"I would like to live in the country always. In the country all the houses are cottages, and you need not wear gluvs not even when you have not washed your hands. In the country you do not get your milk from tin cans, you get it from cows. Some cows are white, and some cows are black, but the milk is always white, and the black cows are nearly always bulls."—Sent in by Harry Clarke, St. Helens, Lancs.

A WAY OUT.

It was during the practical gardening lesson, in a large London school, when the teacher was instructing the boys in the art of protecting plants from the frost.

Jones was observed to be paying no attention to the master's remarks, so the instructor asked him sharply:

"Now then, Jones, which is the best way to keep the May frosts from the plants?"

"Plant them in June, sir!" was Jones' ready reply.—Sent in by A. S. Evans, Lower Edmonton, N.

ECONOMY.

Sandy (in a railway train, to passenger on his left): "Hae ye a motch?"

Passenger: "No. I don't smoke."

Sandy (to passenger on right): "Hae ye got a motch, sir?"

Passenger: "No. I'm sorry, I haven't."

Sandy: "Ah, well. Ah'll hae tae use me ain, thin!"—Sent in by B. Young, Belfast, Ireland.

THE MEANING.

The mayor of a small town had consented to examine the scholars of a preparatory school in general knowledge. Having attained his present position from the humble calling of pork-butcher, he was very vain of the fact.

He drew himself proudly up to his full height in front of the admiring class, and smiled a smile of conscious superiority.

"What," he asked, "is the meaning of the letters J.P. after my name?"

Dead silence.

Then, after a painful pause, a small hand went up, and waved frantically about at the rear of the class.

"Well, my little man, what does it mean?"

"Please, sir," said the bright boy, "'Judge of Pork'!"—Sent in by Miss D. O'Beirne, Rochester.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

A man named Harvard, who had the misfortune of being afflicted with a very bad stutter, was being tried in court for a minor offence.

"Prisoner," said the judge, "what is your name?"

"Har-Har-Har——" he began.

"If you're not careful," roared the judge, "I'll give you an extra month for laughing in court!"—Sent in by M. Read, Toronto, Canada.

ALL REPRESENTED.

A famous member of Parliament was once a guest at an Irish club-dinner, where he told a rather good story, to the following effect.

He was once passing the new War Office, when his companion, a Scotchman, pointing to the emblematic devices engraved over the door, indicated the Scotch thistle, the English lion, and the Irish harp.

"Where is the emblem of Wales?" he asked.

"Oh," replied the member of Parliament, "I expect there's a leak in the roof!"—Sent in by W. Bettam, Beckenham, Kent.

A SMART REPLY.

Among the members of a working gang on a certain railroad was an Irishman, who claimed to be very good at figures. The boss, thinking that he would have a try at catching Pat, said:

"Say, Pat, how many shirts can you get out of a yard?"

"That depends," said the Irishman, "on who's yard you get into."—Sent in by R. E. Kelly, Scarborough, Yorks.

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SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS.

Bob Hall, a fine, strapping young fellow, succeeds in joining a famous Hussar regiment, known as the Die Hards. After Bob has been in the regiment for some time his ne'er-do-well cousin, Captain Lascelles, joins also. Bob finds that, so far from being friendly, Lascelles is constantly endeavouring to get him into trouble, with the object of having him dismissed from the Service in disgrace. Bob, however, with the help of his many friends, is successful in defeating the villain's schemes. Bob comes into contact with the Earl of Dalkey, who finds that Bob is some connection of his family, and promises to have investigations made. It transpires that Bob is heir to a large fortune, which Lascelles, in default of Bob being able to prove that he is the son of his father, intends to claim. After plotting the downfall of two other officers in the regiment, Lascelles is compelled to send in his papers and resign his commission. Some time after, Bob is greatly astonished at being told that his father, whom everyone had believed to be dead, is still alive, and, later, in company with an old friend of his father's, sees him in the street. He is seated in a runaway motor-car, at the wheel of which Lascelles is sitting. Bob proceeds to Lascelles' old haunt in the East End for the purpose of tracing his villainous cousin, but is surprised and overpowered by two of the ex-officer's confederates. In the meantime, Lascelles has decoyed Bob's father to Winchester, where the old man is imprisoned in a room, where he almost loses hope, for the long night drags its slow length without bringing any sign of relief.

(Now go on with the Story.)

Justice or Vengeance?

Morning came at last, and Lascelles' ruffians re-entered the room. Alec Hall would have nothing to say to them. Throughout the day he preserved a dignified silence, and the evening was closing in when the hoot of a motor warned him that Lascelles was returning.

The keepers retired, to be replaced ten minutes later by their employer, and Alec Hall rose and faced his captor. Lascelles, too, was grim and resolute. He had come with a firm resolve to force submission from his prisoner. As the old gentleman was about to demand an explanation the scoundrel forestalled him. Drawing a legal-looking document from his pocket, he laid it on the table, and then he spoke.

"There's a deed," he began hurriedly; "if you sign it you can leave the house. If you refuse, I'll stop at nothing. You thought you were coming here to see your son, that I was interested in him and his friend. I'm not. I hate the young cub, and if I could lay my hands on him I'd—— But there, there's no time for talk. Accidentally I discovered that you were alive, and so I have to deal with you as well as with him, for you both stand in my way. Sign that paper. If you don't——"

"You cur!" the old soldier shouted, trembling with passion. "You dare to threaten me! You've had the impudence to decoy me here under false pretences, and now——"

"Yes, I did decoy you here. What's more, you'll never go back to London if you decline to do as I order. I'm a desperate man, and it's your son who has made me so. Do you think I'll spare the father when the son has caused my misery? But for him I'd be rich and respected. As it is, I'm on the threshold of a fortune; it is almost in my grasp. If you and he were out of the way—ay, even if I had him in my clutches, I'd be safe. Do not hesitate; I warn you. If you do——"

"What if I do?" Alec Hall scoffed. "You can wipe me out if you like, but my boy will be safe. I know of no property which is due to me; yet there must be some hidden reason why you want the signature to that document. I won't sign it; I won't even read it. You can do your worst, and——"

The door was flung open, and one of the scoundrels rushed in. His face was blanched with terror.

"Fly, captain—fly!" he yelled. "The police are on our track! They're coming down the lane. They'll be here——"

Lascelles gazed wildly around; then he dashed for the door. A few seconds later the motor glided off, and even as old Alec Hall stumbled out into the open air Dr. O'Rafferty came rushing up the path.

"In time, thank goodness!" the doctor shouted. "I've had no end of a race! How do, Alec? Don't you remember me?"

Putting the motor-car at top speed, Lascelles dashed away, and raced back to London. His mind was in a whirl. His deep-laid plans had failed—nay, more. In the very moment of triumph he had been detected; how, he did not know, and the very mystery enshrouding the rescue of the old soldier added to the terror with which the villain now was seized. The police were on his track; the strong arm of the law, which he had evaded with fiendish ingenuity for so long, was at last stretched forth to seize him. He almost fancied he could hear the hue-and-cry. "Oh, for one brief night's respite!" he groaned! Then, with the money which rightly belonged to the Halls he could shake the dust of England off his feet for ever.

That mad drive to London was like a nightmare. He dashed on and on, risking life and limb continually, ignoring the yells and imprecations his wild rush through the town and village evoked; only dimly conscious of his surroundings, and guiding the pulsating car more by instinct than by skill. When at last he drew up outside his rooms in Curzon Street he could have given no account of the journey if such had been demanded. He was too haunted with the dread of the immediate future.

He got out and gazed long and fearlessly at the house; it was shrouded in darkness. The street, as always, was quiet and still; down towards Piccadilly, where the sullen roar and whirl, which, in the old times, had quickened his pulse and stirred his blood, when, like the thousands in the West End, he spent his days and evenings in a round of gaiety and pleasure. Now he longed to fly from it all; yet, before attempting this, he knew he must enter the house and chance what Fate might hold for him there. Did freedom or penal servitude await him? The next few moments would decide.

Slowly he extracted his latchkey and opened the door. A cold gust of wind greeted him, and his footfall re-echoed as he crossed the hall. He lit a candle and mounted the stairs. Outside the sitting-room he paused and listened. All was silent inside, and with a light hand he turned the handle and gazed in. A man, broad-shouldered and heavy was seated in an armchair, his feet on the fender. He was wearing his overcoat, and his hat lay on the table.

Lascelles gasped. Was this a myrmidon of the law? The man had fallen asleep. There was still time to escape. The conscious-stricken coward turned on the threshold, and began

noiselessly to retrace his steps. A board creaked, his foot slipped, he staggered forward in a desperate effort to save himself, and, awakened by the noise, the man lying back in the armchair jumped to his feet, dashed across the room with the tramp of a charging elephant, and gazed eagerly down the stairs.

"Hallo, Lascelles! Is that you? What mad pranks are you trying to play? I've been waiting here for a couple of hours, and when at last you do turn up, you bolt down the stairs again, as if terrified by a ghost!"

The gruff, coarse voice was like music to the hunted criminal. He turned, a sickly smile carving hard lines on his greenish, callous face. Mounting to the landing, and stumbling past his visitor with a grunt of recognition, he laid the candle on the table, and went to an escritoire.

Extracting a decanter and tumbler, he poured a glass of liquid into the latter, added water, and drank off the contents, his hand trembling and his teeth chattering as he swallowed the dose.

"You always were a brute, Rutter!" he snarled. "Why couldn't you light the gas, or let a fellow know somehow that a chap was here?"

"Thought I'd give you a surprise," the other scoffed. "What's up, though? You look mortal ill. Any bad news—eh?"

"I'm cold, that's all!" Lascelles growled. "Driving in a motor-car at sixty miles an hour isn't apt to warm a fellow. Why have you come here? Have you any news from Ireland?"

"Rather! Something that will liven you up pretty considerably. The Court has decided in your favour, so there! Old Alec Hall has been legally presumed to be dead, he's been missing for so long, and as that young Hall of the Die Hards had been unable to prove his claim through his friends to the satisfaction of the judge, an order has been made that the money is yours!"

"How soon can I get it?"

"Ah, that's another question! These things take time; but I dare say you'll have it in a week from now."

"A week! I can't wait—I tell you, I can't wait, Rutter!" Lascelles cried hoarsely. "I must have the money or its equivalent to-night. I'm leaving England—I'm going abroad, so——"

"Rot! The money is in Chancery, and there are any amount of formalities to be complied with. Influence helps to shove a thing through, and so, with luck, you may have it in a week, though you may have to wait for two or three. What's the hurry? You've won the case, and——"

Lascelles strode fiercely up and down the room. He stopped abruptly, wheeled round, stalked back till he stood facing his companion with but a foot of space between them, and glared like a baited animal.

"This is no time for secrecy!" he hissed. "You know me for what I am, and I know you. We can't quarrel, for a word from either of us could land the other in gaol. You want this money as much as I do, and if I could handle it you'd have your whack; but neither you nor I can ever touch it! We can only close on what we're able to raise to-night, by giving it as my security to the moneylenders. Go, find out one of them! Prove that the Court has decided in my favour, and he'll advance you ten thousand pounds like a shot. Before the bubble bursts we'll have cashed his cheque, and bolted with the boodle! That is the most we can now do."

Rutter sat down heavily on a chair.

"'Twon't do!" he growled. "You take a deal of watching, Lascelles, and you've sold me more'n once already! What's your game now? You'd better run straight, and tell me everything, or else I'll turn nasty!"

The miserable coward looked piteously at his more stolid companion in crime, and his wild eyes searched the room nervously, as if in fear that the conversation might be overheard.

"I must clear out of this!" he whispered, advancing and bending down over Rutter's chair. "At any moment the police may call and arrest me! I came here to-night to get the few pounds I own, which will take me out of danger. I hoped also that there'd be a telegram telling me how the case had gone in Dublin, but you were here instead of a letter or telegram. Any moment there may be a knock at the door. Hark! What's that?"

A heavy, measured footfall had sounded in the street below, and then the step had paused. Rutter could hear the heart-beats in Lascelles' bosom as the latter bent over him. He, too, was scared, and sat still and rigid. The man on the pavement moved on again, and Lascelles, rising to his usual height, wiped the moisture from his brow.

"What have you done?" Rutter gasped.

"I kidnapped old Alec Hall!"

"What! Is he alive?"

"Yes, worse luck! I took him down to Winchester, and the police nearly caught me there! I just managed to escape some hours ago, but by this time they've wired to Scotland Yard. Any moment——"

Rutter seized his hat.

"You mug! Why didn't you tell me this at once?" he snarled. "If they came here and found me with you, they'd cancel my ticket-of-leave, for certain! I'll get the money, or some of it, anyhow! Get away out of this, and down to Rotherhithe at once! There you can hide in Baker's shanty, and I'll come down to you in the morning. Once clear of the place, you're safe enough. Take care you're not watched and followed, though. If you manage to reach the East End undiscovered, you're safe for a week or more!"

Rutter rushed to the door, stumbled down the stairs, across the hall, and then cautiously opened the door. Giving one swift glance to the right and left, and satisfying himself that no one was about, he pulled his hat well down over his head, turned up the collar of his overcoat, buried his hands in his pockets, and, with head bent, hurried away. But even before he had turned the far corner, a figure glided out of a laneway almost opposite the house where Lascelles still remained.

The watcher quickly crossed the road, mounted the steps, pushed back the hall door, which Rutter had forgotten to close, and, crossing the hall, he mounted the stairs three at a time.

Meanwhile Lascelles had hurried into his bed-room. Lighting the gas, he pulled open a drawer, grasped a small bag of sovereigns, and shoved it into his pocket. Then he made a hurried search for all the articles of jewellery on which he could lay his hands—diamond pins, gold studs, a couple of watches, rings of various sorts. He put them into his pockets with feverish haste, muttering as he did so that they might all come in handy, if Rutter was unable to hoodwink the moneylender.

At last he had pocketed all that he thought could be of use to aid his flight. One last swift glance round the room, and he turned off the gas. Hurrying back to the sitting-room, he seized his hat, enveloped himself in a long coat, grasped a stick, and strode towards the door. Suddenly he paused and almost swooned.

For standing on the threshold was a young man, his clothes torn and dusty, his face pallid and stained, his eyes blazing like glow-worms, his body tense and rigid, his fists clenched, ready to bar all exit, ready at a moment's notice to spring forward and fasten his fingers on the villain's throat.

It was Bob. He had broken through his prison bonds, and had come to claim his own.

"Lascelles!" he thundered. "What have you done with my father?"

Bob Meets His Father.

Bob stood at the threshold. Lascelles, in the centre of the room, clung to the table for support. Again the stern voice resounded through the silent room:

"Lascelles, you cur, what have you done with my father?"

The coward gasped for breath. The hunted look came with feverish intensity back to his eyes. Bob's voice was so deep and resonant, the street was so silent, that the cry might easily be wafted to the hearing of a chance pedestrian; and to escape at once from Curzon Street was vital if Lascelles was to avoid the consequences of his crime-stained life. Yet the young sergeant blocked the way.

"Speak!" Bob thundered. "Where is he? As you value your life, tell me the truth at once!"

The lad advanced, his fists clenched, his muscles taut, his eyes blazing. Lascelles shrank back before the terrible look that Bob wore. It was as if an avenging angel had come to demand retribution.

"Your father is safe!" Lascelles gasped. "He is at Winchester. O'Rafferty is there, too. Let me pass; I must be off."

Bob still barred the way.

"How do I know that you speak the truth?" he scoffed. "I came here to-night, having broken loose from a gang of villains in your pay, in order that I might rescue my father from your clutches; and if that was too late, then so that I might avenge him to the bitter end. What proof can you give me that what you say is true?"

"None—none! I can give you no proof!" Lascelles groaned. "Search the house if you like, you will not find him here. I am going away—leaving England for ever. For Heaven's sake do not baulk me! The police are on my track; all my misdeeds have risen up in my condemnation; at any moment I may be seized and flung into gaol. Let me fly!"

There was such abject terror in the coward's pallid face as he thus pleaded, that Bob, regarding him sternly, had no

doubt but that his enemy had told him the truth for once. No great actor could have assumed such fear as Lascelles displayed. The man was incapable of mischief; his one consuming thought was to conceal himself from his pursuers.

"I meant to thrash you within an inch of your life!" Bob replied, with icy coldness. "I came here with that object; but already you are so punished that I'd scorn to add to your misery. I believe you, though, so far, I have never once known you to do otherwise than lie. Yet you are my cousin, and my father's nephew. You can go."

He stood to one side. Clutching his hat and gasping as if half stifled, Lascelles staggered from the room, and stumbled heavily down the stairs. The lad heard the door closed with a bang, and he gave a sigh of relief.

The candle was still flickering on the table, and Bob crossed to blow it out. At that moment a thundering knock re-echoed through the silent house. The lad went to the window, and looked down. Three men were standing on the pavement.

He descended the stairs, crossed the hall, and flung the door open. Instantly one of the men stepped quickly into the hall, grasping the door so that the lad could not close it had he so wished.

"Captain Lascelles!" the stranger rasped out gruffly.

"He is not here."

"Who, then, are you?"

"My name is Robert Hall."

"I'm Inspector Kennard. I've got a search-warrant in my pocket. Come along upstairs and explain how it is that you're on these premises. Now, men, look sharp, and make a thorough search."

So saying, the inspector lit the lamp in the hall, and, nodding to Bob to follow him, he strode up the stairs and into Lascelles' sitting-room. He lit the gas there, too, blew out the candle, and then turned and faced Bob.

"Are you a friend of Captain Lascelles?" he demanded.

"I'm his cousin."

"Has he been here lately?"

"Yes, he has."

"When is he expected back?"

"He'll never come back," Bob replied. "He knew you were on his track, and he's bolted. If you want to catch him you'll have to go after him."

"And you let him go!" the inspector spluttered wrathfully.

"It wasn't my business to hold him, nor had I any power that way," Bob explained. "Besides, he's my cousin, as I said, and though I know him for a scoundrel, yet it's not for me to bring disgrace on my own family!"

"Your cousin! Ah, that reminds me!" the inspector grunted, diving his hand into his pocket. "See here, you can read this!"

He held out a telegram, and Bob took it.

"That came to us an hour ago," the man explained. "You're evidently the chap we were told to hunt up. Well, we've found you safe and sound, anyhow, even if that beauty has slipped through our fingers for the time!"

The telegram ran as follows:

"Am returning to London with Colonel Alec Hall. His son, Robert Hall, was captured by villains in Gwalior Street. Do all that's possible to rescue him. Will be at Waterloo Station at eleven o'clock. O'RAFFERTY."

"You know the man that sent that wire?" the inspector continued.

"Yes; he's a friend of mine. What he says is quite true. I was overpowered by a couple of ruffians, and they were taking me out of London, when by a bit of luck I managed to get away. This is good news, anyhow. I must scoot off to Waterloo."

"And what about this rogue Lascelles?"

"I can't help you there, inspector," Bob replied. "If you can reach him, you'll know what to do. I've other things to think about now. Ta-ta! I'll look you up presently at Scotland Yard!"

Bob hurried away. He had an hour in which to reach Waterloo before the train from Winchester would be due, so he strolled down Piccadilly, across Leicester Square, down into Wellington Street, and so across the bridge to the station.

His sensations were strange, and he tried to keep himself in hand. To meet one for the first time who claims to be your father, and whom you have never known, is an experience happily given to few. Yet all can easily picture what their feelings would be if they were placed in the same position as Bob.

He stood on the platform, and saw the train cross the points, and glide slowly under the glass roof. Passengers jumped out and hurried away. None knew the strange meeting that was about to take place. Had they done so they would have stopped to witness it, in spite of the pressure of business, so great is human sympathy, whatever cynics may say.

Bob's heart was thumping against his ribs. He glanced eagerly up and down. At last, in the distance, he saw O'Rafferty's stout figure emerging from a carriage, and as the lad walked forward the doctor turned and held out his hand to assist his companion from the train.

"Hallo! Here's Bob!"

O'Rafferty had seen the young sergeant, and now father and son stood and gazed at one another.

Bob's heart gave a jump. He saw the soldierly frame, the fine, dignified face, the kindly eyes, in which a sparkle of pride shone as the old man gazed on his boy. He stepped forward, his feelings shining in his own manly young features, and O'Rafferty whisked round and walked away.

"I'm going to engage a cab, chaps, before they're all snapped up!" he cried.

And, joining in the throng, he hurried down the platform.

Five minutes later, as the platform was almost deserted, O'Rafferty, standing by the cab he had secured, saw Bob and his father approaching. They were both silent, and the old man was leaning on the sergeant's arm.

"Bustle in, the pair of you!" the doctor cried. "We'd better drive to an hotel and get some grub. I'm as hungry as a hawk!"

They took their seats, the cab pulled out from the station, and they drove across London to the quiet hotel the doctor frequented when in London.

"I don't know that I've got much appetite, but still I'll try to do justice to the meal," the old soldier grinned. "I can't take my eyes off Bob, though, and that's a fact. He's grown up and filled out into a fine figure of a man. Well, we'll have our talks later on, and there'll be plenty for us both to tell, I guess. But there's a bit of business we must get through first, not for my sake, Bob, my lad, but for yours, for I'm an old man now, and I don't want much more than I have at present to make the rest of my life run smooth and comfortable."

"Then what's on your mind, father?" Bob inquired.

"Why, about this money! O'Rafferty tells me I'm entitled to five thousand a year! I never knew that. It came to me after I was captured by those scoundrels of Afridis out in India, and on my escape and return here I never went in the way of hearing about it. I was hard up, my lad. I had to work for a pittance, old man that I am, and I didn't like, therefore, to meet such of my old chums as are still alive."

"Well, you can obtain the money now, anyhow," Bob grinned. "Don't talk about the rough time you had, guv'nor; I don't like to think about it."

Old Alec shot a swift glance at O'Rafferty, and shuffled uncomfortably.

"And I don't like to think of all you must have gone through, either," he replied. "I left you in good hands when I went abroad, for I left you with your mother." The old soldier sighed. "But she died, and those who should have looked after you then betrayed their trust. You were put amongst strangers, and you had to grow up amongst them, and plenty of kicks and cuffs you got, I'm sure. I wouldn't mind so much, but the man who said you were an orphan, and gave you to rough people to rear, did so for his own ends. That man was Lascelles."

Bob gave a dry laugh.

"We'll forget it all and look forward instead," he remarked pluckily. "I'm none the worse for the kicks and cuffs. I've learnt from experience how to treat chaps properly, and I'm not a conceited ass. Lascelles is in a bad way now, and though I can't forgive him quite, yet I bear him no malice. He's ruined and disgraced. We'll never see him again."

Alec Hall and O'Rafferty started.

"But we must see him!" the old soldier cried. "That's just what I was going to explain. You're my son, Bob, as I know well; but we must have proofs of that. What's more, I can't get the property without certain deeds and documents that Lascelles possesses. We must force him to hand 'em over. Otherwise, we lose everything."

Bob went pale.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "I had my hands on Lascelles a couple of hours ago, and I took pity on him, and let him escape. If he gets out of the country, as he's trying to do, you'll be ruined, father, and all through me! What a fool I've been! If it should happen that through my fault——"

"Where did you meet him?" O'Rafferty cried.

"In his rooms in Curzon Street. The police were hard on his heels, and he'd only time to bolt before they were hammering at the door. I don't know where he's gone to. I haven't the slightest idea how we can track him down. By this time he may be out of London."

"No fear!" the doctor rejoined, rising from the table. "Lascelles knows well that it's easier to hide in London than anywhere else, and he's not likely to make a bolt until he can get on a ship. He's hiding in some low quarter—that is, if the police haven't nabbed him already. Come on, we'll go after him! There's a man, Bob, that you and I know who'll give us a clue. I fair scared him the other night."

The Last Chase.

Bob and O'Rafferty hurriedly left the hotel together. Alec Hall would have liked to accompany them, but they persuaded him to stay where he was, pointing out that probably they would have a prolonged search, and that perhaps even their movements might be retarded at a critical moment if he was with them. After some trouble they convinced the stout old soldier that their view was right, but he went with them to the door, and saw them off, being reluctant to lose sight of his son after such a long absence.

"And now, O'Rafferty, who's the man you think may help us?" the lad inquired eagerly, as they moved away.

"Why, that chap down in Gwalior Street!" the doctor grinned. "The fellow who opened the door there—his name is Rudyard. A prime scoundrel if ever there was one! But I scared the life out of him, I can tell you. He won't hide much from us, I'll go bail, and there's not a thieves' den in London he doesn't know if half that he told me is true."

Exchanging experiences since they had parted under such mysterious circumstances some nights before, the two friends journeyed down to Gwalior Street and reached the house where Rudyard lived. The doctor had ascertained the secret code of knocks by which the villain's accomplices were wont to claim admission when they had stolen goods to sell, for Rudyard was a receiver of such ill-gotten property, and did a large trade with all the swell mobsmen in the City. It was not long before they had gained admittance, and this time the ruffian made no pretence of being otherwise than a rogue.

"We here, Rudyard, we ain't come to pay you out for your past villainy if you run straight," the bluff Irish doctor began coolly. "My friend here owes you one for the way you've behaved, but he'll wipe all that off the slate if you act now like a man. We're after Lascelles. The police are after him, too, for that matter, and——"

"The police!" the scoundrel gasped. "They're after the captain! I never reckoned on that! If he's caught, he'll blab, as sure as fate. He knows more about us coves than anyone else, and we always thought he'd keep his head up, and that we could use him safely. But if it's a case with him of turning informer or going to quod——"

"He seems to be an extra particular sort of cur!" O'Rafferty interjected. "We know him for a scoundrel in many ways, but from what you've let fall, it seems as if he was a partner in a good many crimes outside his own affairs."

"He's no better nor any of us!" Rudyard assented gruffly. "But I don't want the police to nab him, anyhow, and so——"

"Quite so! Well, where do you think we're likely to find him?" Bob cut in. "I could have handed him over to justice some hours ago, but he's my relation, worse luck, so I didn't care to do that. He left his rooms in Curzon Street, and bolted away. He's in London still! Now, where do you think he'd go?"

Rudyard for answer took his hat from a table, and got into an overcoat.

"I dunno!" he replied. "There's half a dozen places where he could lie low for a spell, but he wouldn't be welcome at all of 'em. If the boys hear that he's broke, and that he means to bolt, they'll get round him like a shot. He owes a tidy bit of money to most of 'em, and they're not the sort to spare him."

"He has dragged himself low!" Bob remarked scornfully. "Spurned by his friends, and flying from the law, he has even to avoid his own confederates in crime, for he wasn't able to be straightforward even to them. Well, Rudyard, you'd better come along!"

"I'll go!" the man assented shamefacedly. Bob's words had scorched his soul like fire. "Yes, mister, I'll help you, and I don't deny as I'm looking after myself in doing that, for I'm afraid what the captain might tell if he was caught. But I'm doing it a bit for your sake, too! I'm not as bad as you may think, and it's starvation and temptation as has brought me to what you see."

"Well, you've a chance to reform still," O'Rafferty replied. "I told you the other night that I'd help you to run straight if you cared to try, and my friend here will do the same. However, we must get hold of Lascelles before we can talk about anything else. Where do you mean to try first?"

"Come along, and I'll show you; you're safe with me," Rudyard replied. "We have our own 'tecs, though you mightn't think it, and like as not word has gone round already that the captain is wanted at Scotland Yard. If so, I'll soon find out his whereabouts."

The three left the house, and, crossing the river, Rudyard slunk along down strange, malodorous side-streets till he came to a place that had the outward appearance of a greengrocer's shop.

The proprietor, an evil-looking individual, with only one eye, glanced at the scoundrel carelessly and allowed him to pass without comment as he marched through the shop and descended to a lower region, followed by Bob and the doctor.

The two friends stumbled after their guide along a dark passage till, pushing open a door, he entered a long cellar crowded with men of all nationalities and of every class, half-hidden in the smoke from dozens of pipes. All seemed to be smoking, and all were chatting freely.

"Hallo! Here's the blind!" one of them scoffed raucously. "I s'pose he thinks business is bad, so he won't wait for us coves to walk into his trap. No work being done to-night, matey. The lads are holdin' a council!"

Rudyard winked, and led the speaker to one side.

"Don't mind these blokes; they ain't traps!" he muttered, as the stranger eyed Bob and O'Rafferty suspiciously. "They won't split. Say, have you any notion where the captain may be? One of these gents is a relative or summat of his, and he wants to come up with him."

The man stared at Bob, and then he eyed Rudyard curiously.

"Haven't ye heard?" he growled. "Why, the captain's gone under! It's about him the blokes are talking. Dandy Smootch came along an hour ago, and said as how the bobbies were hot on the captain's tracks. He's done a 'guy—thrown up the sponge! Made his way down here to Rotherhithe, so he did, and implored of old Barber to hide him. 'Tain't safe for us, though. He's just the sort to peach on——"

"I know," Rudyard agreed gruffly. "Ye might find out what they mean to do, and let me know in half an hour's time when I call back. Don't say nothin'. These gents will look after you the same as me."

Rudyard winked to his accomplice, who nodded in reply, and then the former sauntered towards the door and slipped out without being noticed. Bob and O'Rafferty followed him.

"Not a moment to lose!" Rudyard whispered, as they mounted the stairs again. "Those blokes will be hot on our heels, or else I know nothing of them. If ye want the captain ye must bustle all ye can, for if once they lay their hands on him they'll take care he'll never be able to blab."

"And yet they didn't mind us going in there amongst them!" Bob cried, in amazement.

(Another grand instalment of this fine military serial will be published in next week's "GEM.")

For Next Wednesday—

"THE HERO OF THE HOUR!"
By Martin Clifford.

In next week's magnificent story of Tom Merry & Co., Talbot, and Marie Rivers, the popular "Gem" author again excels himself. Talbot, having taken the guilt of another upon his own shoulders, has been sent out into the world, seemingly cut off for ever from the school to which he was so deeply attached. But "truth will out," as the old proverb has it; and just as the darkest hour of night heralds the approach of dawn, so, when things look blackest for the outcast of St. Jim's, affairs begin to take a new and brighter turn, and it is not long before Reginald Talbot, the one-time "Toff," is unanimously acclaimed

"THE HERO OF THE HOUR!"

ANOTHER NOTEWORTHY SUCCESS.

That many "Gem" readers are fellows of exceptional talent and genius is proved by the fact that I have lately been receiving details of some of my chums' remarkable successes.

This week I am pleased to record the prowess of Master Eric Brooks, a staunch Gemite, and one of the leading boy soloists in the British Empire. This young singer, who has rapidly come to the front in the musical world, has indeed acquitted himself well, for although he has been before the public little more than a year, there are many places where the announcement of his appearance is sufficient to fill a large hall.

On the occasion of a recent visit to Derby, Master Brooks's delightful singing brought him the following tribute from a prominent J.P.:

"I had the pleasure of listening to our young friend, and I thought he possessed the most angelic voice for a boy that it was possible for man to listen to. I should have felt very disappointed if the opportunity of hearing him had passed me by. How proud his parents must be of him!"

I, too, must join in with others to congratulate my young Gemite friend on his remarkable gift, which may be exercised as a great power for good. Master Brooks has written to say how highly he appreciates the companion papers, which always accompany him on his train journeys. He has my sincerest wishes for a prosperous future.

A CORRECTION.

Master Fred Burton, the Gemite whose notable triumph in a recent Post Office Exmaination was recorded on this page a short time ago, has sent me the following note:

"Dear Editor,—I must apologise for a little mistake I made when I last wrote to you. I was fifth in the examination mentioned, not fourth.

"The error was not altogether my fault. On the morning the results came to hand our headmaster went through the list and told me I was fourth; but it transpired later that he had made a mistake.

"I am sorry if this will cause you any trouble; but if you have mentioned the matter in the 'Gem,' could you rectify it in a later number, as I do not wish to rob the boy who was really fourth of his laurels?—Believe me, sincerely yours,

"FRED BURTON.

"P.S.—I have decided to enter the 'Gem' League controlled by Mr. William Pike, of 127, Knights Hill, West Norwood, S.E., as I hardly like to be left out in the cold when there are so many leagues forming now. Of course, I shall not be able to devote much time to the organisation, but will back it up as well as I can."

Thank you for your note, Master Burton. I consider it is very sportsmanlike of you to see that the candidate who was placed fourth on the list loses none of the honour. I shall be glad to hear from you at all times.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"A 'Gem' Reader" (London, W.C.).—"The Shanghaied Schoolboys" was in "The Gem" No. 326.

"An English Boy" (Blackburn).—The character you mention belongs to Greyfriars, and will return there shortly.

W. Cartrite.—You need have had no fear that your letter would remain unanswered; but three weeks at least must elapse before replies can be printed on this page, and my readers would do well to bear this in mind.

"Dorothy" (Sydney).—Thank you very much for your welcome letter. I am always delighted to hear from my friends "down under."

G. Bedwin (Clapham).—Thank you for your letter extolling the "Gem." Storyettes should in all cases be submitted on postcards.

A. I. (Birmingham).—Tom Merry is the better boxer of those you name.

S. Nicholson.—Write to Messrs. Gamage, Holborn, E.C., for the article you require.

N. Roberts-Sutton (Darlaston).—Thanks very much for your letter and loyal sentiments.

"A Newcastle Chum."—You need not have feared that I should take your criticisms too much to heart. As a matter of fact, I am always pleased to hear from my chums if they see anything in "The Gem" of which they do not altogether approve. Reilly's Christian name is Patrick. Hope you will soon be recovered from your injury.

"Two Girl Readers" (Lancaster).—I am sorry I cannot publish a book for the exclusive benefit of my girl chums. Most of them are perfectly contented with the good old "Gem."

T. McLaughlin (Liverpool).—I am always glad to welcome new readers. You did not comply with the rules when sending in your Storyette. Postcards only, please!

"A Regular Reader" (Newton).—Write to Messrs. Glaisher & Co., Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.

"A Girl Reader" (Berwick-on-Tweed).—No; unfortunately I cannot advise any girl how she may become a boy. I suppose the first asset towards that end is to read "The Gem."

Arthur Ball (Kempston).—Sorry I cannot oblige you with a photograph of Dr. Locke.

"Two Grammar School Chums" (Chichester).—Thank you very much for your ripping letter. I hope you'll always stand by "The Gem."

"A Mablethorpe Reader."—Much obliged to you for your complimentary remarks. Hammond is fifteen years of age.

Montague R. Wentworth (Toronto).—Will see what I can do for you, Monty.

Cyril A. Ward (Lower Edmonton).—"Sir Billy of Greyhouse," Warren Bell's famous masterpiece, has never appeared in threepenny book form. It appeared in serial form, however, in "The Gem" a year or so back.

Jim Kennedy (Co. Donegal).—Write to Messrs. W. & G. Foyle, Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.

THE EDITOR.

OUT TO-DAY!

CONTAINS A

Magnificent Competition

IN WHICH

500 PRIZES

ARE OFFERED TO READERS.

Every Gemite Should Enter!

OUT TO-DAY!