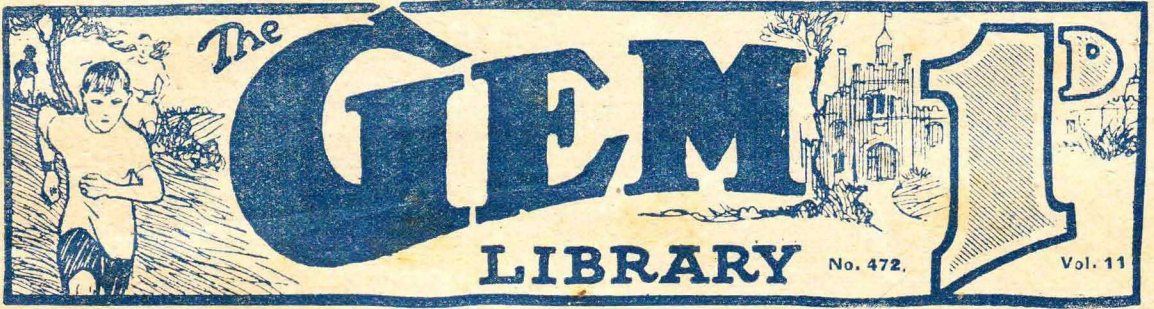


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# HARD LINES FOR LEVISON!

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



# HARD UP AGAINST IT!

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# HARD LINES FOR LEVISON!

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

## CHAPTER 1.

### "Smoked Out!"

LEVISON of the Fourth looked up with a smile as his minor came into No. 2 Study in the Fourth-form passage of the School House.

Levison minor had two or three books under his arm, and a woeful expression upon his usually cheery face.

He paused in the doorway, and looked doubtfully at his major.

"Not busy, Ernie?" he asked.

"No. I haven't started my prep. But that doesn't matter. What's the trouble?"

Frank Levison made a grimace.

"Old Selby's been going for me. If you'd like to help me—"

Levison laughed.

Right-ho! Let's pile in. What is it—Eutropius?"

"No; Cæsar."

"Well, Cæsar oughtn't to bother you very much," said Levison. "You've been slacking. We'll have a grind!"

"I wish sometimes that Brutus & Co. had polished him off before he wrote about the Gallic War!" said Frank, as he sat down at the major's table. "Here's the place. I say, though, the other chaps in this study don't like me working here."

"Bosh!"

"Trimble's told me so, and Mellish!"

"Trimble and Mellish can go and eat coke! Let's begin!" said Levison.

"Where are you? I suppose you've got a bit further than 'Omnis Gallia divisa est in tres partes'?"

The fag grinned.

"Yes, a bit! Here you are: 'Ea res ut Helvetiis per indicium enunciata.' Let's get on from that."

Tom Merry came along the passage and glanced in at the half-open door. Levison major and minor were deep in old "Julius Cæsar," child's play to Levison of the Fourth, though it presented such difficulties to the fag. Tom Merry smiled a little as he looked in.

It was curious enough to see Levison, once the black sheep of the Fourth, thus engaged. Levison had been wont to spend his leisure hours at nap or banker in Racke's study, or in similar occupations of a far from elevated nature. But Levison was rather a different fellow this term, and his kindness to his minor showed up his better nature sharply.

"Hard at work?" smiled Tom.

"Yes. Want anything?"

"I was going to speak about the Rookwood match. But another time will do," said the captain of the Shell. "Pile in!"

Levison's eyes glistened.

"You don't want me for the match?" he asked.

"But I do!" said Tom.

"Good! I'm your man!"

"All serene!"

Tom Merry passed on, and Levison turned to his work with a cheery face. Since his reform it was not uncommon for Levison to find a place in the Junior School team open for him. But it came very pleasantly, all the same.

This was a little better, he could not help reflecting, than nap or banker with Crooke and Racke, or hanging about the Green Man in Rylcombe for a surreptitious game of billiards with Mr. Lodgey.

His reform certainly had turned his old associates into bitter enemies. And two of them were his study mates. But that could not be helped.

Major and minor were very busy with the "Gallic War" when Mellish of the Fourth came into the study.

Levison did not look at him.

"Orgetorix mortuus est!" Frank was saying.

"Give Orgetorix a rest!" said Mellish. "What's that blessed fag doing in this study?"

"Shut up, Mellish!" said Levison, without looking up.

"Oh, keep on if you like!" said Mellish. "We've got a little party on in the study. If it interferes with your mollycoddling, I'm sorry."

Trimble followed Mellish in.

Baggy Trimble's fat face wore a grin. Levison did not need telling that something was on, and he began to look restive.

"We shall want some more chairs!" cried Trimble.

"They're going to bring some with them!" said Mellish. "Racke's bringing the smokes."

"He, he, he!"

There was another arrival—Clampe of the Shell, a New House fellow. He came in grinning.

"Not late?" he asked.

"Not at all. Racke and Crooke and Scrope haven't turned up yet."

"Sha'n't we be interrupting the sweating!" grinned Clampe, with a glance at the workers at the table.

"Yes. Pity, isn't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish and Clampe and Trimble proceeded to talk all at once. It was not easy to keep working under the circumstances, but Levison paid no heed. Mellish and Trimble had a right to talk in their own study if they liked, and to ask their friends into it.

Racke and Crooke of the Shell arrived together a few minutes later. Mellish closed the door after they were in.

"Got the smokes, Racke?"

"Here you are!"

"Good egg!"

Racke laid a box of cigarettes on the table. The merry party sat down round the study, and cigarettes were handed round. It was a smoking-party, and Levison knew that it was intended specially for his annoyance. If the young rascals had wanted merely to smoke, they would have smoked in Racke's study.

Scrope of the Shell came in and joined the party. Then the door was locked. It was necessary to take that little precaution against a surprise visit. The School House prefects would not have looked with a lenient eye upon the sporting proclivities of Racke & Co.

Frank Levison began to cough. The smoke thickened in the study, and the merry company exchanged grins and chuckles.

"Have a fag, Levison?" asked Racke genially.

"No!" growled Levison.

"Not given it up?" exclaimed Crooke, with an air of surprise.

"You know I have."

"Well, I know you've pretended to!" agreed Crooke. "But there's no need

to keep up humbug here, you know! None but friends present!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about Franky?" asked Scrope, with a chuckle. "Has Franky learned your ways yet, Levison?"

Another cough from Franky. The smoke was getting into his lungs, and he did not find it pleasant.

Levison rose to his feet, his eyes glittering.

"You've planted this on me for a rotten trick, you rotters!" he said.

"My hat! Don't you like smoke in the study?" exclaimed Racke. "You've smoked in my study often enough."

"And in mine!" said Scrope. "Have a fag, Levison, and don't play the giddy goat! Be a man, you know!"

Levison's lip curled.

"Being a man," after Scrope's fashion, did not appeal to him at all.

"Are you going to chuck it?" he demanded.

"No fear!" said Mellish promptly.

"I suppose I can have a little party in my own study if I like? You can join us if you choose."

"No good trying to spoof us, you know!" chuckled Baggy Trimble. "Have a fag, and give the humbug a rest, Levison!"

Levison set his teeth. He could not turn the crowd of young rascals out of the study, that was clear. And Racke & Co. had evidently come to stay. Frank rubbed his smarting eyelids, and looked doubtfully at his major.

"We'll go down to the Form-room, Frank!" said Levison at last.

"Yes, Ernie!"

Racke & Co. chuckled joyfully. Levison and the fag left the study together, and Mellish turned the key after them.

"I rather think we score this time!" grinned Mellish. "We'll jolly well keep it up, too. I wonder I never thought of it before. A smoking-party in the study every evening, that will make the blessed humbug sit up, I think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Racke & Co. roared with laughter at the idea: The way of the transgressor is said to be hard; but, if Racke & Co. could help it, the way of reform was not to be easy.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Gussy's Little Mistake.

"BAL Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form, was chatting with Blake and Herries and Digby, outside Study No. 6 when Levison and his minor came along.

They brought with them a very distinct whiff of tobacco-smoke—hence the surprised ejaculation of Arthur Augustus.

Arthur Augustus' noble face became very grave.

He had been quite friendly with Levison since his reform; indeed, he had been the first to believe that the black sheep of the Fourth was turning over a new leaf, while his chums had been inclined to scoff. He had witnessed more than one of Levison's many backslidings with a shocked but compassionate eye. He took a personal interest in the matter; in fact, Arthur Augustus had quite a

fatherly way with him, a way which was not always appreciated at its just value.

"Pway hold on a moment, Levison, deah boy," said D'Arcy gravely.

Levison held on.

"I am sowwy to see this, Levison!"

"Hallo! What are you burbling about now?" asked Levison.

"Pway do not chawactewise my wemarks as burblin', Levison! I wepeat that I am sowwy to see this. I wealise that there are vewy many difficulties in the path of weform, but weally, this is wathah too thiek!"

"What is?" asked Levison calmly.

"Are you awaah, Levison, that you are smellin' of smoke?"

"I hadn't noticed it."

"It is vewy distinct—in fact, vewy unpleasent," said Arthur Augustus. "I am sowwy to notice that Frank is smellin' of smoke, too."

"Look here——" began Levison minor hotly.

"Pway do not intewwupt your eldahs, Levison minah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I am surprised and shocked. Levison, there has been smokin' goin' on in your study!"

Levison nodded.

"Bai Jove! You admit it?"

"Certainly."

"With your minah present?"

"Yes."

"Gweat Scott! Levison, I do not wish to be personal, but I must say that I wegard your conduct as wepwehensible in the extweme."

"Go hon!"

"Is that the way you are goin' to keep fit for the Wookwood match?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "If I were Tom Mewwy, Levison, I should certainly not play you against Wookwood atfah this."

"How lucky you're not Tom Merry, then!" remarked Levison, unmoved. "Have you finished the sermon, and is there any charge?"

Blake and Herries and Digby chuckled. Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon them severely.

"This is not a laughin' mattah, Blake."

"My mistake! I thought it was," said Blake blandly. "But go on, Gussy, you're ripping at the good-old-grand-father bizney. Keep it up!"

"I should expect you fellows, at least, to take the mattah sewiously——"

"My dear ass, we can't take you seriously," urged Digby. "You musn't ask too much, you know!"

"Go on with the sermon!" said Herries. "Levison is waiting for the sixthly, seventhly, and lastly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three came along the passage, and they paused to look on. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were bound for their study to begin their prep; but they had a few minutes to spare for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hallo, what's the row?" asked Monty Lowther. "Gussy on the high horse again?"

"Fairly on it," said Blake. "It's as good as a cinema. Go it, Gussy!"

"I shall not allude to the mattah in Tom Mewwy's pwesence," said Arthur Augustus loftily. "I do not wish to spoil Levison's chance for the Wookwood match."

"Oh, don't mind me!" said Levison cheerily. "Get on with it! This is too funny to miss."

"If you wegard it as funnay, Levison——"

"I do!" said Levison. "Get on, tell Tommy the whole harrowing yarn. I dare say he noticed already that I smell of smoke."

"I did notice it," said Tom Merry, in surprise. "But what——"

"Gussy is talking to me for my own

good," explained Levison. "If you listen, you will be edified too. Hallo, Talbot; come and be edified! Don't miss this chance of having your mind improved."

Talbot of the Shell joined the group, smiling.

"What's on?" he asked.

"Gussy is," said Blake. "On the high horse, and putting his foot into it, as usual. Go it, Gussy, we're all listening. Look serious, you chaps. You shouldn't smile during a sermon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his celebrated monocle a little more tightly into his eye, and surveyed the grinning group with rising indignation.

"I wegard this mewwiment as vewy unseemly, not to say wibald," he said. "I should weally have expected you fellows to be shocked."

"But what are we to be shocked about?" asked Talbot.

"I am not goin' to mention about Levison smokin', as the football skippah is pwesent."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothin' watevah to laugh at, Tom Mewwy! I think Levison ought to be spoken to vewy sewiously."

"More in sorrow than in anger, as Shakespeare puts in," suggested Lowther.

"Yaas, exactly. Levison, deah boy, if you are not fit for a footah match, Tom Mewwy will be bound to turn you out of the team."

"If Levison isn't fit, he'll go out so fast it will make his head swim," said Tom. "But he looks fit enough."

"Fit as a fiddle," said Levison. "Gussy is alarmed because there has been smoking in my study."

"As you wefer to the mattah yourself, Levison, I will mention it. Do you think that smokin' cigawettes is the way to keep fit for footah?"

"Not at all."

"You are awaah that it will spoil your wind?"

"Yes; I think I've heard so," said Levison sarcastically.

"Also that it is a widiculous pwocceedin' in a fellow of your age, a youngstah like you," said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Quite so."

"Then why do you do it, you widiculous ass?"

"But I don't do it," said Levison cheerfully.

"Weally, Levison, you are smellin' of tobacco-smoke at this vewy moment!"

"No doubt about that," agreed Levison.

"You admit that there has been smokin' goin' on in your studay?"

"Certainly."

"Vewy well, undah the circs——"

"Under the circs, we'd better go and get on with Cæsar, Franky, as D'Arcy seems to be wound up," remarked Levison. "Come on!"

And Levison went on down the passage, followed by his grinning minor. Arthur Augustus gazed after him sadly, and then looked at his chuckling companions.

"If you wegard this as a laughin' mattah, you fellows, I can only we remark that you are labahin' undah a sewious misappwehension," he said sternly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now that Levison has taken to smokin' again——"

"But he hasn't, you howling ass!" roared Blake. "Can't you see that Levison was pulling your fatheaded leg, you duffer?"

"Weally, Blake——"

"You cheerful idiot!" said Herries. "Didn't you see Racke and Crooke and

that crowd go into the study? They've been smoking him out."

"Bai Jove!"

"I thought it was something of the sort," said Tom Merry laughing. "You can always rely on Uncle Gustavus to put his noble foot in it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face was a study.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated at last. "Do you weally think that is the case, Blake?"

"I know it is, fathead!"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake! If you knew that that was the case, why didn't you tell me so?"

"Oh, I like to hear you run on," said Blake cheerfully. "It's a relief from war worry, you know, to hear you talking like a Dutch uncle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as an ass, Blake. Bai Jove! I weally think I owe Levison an apology," said Arthur Augustus greatly distressed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus sniffed, and hurried away down the passage. Having put his noble foot in it, he was bound to make the "amende honorable." It was evidently a case that called for an apology. And to leave a debt of that kind unpaid did not consort with the noble manners of Vere de Vere.

The swell of St. Jim's looked in at the Third Form-room. He found a crowd of fags there, but neither Levison minor nor his major was to be seen.

"Do you know where Levison is, Wally?" asked Arthur Augustus, addressing his minor, who was playing leapfrog with Reggie Manners and Joe Frayne and Jameson and several other dusty youths.

"Bow-wow! Don't bother!" was Wally's reply.

"Weally, Wally——"

"Shut that door, ass! Suppose old Selby comes along? He don't like leapfrog in the Form-room."

Arthur Augustus retired, and shut the door, with unnecessary force. He looked into the Fourth Form-room next; and there he found Levison major and minor, sitting at a desk, deep in the Gallic War, and the stirring events that followed the death of Orgetorix.

"Levison, deah boy——"

Levison waved his hand to the door.

"Busy! Buzz off!"

"It is wathah important, Levison——" "Can't stand two sermons in one evening, and Frank will be wanted for prep soon. Do ring off!"

"I owe you an apology, Levison——"

"Dry up!" roared Levison.

"I wefuse to dwy up, Levison, until I have explained——"

"Br-r-r!"

"I appeah to have been labahin' undah a misappwehension, Levison——"

"You'll be labouring under a Latin dictionary if you don't clear off!" said the exasperated Levison.

"It appeahs, Levison, that you were not smokin'——"

"Buzz off!"

"But you were smoked out of your study by a set of wottahs——"

"Good-bye!"

"Undah the circs, I owe you an apology——"

"Will you shut up?" shrieked Levison. "I tell you Franky's got to go to Selby in ten minutes, and he's got to get through this dashed thing first!"

"I am sowwy to intewwupt you, undah the circs, Levison. I twust that Fwanky will pwofit by your vewy kind instructions. But I feel bound to explain to you that—— Yawwooooh!"

Whizz!

A Latin dictionary flew through the air, and it landed upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's handsome waistcoat. The swell of St. Jim's sat down in the Form-room doorway with a bump.

"Gwooh!" he ejaculated.  
"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Frank. "Well hit!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled up, his eyeglass flying at the end of its cords, his trousers dusty, and his face crimson with wrath.

"Bai Jove! I wefuse to apologise now, Levison! I wegard you—"  
"You'll get the inkpot next!" said Levison.

"You uttah wottah! Oh, bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus dodged out of the Form-room as Levison clutched the inkpot. He closed the door with a terrific bang. Levison of the Fourth and his minor ground on through the Gallic War, and the apology was never delivered!

CHAPTER 3.

Lowther Has an Idea!

**B**LAKE & CO. grinned when Arthur Augustus came back into Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus was looking a little dusty, and somewhat excited.

"Hallo! Didn't the apology go off all right?" asked Digby.

"Levison cut up wussy for some weason, Dig. He is wathah a wuff beast."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"There is nothin' to make at. I should have given the wottah a feathful thwashin', but he had an inkpot—"  
Blake & Co. roared.

"I wegard this laughtah as entially out of place!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "And, in spite of Levison's wude conduct, I am goin' to befriend him!"

"Going to put your foot in it again?" yawned Blake. "Why not get on with your prep instead?"

"Pwep can wait, Blake."  
"Lathom won't wait in the morning," said Herries, with a shake of the head. "Botter pile in! Give your lower jaw a rest!"

"Wats! Levison has been simply driven out of his study by those smokay wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am not surprised that he is wathah watty. I weally think somebody ought to chip in. What do you think, Blake?"

"I think I am going to do my prep."  
"I am goin' to speak to them vewy severely," said Arthur Augustus. "If they do not stop their wepwehensible wascaloty, I shall use dwastic measuaha. I wegard it as bein' up to me. You fellows comin'?"

"No; we'll get our prep done," said Digby. "You run along and remonstrate with the rotters! I expect the door's locked. But I dare say you can remonstrate through the keyhole!"

"Weally, Dig—"  
Blake and Herries and Dig bent over their work. Arthur Augustus gave them a lofty glance, and departed from the study.

He stopped at the door of No. 2, tapped, and turned the handle. The door did not open.

"Who's there?" came Mellish's voice.  
"It is I, Mellish!"  
"Well, go and eat coke!"  
"Pway open the door!"  
"Rate!"

"I wish to point out to you that your conduct is uttably wotten, Mellish! You have no wight to smoke Levison out of his own studdy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I wegard you as a set of wotten Huns!"

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"Buzz off, fathead!"  
"Bai Jove!"

The locked door was between Mellish and vengeance, so he rattled on cheerfully.

"Go and eat coke, fathead! Go and chop chips, dummy! Run away and play, ass! Do anything you like but sing one of your tenor solos! Don't do that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
Arthur Augustus retired, breathing wrath. But he did not return to No. 6. He walked on to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage. There he found the Terrible Three at prep.

"I want you fellows to back me up!" he announced.

"Cut off—busy!" said Tom.  
"Those smokay wottahs have smoked Levison out of his study. I wegard it as bein' up to somebody to chip in. Blake wants to do his pwep—"  
"I want to do mine," said Manners plaintively.

"Weally, Mannahs, pwep can wait in a good cause! This is the time for ewwybody to wally wound. Levison ought to be encouraged in turnin' ovah a new leaf; it is weally a vewy cweditable performance for a chap like Levison. Suppose you come and help me burst in the door—"

"And suppose Railton comes up and bursts on us with a cane?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"We will wisk that, Lowthah!"  
"I'll leave my whack of the risk to you, Gussy," said Tom Merry, laughing.  
"I wegard it as a risk, it would be a cert!"

"I say, something must be done, though," said Monty Lowther, with a glimmer in his eyes which showed that a weeze was coming. "It's really hard lines on Levison. Must be rotten to be smoked out like a badger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Look here, we've got prep to do!" said Manners warmly. "None of your little jokes now, Monty."  
"But it is a good weeze," said Lowther eagerly. "They've smoked Levison out. Why shouldn't they be smoked out?"

"Fathead! Do you want us to go and compete with them at cigarette-puffing?" grunted Manners.  
"No, ass! They wouldn't let us in, anyway. But there's a chimney in the study, and we could get at the chimney over the leads."

"My hat!"  
"And we could fasten the door up first, so as to give 'em a good smoke," said Lowther, his eyes glistening.

"Tom Merry laughed.  
"Good egg! What's sauce for the gander! Prep can wait a bit."  
"But how'll Levison like his study being smothered with smoke and soot?" asked Manners.

"We'll ask him afterwards."  
"You ass—"  
"It's too good to be missed!" said Monty Lowther, jumping up. "Blow prep! Prep ought to be abolished in war time, anyway! Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as a wippin' ideah, deah boys."  
"After which, there is nothing more to be said," remarked Lowther. "Gussy approves! So, as Shakespeare remarks, 'Come all the corners of the world in arms, and we shall front them!' Gussy approves!"

"Weally, you ass—"  
"You stay here and work your lower jaw, Gussy," said Lowther; and the Terrible Three left the study.

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, you uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus

indignantly. And he followed the chums of the Shell.

Monty Lowther stopped outside No. 2 Study in the Fourth. His preparations were soon made. Quietly and steadily, he drove a screw into the doorpost close by the lock. It was a big screw, and he left about an inch of it out of the wood. Then he bound a stout whipcord about the handle of the door, and fastened it to the screw, pulling it quite taut. Within the study there was a chatter of voices, and Racke & Co. had no suspicion of what the humorist of the Shell was doing outside.

"There you are!" murmured Lowther. "Now, who's going on the leads? It's a D'Arcy's place to lead, I think."  
"Yaas, wathah!"

"And I don't want to soil my trousers—"

"Bai Jove!"  
"Buck up, Gussy!"

"On second thoughts, Lowthah, I pwefer not to go on the leads. It would wuin my twousahs."

"I suppose you can sacrifice a pair of trousers on the altar of a good cause?" said Monty Lowther severely.

"Wats!"  
Monty Lowther grinned and disappeared up the passage. At the top of the back staircase was a trapdoor, giving access to the leads. It was supposed only to be used in case of fire. But there it was; and Monty Lowther, having captured a piece of sacking in the box-room, opened the trap, and stepped out on the leads. His chums waited in the Fourth Form passage for what was to happen.

CHAPTER 4.

Sauce for the Gander.

**R**ACKE & CO were enjoying themselves, after their own peculiar fashion.

The room was quite hazy with smoke.

But it was only cigarette-smoke, so far, and the black shtep were accustomed to that.

Racke and Crooke, Scrope and Mellish, were gathered round the table, playing cards. Baggy Trimble was looking on with envious eyes. Baggy was, as usual, short of cash; and Racke & Co. did not feel inclined to play for waste-paper, as they politely termed Baggy's I.O.U's.

"Your deal, Crooke," yawned Racke. "I say, it seems a bit smoky in this study. Anything wrong with the chimney?"

"Not that I know of," said Mellish, looking round and sniffing. "It does seem a bit smoky, though. My hat!"

He jumped up as a sudden rush of smoke poured down the chimney. It came out in a black rolling cloud, which showed that its natural passage upward had been stopped.

Racke started up angrily.  
"What the thunder's the matter with it? Oh, crumbs!"

Smoke was simply pouring from the chimney now.

It filled the room with a dense cloud, and the young rascals began to cough and splutter frantically.

"I'm getting out of this!" snarled Crooke, and he dashed to the door and unlocked it. He dragged at the door, but it did not open.

"What's the matter with this confounded door?" roared Crooke, dragging furiously at the handle. "What's the matter with it, Mellish?"

"Gwoogh!"  
"Come and open it, you dummy!"  
"Gurrig!"  
"Get it open!" shrieked Racke. "Wa

shall be suffocated at this rate!" Racke jammed the window open to its fullest extent. "Why don't you open the door, Crooke, you silly ass?"

"I can't, you dummy!"  
 "Get aside, fathead! Let me try!"  
 Racke dragged at the door in his turn. But the door did not open. The smoke thickened in the study, in spite of the opened window. All eyes were smarting and running water now. Outside, a voice was audible.

"Bai Jove! There's smoke comin' through the keyhole, deah boys! It must be feahfully smokay in there, you know."

"It's a trick!" hissed Racke. "D'Arcy, you rotter, open this door!"

"I wefuse to be called a wottah, Wacke!"

"Will you open this door, you dummy?"

"Open this door!" yelled Crooke. "We're suffocating!"  
 "Suffocate quietly, then!" said Manners.

"We're chook-chook-choked!"  
 "Wats! You're fond of smoke!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "Now you can simply woll in it. I wegard this as funnay!"

"Grooo-hoooh!"  
 "Gurrrrrrh!"  
 "Let us out!"

"What can be the matter with the chimney?" exclaimed Clive.

"Lowther and a sack, I think," grinned Manners.

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha!"

"I guess that study will be rather nice after that," said Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "Whose idea was it?"

"It was weally my ideah, Lumlay."

"Then I guess I'd bump you bald-

"No; I've taken it off," grinned Lowther. "I thought about ten minutes would be enough. It must be quite thick in there. I say, Racke, is it rather thick in that study?"

"Open the door, you rotter!"

Racke & Co. had ceased to drag at the door, as they had found it would not open. Lowther, with a grin, cut through the whipcord, and put the driver in the screw. The screw was withdrawn, and Lowther slipped it into his pocket with the screwdriver. The juniors yelled with laughter. There was nothing now to prevent Racke & Co. from opening the door, if they liked; but they were not aware of that fact. They were hammering on the door with their fists, and yelling to be let out.

"Cave!" sang Clive along the passage.

"Here comes Kildare!"

"Let him come!" grinned Lowther.

"We're not doing any harm. I suppose. In fact, we're sympathising with Racke."

Kildare of the Sixth came striding along the passage. He had his ashplant in his hand.

"What's all this thumping row about?" he exclaimed.

"About to leave off, I think," said Monty Lowther genially. "Yow-ow! Keep that blessed ashplant away, Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's did not seem to appreciate Lowther's humorous reply.

Hammer, and hammer, and hammer came from within the smoking study.

"Let us out!" roared Crooke.

"Yow-ow-ow! Lemme gerrout!" shrieked Trimble.

"Why don't you come out, then?" exclaimed Kildare. He opened the door, and pushed it, and there was a howl from Racke & Co. as it bumped on them. "Great Scott! What's all this smother?"

"Groogh! The chimney started smoking," gasped Racke, "and those rotters were holding the door shut!"

"You young rascals!"

Kildare turned to the passage again. But the passage was empty: the juniors had disappeared as if by the stroke of a magician's hand.

"The chimney seems all right now!" exclaimed Kildare. "It's drawing right enough. You've been up to some tricks here!"

"We haven't!" spluttered Racke furiously. "Do you think we got into this state for the fun of the thing?"

Kildare grinned as he looked at the smoky company. Really, it did not seem likely that they had got into that state on purpose.

"Well, you'd better get cleaned," he said. "You look like a set of sweeps. Don't make any more row, that's all."

And Kildare beat a retreat; he had had enough of the smoke. Racke & Co. came out into the passage gasping and coughing and wheezing. Monty Lowther looked-out of his study as they trooped off to the bath-room.

"You look rather smoky," he remarked.

"You rotter. I believe you played some trick on the chimney!" snarled Racke.

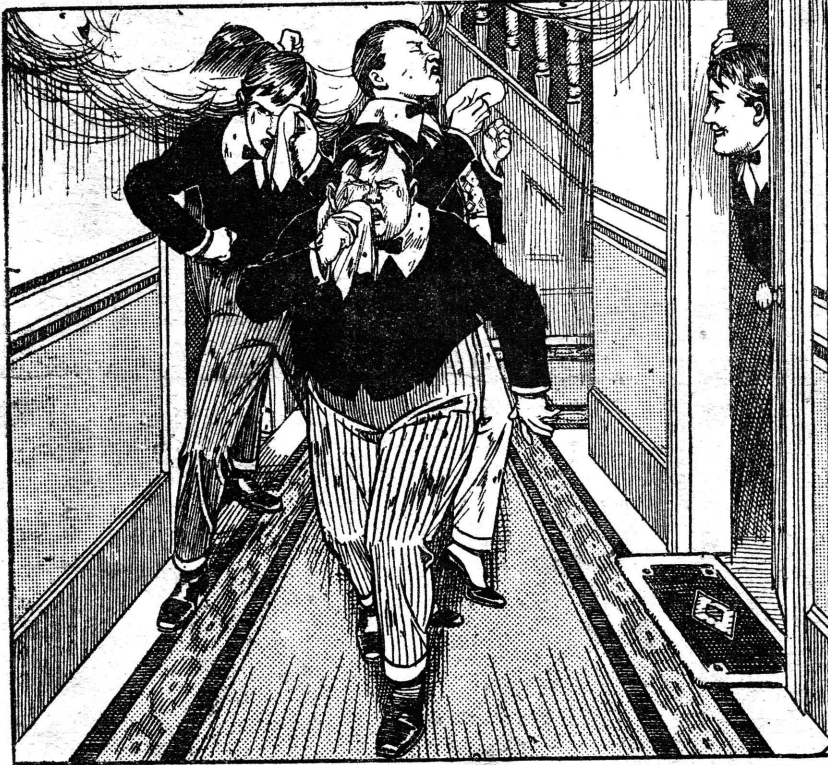
"Well, you smoked Levison out, you know. One good turn deserves another. Don't you think so?" asked Lowther sweetly.

Racke & Co. did not reply to that question; they tramped on. Lowther returned to his prep with a satisfied smile.

"I rather think we've done a good deed," he remarked. "Racke & Co. looked quite fed-up."

"I wonder what Levison will think

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Racke and Co. came out into the passage gasping and coughing and wheezing. (See Chapter 4.)

"I wegard that as an oppwobwious expression, Wacke, and I wefuse to weply!"

"You—you—you— Lend me a hand with this door, you fellows!"

panted Racke. "I'm smothered with blacks! I'm suffocating!"

"Groogh!"

"Yow-ow! Oh dear!"

The merry blades were not looking very merry now. They were black with smoke and soot, their eyes were streaming, and they were in furiously bad tempers. They gathered round the door, striving to drag it open. It yielded about half an inch; but it would yield no further.

Outside, there was a buzz of merriment. Blake & Co. had come out of Study No. 6—forsaking even the delights of prep. Kangaroo and Dane and Glyn had come along, and Julian & Co. from No. 5. Smoke was issuing from the keyhole and round the door of the study. The furious voices of the merry blades could be heard within, as they struggled with the door.

headed, if I hadn't changed into No. 8," grinned Lumley-Lumley. "If that were my study now—"

"Weally, Lumley—"

"I wonder how Levison will like it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Lumley-Lumley joined in the roar. He did not mind; he had changed out of No. 2 Study, having become most completely fed up with Mellish and Trimble. Lowther's little joke was really being played on Levison's account; but how Levison would like the results was a problem.

It was certain, at all events, that Racke & Co. did not like it. They were raging in the smoky study like rats in a trap.

Monty Lowther came back along the passage, with a genial smile upon his face.

"Seems rather smoky here," he remarked. "Anything wrong with anybody's chimney?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You haven't left the sack on?" exclaimed Tom.

when he sees his study?" grinned Manners.

"I hope he will be grateful."

"Ha, ha! I fancy he won't be."

"Well, there's a lot of ingratitude in the world," remarked Monty Lowther philosophically. "I sha'n't expect too much gratitude from Levison. Let's get on with the prep."

And the Terrible Three got on with the prep.

## CHAPTER 5.

### A Change of Quarters.

"MY hat!" Levison of the Fourth uttered that ejaculation as he looked into his study about half an hour later.

The study did not look inviting.

The room and everything in it was smothered with blacks. Smoke still clung to the furniture, and table and chairs and books reeked with blacks.

"My hat!" repeated Levison.

"Hallo! Is that you, Levison, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus came out of No. 6 Study. "Looks wathah wotten in there. Pempwaps—"

"What on earth's happened?"

"We smoked them out, deah boy, to give them a lesson about smokin' a chap out of his studay," grinned Arthur Augustus. "Wathah a neat ideah—what?"

"You howling idiot!" roared Levison.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Look at my things—my books—everything!" shrieked Levison. "How am I going to get that lot clean?"

Arthur Augustus looked into the dismal study and shook his head. It was a problem too difficult for him, and he gave it up.

"I weally do not know, deah boy," he replied. "I nevah thought of that."

"You dummy!"

"Weally, Levison, if that is what you call gwatitude—"

"You frabjous ass!"

"I wegard you as an ungwateful beast, Levison, and the next time you are smoked out of your studay, I shall wefuse to come to the rescue!" And Arthur Augustus returned to his quarters with his noble nose high in the air.

Trimble and Mellish came along the passage, newly swept and garnished, so to speak, but still a little sooty and smoky.

"You've got your precious new pals to thank for that, Levison," said Mellish viciously. "You'd better clean it up. I'm going to do my prep in Crooke's study."

"And I'm going to Scrope's," growled Trimble.

Levison grunted. He did not feel inclined to do his prep in the study in that state, neither did he feel inclined to start the cleaning process. That looked as if it would have made a thirteenth job for Hercules. He sorted out the books he needed, and went along to No. 7. He found Clive and Smith minor and Contarini at work there.

"You chaps mind if I do my prep here?" asked Levison.

The three juniors grinned. They had been witnesses of the smoking-out of No. 2.

"Right you are!" said Clive at once. "Make room, you chaps!"

"You're welcome," said Smith minor.

"Come i fiori in Maggio," said Contarini gracefully.

"You don't pull with Mellish and Trimble now?" remarked Clive, with rather a curious look at Levison. The South African junior, like Tom Merry & Co., had got on much better with Levison since the latter's change of habits.

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"No," growled Levison. "It's rottener than it was before, now Lumley-Lumley's changed out."

"Why don't you change out, too?" suggested Clive. "We're a bit crowded in here, and I've been thinking of asking for No. 9, only I don't want to dig by myself. Railton would let the two of us have it."

Levison gave him rather a queer look.

It was true that No. 9 in the Fourth Form passage was empty, two fellows who had shared it not having come back for the new term. Levison had thought of asking the Housemaster for it, but he did not want to dig alone. It was not quite so good a room as No. 2, but the absence of Mellish and Trimble compensated for that. It was Clive's proposition that surprised him. A few weeks before the South African junior would never have dreamed of making it. Even now that Levison's reform was believed in, he could not exactly be said to have a chum in the Fourth.

Fellows were friendly with him, but he chummed with nobody; he was not of a chummy nature, if it came to that. Clive, on the other hand, was on excellent terms with nearly every fellow in the Fourth.

"You mean that?" asked Levison, at last.

Clive nodded.

"Why not? I expect we should pull together all right. And there isn't much room here, what with Jackeymo's fiddle and Smithy's boots—"

"You let my boots alone!" growled Smith minor.

"It's a go!" said Levison. "I'd like it, if you would. We'd better ask old Railton this evening; the study will be snapped up pretty soon. Macdonald was talking about asking for it."

"Let's go now, if you like the idea," said Clive.

"Done!"

The two juniors left the study together, Levison looking very thoughtful. Sidney Clive's offer to share a study with him had given him more pleasure than he would have cared to admit. The healthy, hearty, open-hearted Colonial junior was not much like Levison, but Levison could not help liking him. Levison realised that he was getting on quite a new footing in the Fourth, and it naturally pleased him.

He tapped at the Housemaster's door, and Mr. Railton's deep voice bade him enter. The two Fourth-Formers entered together.

The Housemaster gave them a kind nod.

"What is it?" he asked.

"We've come to ask if we may have No. 9, sir," said Levison. "It's empty at present, and—"

"And there isn't much room for three in my study, sir," said Clive.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Quite so, Clive. But why do you wish to change, Levison?" His eyes dwelt keenly on Levison's face.

"I don't get on so well as I used with my study-mates, sir," said Levison. "Clive and I would get on first-rate."

"The fact is, there is a new boy coming in a few days, and I intended to place him in No. 9," said Mr. Railton. "However, we will see. For the present, you may change into No. 9, if you wish."

"Thank you, sir!" said the two juniors together.

And they left the Housemaster's study quite satisfied. Levison looked at his companion rather oddly in the passage.

"You think you'll get on with me?" he asked.

"I have no doubt about that."

"Some of the fellows wouldn't think it so easy."

Clive laughed.

"Well, I'll chance it. If we row, we shall row. I've rowed with Jackeymo often enough for scraping on his fiddle while I'm doing my prep."

Levison burst into a chuckle.

"Trimble and Mellish can have the pleasure of cleaning No. 2, or tipping the maid to do it," he remarked. "Come to think of it, it was a jolly good wheeze, smoking them out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After prep that evening the two new study-mates removed their personal belongings to No. 9. Levison's belongings required some rubbing and dusting before they could be removed, and Clive lent him a willing hand. Mellish glanced in at the doorway while they were so engaged.

"Cleaning it up?" he sneered.

"No fear!" grinned Levison. "That's your little bit, if you want it cleaned up. I'm getting out."

Mellish's face fell.

"Changing studies?" he ejaculated.

"Exactly."

"Rats!" said Mellish incredulously. "Nobody in the Fourth would have you for a study-mate at any price if he could help it!"

"Wrong again!" grinned Levison. "Come on, Clive! We've got to get the study in order before bedtime. Sorry to deprive you of the armchair, Mellish, but it happens to be my property!"

And Clive and Levison bore away the study armchair, leaving Mellish staring. The little plot plotted among the black sheep of the School House was evidently at an end. The smoking-party could gather in No. 2 every evening if it chose; it would not matter to Levison.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Mellish.

"What a sell!"

And Mellish made his way to Racke's study to tell the news. He found Racke and Crooke looking decidedly bad-tempered. They had not quite got over the smoke yet.

"The game's up about Levison," announced Mellish. "We sha'n't be able to smoke him out again!"

"I'm going to smoke him out every evening, the cad!" growled Racke.

"N.G. He's changed out—chummed up with Clive, of all chaps! Blessed if I ever thought a chap like Clive would take to Levison!"

Crooke gave a whistle.

"He's spoofing them all round, of course," he remarked. "I don't believe in these precious reforms, for one! There'll be rows when Clive finds that he smokes, and takes sporting papers in the study, and leaves cigarettos about, and playing-cards and things!"

Racke snorted.

"Whether he's spoofing or not, he's keeping it up," he said. "He means to throw us over for good, and creep into Merry's good graces. I hear that he's going to play for St. Jim's in the Rookwood match. Lot of chance any of us would have of playing for St. Jim's!"

"Blessed if I want to!" yawned Crooke.

Racke set his teeth.

"He's thrown us over," he repeated. "That poverty-stricken cad! Why, I know his father can hardly afford to pay his fees here!"

"Not like your pater, rolling in war-profits!" grinned Mellish.

"You're jolly glad to see some of the war-profits, anyway!" sneered Racke. "One thing's jolly certain—I'm not going to be thrown over by a rotten outsider like Levison without making him sit up! If we can't make him squirm one way, we can another!"

Crooke shook his head.

"No more of your blessed wheezes!"

he said. "It was mucked up when we tried to keep him out of the Greyfriars footer match. I'm not trying that again. He can play against Rookwood, and everybody else, for all I care. I'm keeping off the grass!"

"And it's not much good sticking cigarettes in his pockets for fellows to see," grinned Mellish. "We've tried that, and it was no go. They believe in him now!"

"One swallow doesn't make a summer!" growled Racke. "I'm going to put another spoke in his wheel, and I've got an idea in my head already!"

"You can keep it there, so far as I'm concerned," said Mellish. "I'm not looking for another ragging!"

And the cad of the Fourth quitted the study.

Crooke went on with his preparation, but Racke did not. Racke threw himself into the armchair, and lighted a cigarette. His wrinkled brows looked through a cloud of smoke, and he cogitated upon the new scheme that had come into his head—the scheme for making Ernest Levison of the Fourth repent him that he had thrown over his old associates—the estimable Racke & Co.!

### CHAPTER 6. Study-mates.

LEVISON of the Fourth found himself decidedly more comfortable in his new quarters with his new study-mate.

Contrary to the expectations of a good many fellows, No. 9 study pulled together very well indeed.

If Levison had been the Levison of old, Sidney Clive would certainly have had nothing to do with him, and the fact that Clive had chummed with him showed that the former black sheep was accepted at his new value by the best fellows in the House. It was, so to speak, the outward and visible sign of the inward invisible grace.

Tom Merry & Co. were glad enough to see it. They liked Clive, and they knew that his companionship in the study would be a good thing for Levison.

Levison was quite clear of his old associates now, and out of reach of the knavish tricks they had so kindly planned for him.

Frank Levison, too, was "persona grata" in Levison's new study.

Clive of the Fourth always had a cheery nod and smile for the fag, and sometimes lent him a hand when he brought his books to the study to wrestle with the difficulties of Eutropius and old Julius.

The smoking-out scheme having failed, in consequence of Levison's change of quarters, Racke & Co. appeared to have given the matter up in disgust. Mellish and Crooke, indeed, would probably have let the business drop, and Levison go his own way; but Racke was differently built.

The heir of the wealthy war-profitteer, the fellow who had more fivers than any other fellow had ten-shilling notes, could not forgive the slight of being thrown over by a "poverty-stricken outsider." If he had chosen to drop Levison, that would have been right and natural; but for Levison to drop him was an unparadonable insult, and had to be punished. Racke neither forgave nor forgot; but he was biding his time.

Levison gave him hardly a thought, if a thought at all. He was busy now in keeping up his footer practice in readiness for the Rookwood match. That match was one of the most important on the junior list, ranking next to Greyfriars in the estimation of the junior players. It was a high honour to be selected for the team on such an occasion, and a few weeks before no one would have dreamed

of such an honour falling to Levison. The new recruit meant to make himself well worthy of a place in Tom Merry's front line, and his assiduity and the form he showed earned him hearty encomiums from his skipper.

Levison came into No. 9 after footer practice one afternoon, looking very ruddy and cheerful, very different from the old Levison.

Clive was there, getting tea ready, and Grundy of the Shell was sitting on the corner of the table. Grundy was waiting for Levison, and he had been improving the shining hour by telling Clive how footer ought really to be played, and what an ass Tom Merry was not to pick out George Alfred Grundy for the Rookwood match.

Clive was grinning good-naturedly, giving Grundy his head, as it were.

"Oh, here you are!" said Grundy, as Levison came in. "I've been waiting for you, Levison. I've waited jolly nearly ten minutes!"

Grundy made that statement in a very impressive tone. Evidently, from Grundy's point of view, it was a serious matter for an ordinary mortal to keep him waiting ten minutes.

"Have you?" yawned Levison. "Well, don't wait any longer, there's a good chap!"

"I've got a job for you," explained Grundy. "Old Linton's given me two hundred lines!"

"Better buzz off and do them!"

"Two hundred lines!" said Grundy indignantly. "Doubled my impot, you know, because I told him I hadn't had time to do the hundred yesterday!"

"You told Linton that?" ejaculated Levison.

"Certainly! It was so, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at, Levison, and I don't like being cackled at by fags!" said Grundy, frowning.

"However, I want you to do the lines. Two hundred of Virgil, in my first, and there's your two bob!"

Grundy tossed a two-shilling piece on the table, and lounged out of the study. Levison picked up the coin.

Clive looked at him.

"You're going to do them?" he asked.

"Yes; I often do."

"In Grundy's fist?"

"Well, it wouldn't be much use doing them in my own fist, would it?" grinned Levison. "Linton's a bit sharper than old Lathom!"

Clive was silent, and went on with getting tea. A new hesitation came into Levison's manner, and he eyed the South African junior keenly.

"You don't think I ought to do them?" he asked.

"It isn't my bizney," said Clive shortly.

"Lots of chaps do each other's lines."

"Not for money."

"Well, no. But I've often made a little extra tin that way, and I don't have very much pocket-money, you know."

"It isn't only that," said Clive abruptly; "but it's a bit dangerous imitating another fellow's hand. A gift like that might get you into trouble!"

"It has got me into trouble more than once," said Levison calmly. "I've played tricks that way, you know, just to show how really clever I was!"

Clive laughed, in spite of himself.

"Jolly nearly got sacked for it once, for a rotten trick I played on Brooke of the Fourth!" said Levison. "I've got a bit more sense now; but I don't see any harm in doing Grundy's lines for him. All's grist that comes to the mill when you're short of oof!"

"Not all, I should think."

Levison knitted his brows. As a matter of fact, it had come into his mind that

the question was not quite so unimportant as he had always deemed it, and he could see that Clive did not like the idea.

Levison was still the old Levison in some respects. The old suspicious and uncertain temper was not quite cured.

"You're not hard up," he said. "It's easy to preach at a chap who is."

"I'm not preaching at you," said Clive.

"You are!" said Levison angrily. "What's the harm in writing 'Virgil' in Grundy's clumsy fist?"

"I don't know that there is any harm in it."

"But you wouldn't do it?"

"No; I wouldn't."

"I know you've helped Smith minor with his lines, all the same."

"That's different."

"You mean you weren't paid for it?"

"Well, yes."

"And you don't call that preaching?" sneered Levison.

"Oh, let it drop!" said Clive. "Make the tea while I finish the toast. What's the good of jawing one another?"

Levison gave a grunt, and the subject dropped. When tea was over, however, he pushed the tea-things aside, and took out a sheaf of impot paper. He did not need a copy of Grundy's fist; he had done so many lines for Grundy that he knew it only too well. He hardly needed a "Virgil" before him, either. Levison had a retentive memory, and could have recited hundreds of verses from the "Æneid." Clive had lines to do on his own account, and he sat down to do them—with much!

He glanced at Levison's work in wonder. Levison's own handwriting was small and very neat and clear; but without an effort he was filling the page with Grundy's huge, sprawling hand. It was a dangerous gift for any fellow to possess, and Levison had sometimes turned it to bad account; but it was certainly a gift.

"What do you think of that?" said Levison, when he had finished the impot, getting through the two hundred lines before Clive had finished his hundred.

"Jolly clever, at least!" said Clive. Levison laughed.

"I'll help you with your lot if you like," he said. "Give me the next sheet, and I'll fill it for you."

"You do them much more easily than I do," said Clive. "But—"

"Oh, rot! Give me the paper, and I'll run them off! You don't think I want you to pay me, do you?"

Clive hesitated a moment, but he allowed Levison to have his way. It was not unusual for study-mates to help one another with impots, and trust to luck for the Form-master not to notice the difference of hands. It was Levison's uncanny skill at what was dangerously near forgery that made the thing unsavoury to Clive's mind. But Levison meant to be good-natured, and Clive did not want to be ungracious, and he gave in.

Levison glanced at what Clive had written, wrote a line or two for practice, and then started on the impot. The Colonial junior stared as the lines raced off under Levison's pen in Clive's own handwriting.

"There you are!" said Levison. "It's nothing to me. You can take them in to Lathom now. Don't tell him I wrote them—Hallo, Racke! What the dickens do you want?"

Racke of the Shell was looking in at the doorway.

"Job for you," said Racke, with a curiously furtive glance. "A hundred lines for Kildare. Mind you make them in my fist. I suppose Clive knows all about your wonderful gifts?" he added,

with a sneer. "I'm not letting anything out, am I?"

"You know he does, as you've just seen me doing lines for him!" snapped Levison. "But I'm not going to do your lines!"

"I'm going to pay you, of course," said Racke loftily.

"Oh, clear off!"

Racke stood his ground.

"Does that mean that prices have gone up?" he sneered. "Are you charging more than a bob a hundred?"

"I'm not a war-profiteer!" grinned Levison. "I leave that to Messrs. Racke & Hacke. It means that I'm not going to do lines for you."

"I've no time to do them," said Racke arrogantly. "I'll make it two bob a hundred if you like. The money's nothing to me."

"No; as it isn't your own money," remarked Levison. "You'll have to be a bit more careful if war-profits are put a stop to. It may happen, you know, if the war goes on. I suppose Racke & Hacke will join the Pacifists then?"

Clive chuckled, and Racke scowled.

"Look here! Are you going to do the lines?" demanded Racke.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't choose."

"Go and eat coke, then!"

Racke strode away with a sulky brow, but with a strange glitter in his eyes. Racke's thoughts were busy. Levison gave a hard laugh.

"To think that I chummed with that worm once!" he said. "Do you know why he came here, Clive?"

"To get his lines done, I suppose."

"Yes; and to let you know about my doing them for money, in case you didn't know already. They'd like to start trouble in this study if they could."

"I dare say that was it," agreed Clive, after a moment's thought. "It would be like Racke."

"But you're not going to preach to me about it?" grinned Levison.

"No; you know I'm not."

Levison rose to his feet.

"I'll take this lot to Grundy," he said. "He's depending on me, and I can't let him down. But it's the last lot. I'll tell him so. I hadn't thought much about it before; but I'm chucking it now."

And Levison left the study with Grundy's impot in his hand. Clive looked after him rather curiously. Certainly, the change in Levison had gone deep, and Clive did not regret that he'd gone Co. with him in Study No. 9.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Trimble is Made Useful.

"WHAT are you doing here, you fat boulder?"

"Oh!" ejaculated Trimble.

Sidney Clive had come into his study suddenly a day or two after the affair of Grundy's impot. He found Baggy Trimble of the Fourth there, very busy.

It was not uncommon for Baggy Trimble to raid another fellow's study during the said fellow's absence. Trimble had an appetite that put into the shade the famous appetite of Fatty Wynn of the New House. And although he never tired of talking of the splendours of Trimble Hall, it was noticeable that remittances came very seldom from that magnificent residence. Trimble was always short of money, and whenever he had any it went at once to Dame Taggles in the tuckshop. Hence Baggy's frequent surreptitious visits to study cupboards, and hence many a bumping that had

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been bestowed upon Baggy by exasperated fellows who found their supplies raided.

But Baggy Trimble was not at the study cupboard this time. He was examining the shabby old wastepaper-basket under the table, though what he could want with the wastepaper-basket was a mystery.

He jumped up, with a red and guilty look as Clive came in. The Colonial junior eyed him sternly. Clive had come back to the study unexpectedly after leaving it, to fetch a book he had forgotten. Baggy had undoubtedly watched him go, and fancied that the coast was clear.

"Well, what are you up to?" demanded Clive.

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Baggy.

"What are you looking for?"

"Nothing at all. In—in fact, I—I thought I'd tidy up the study for you while you were out," said Trimble. That—that's what I really came for."

"You fat spoofer!" growled Clive. Trimble never tidied up his own study, and he was certainly not likely to tidy up anybody else's. "I've had to kick you out of this study before!"

"I—I thought you were here when I came in, you know."

"You thought I was here?" ejaculated Clive.

"Ye-es, of course—"

"And you just said that you came in to tidy up the study while I was out!"

"D-d-did I? I—I meant—"

"There's an old proverb that Prussians should have good memories," said Clive. "I suppose you were after the grub?"

"Yes; exactly!" gasped Trimble. "That—that was it, Clive!"

Clive stared at him. Trimble generally denied such an accusation with great promptness. It really looked as if he had come into the study for some other purpose, and was relieved to find that Clive supposed he had come in for the grub.

"What the dickens did you want with the wastepaper-basket, then?" demanded Clive.

"N-n-nothing at all! I—I wasn't looking for anything in it!" gasped Trimble, edging towards the door.

"Blessed if I don't think you're half off your rocker!" said Clive, in wonder.

"Were you grubbing in the wastepaper-basket because you didn't want anything that was in it, then?"

"Ye-e-es; that's just it."

"You fat duffer!" shouted Clive.

"I—I mean I—I did want something!" gasped Trimble, with a longing eye on the door. "I—I wanted some paper to light the fire in my study, and—and I thought you wouldn't mind, you know."

"Why the dickens didn't you say so, then, instead of rolling out lies like a Prussian?" growled Clive. "You can take the paper if you want it!"

Trimble's manner was suspicious; but unless his statement was true, Clive could not imagine what he wanted with the wastepaper-basket. He supposed that the fat Fourth-Former had plunged into lying from sheer force of habit.

"Thanks, old chap, I will!" said Trimble.

"If you call me old chap, I'll boot you down the passage!" grunted Clive. "Take it, and go! And if I catch you here again, I'll scalp you!"

"All right, old chap—I—I mean, old fellow—that is, I'm going!" gasped Trimble. And he clutched up a double handful of paper fragments from the basket, and vanished.

Clive looked for his book; found it, and left the study. He did not bestow a further thought on Baggy Trimble. He would have thought about the

matter, however, if he had been aware of Trimble's further actions. Baggy had taken the crumpled papers into his own study, and there he was sorting them out. He did not light the study fire with them, however.

He scanned each paper in turn, and stopped at one in Clive's handwriting. It was a sheet upon which the South African junior had written an exercise and thrown away.

"That will do," murmured Trimble.

He threw the remainder of the papers into the grate, and slipped Clive's old exercise into his pocket. Then, with a fat grin on his face, he rolled out of the study, and left the School House. He looked up and down the quadrangle for some time, and at last spotted Racke of the Shell lounging by the tuckshop. Baggy Trimble joined the heir of Racke & Hacke with a familiar nod.

"Got it!" he said.

"Don't shove it at me, fathead!" growled Racke. "Slip it into my hand. Do you want all St. Jim's to see it?"

"Blessed if I see why not!" said Trimble. "What are you so jolly secret about?"

"Find out!"

"I don't see what you want the paper at all for," said Trimble inquisitively. "What's the good of it?"

"That's my business!"

"And I don't see why you couldn't have got it yourself," said Trimble.

Racke shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, you ought to tell a fellow, you know!" urged Trimble.

"What's the good of a bit of paper in Clive's writing? I don't see it myself."

"Br-r-r-r!"

Trimble looked at Racke with eager curiosity. Racke's proceedings were a mystery to Baggy. Why Racke should want a specimen of Sidney Clive's handwriting was a problem that beat Baggy hollow, keen as he fancied himself to be. Why Racke had employed Trimble to obtain it was, however, clear enough. Baggy was so often found rummaging in other fellows' studies that it would occasion no surprise if he were found rummaging in Study No. 9. With Racke of the Shell, however, it was different. It would certainly have excited a good deal of curiosity if the Shell fellow had been seen rummaging in a Fourth Form study. Trimble guessed that much, and Racke evidently did not intend to tell him more.

"You owe me a bob, anyway," said Trimble sulkily.

"You weren't seen there?" asked Racke.

"Oh, no!" said Trimble, afraid he might lose his reward if he confessed that Sidney Clive had caught him in the act. "I was jolly careful, of course!"

"All serene! Here's your bob!"

Racke strolled away with the paper in his pocket. Trimble blinked after him, and then rolled into the tuckshop with the shilling. All other matters were dismissed from Baggy's mind until that coin had been disposed of in refreshments, liquid and solid.

An hour later, when Croke of the Shell went to his study, he found the door locked, and rapped on it impatiently.

"You here, Racke? Let me in, fathead!"

"All right! Don't make such a thumping row!"

Racke opened the door, and Croke entered. He stared at the table, which was covered with written sheets. Racke had evidently been hard at work.

"Swotting!" ejaculated Croke, in amazement. Fellows sometimes sported their oak for the purpose of swotting;



but Crooke had never known his study-mate to swot before.

Racke grinned as he turned the key again.

"Yes, in a way," he said. "Keep your head shut about it, Crooke!"

"That isn't your fist," said Crooke, in wonder, as he looked at the papers. "Are you taking up Levison's old trade? I hear that he's dropped it!"

"Not exactly."

"Why, that's Clive's fist!" said Crooke. "I've seen it before, and I remember it now. What the merry thunder are you practising Clive's fist for?"

Racke smiled unpleasantly.

"Levison's so beastly clever at the game that I thought I'd try my hand, and see what I could do," he remarked. "You've done it jolly well," said Crooke. "Blessed if I see why! You're not hard up? Nothing gone wrong with the war profits, I suppose?"

"No, fathead!"

"Then you're not going to get Levison's old connection, and do lines at a bob a hundred?" grinned Crooke.

"Don't be an ass! You think that's pretty good?" asked Racke. "Here's the copy. Look at it!"

"Jolly good!" said Crooke. "You've got nearer and nearer to the original every time. What's the game?"

"I'll tell you if you like."

Crooke shook his head.

"No fear!" he exclaimed. "You can leave me out of it. And I won't interrupt you. Mind, I don't know anything about it!"

He left the study at once, and Racke laughed as he locked the door after him. Then he sat down at the table, and resumed the work Crooke had interrupted, covering sheet after sheet with writing. And when he had finished he burnt every sheet carefully in the study fire—a proceeding that would certainly have made anyone who had seen it very curious indeed.

## CHAPTER 8.

### A Startling Accusation.

"MY hat!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Monty Lowther uttered that ejaculation in a sort of combined exclamatory chorus.

They were surprised.

There was reason for surprise. The Terrible Three were chatting on the steps of the School House after lessons, when Clive of the Fourth came out. At the same time, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was coming in.

Clive gave the swell of St. Jim's a smiling glance. Arthur Augustus paused a moment, looked Clive full in the face, and then passed on, silent and grim.

Clive stood rooted to the steps.

An hour before he had been chatting cheerily with D'Arcy and his chums. Now, in full view of half a dozen fellows, D'Arcy had cut him dead.

The Terrible Three stared blankly at Arthur Augustus as he came in, with a heightened colour and a grim brow.

"Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Tom was simply astounded. Personal rudeness was about the last thing of which anyone could have suspected D'Arcy. Sir Charles Grandison himself could not have possessed a more finished polish of manner than the Honourable Arthur Augustus; indeed, Lowther had declared that the celebrated Lord Chesterfield was a fool to him. And now he—

The Terrible Three lined up in D'Arcy's way. They felt that an explanation was needed.

"Hold on, Gussy!" said Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"What's the matter with you, fat-head?" exclaimed Lowther.

"I wufuse to be called a fathead, Lowthah! Nothin' is the mattah!"

Sidney Clive had turned round, and he came in again. His cheeks were flushed. Clive was one of the best-tempered fellows in the House; but he was not the fellow to allow such an insult to pass without a word.

"D'Arcy!" he rapped out.

Arthur Augustus gave him a lofty glance, and did not reply. Clive's hands clenched, and his eyes gleamed.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed hotly. "If you haven't gone potty, what do you mean?"

"I wufuse to answah you!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"I have nothin' to say to you, except in' that I wegard you with contempt!"

"Contempt! Me!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Keep cool," said Tom Merry, pushing back the Colonial junior. "We're going to make Gussy explain!"

"You can let the wottah come on, Tom Mewwy! I am quite pwepared to give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"What do you mean by calling Clive a rotter?" exclaimed Tom, puzzled and angry.

"He is a wottah!"

Clive drew a deep breath.

"What have I done?" he asked. "I think there must be some mistake, or somebody has taken you in. I'll give you a chance to explain before I knock your silly head off!"

"I should wufuse to have my silly head knocked off. I mean to have my head knocked off! I wegard you with contempt."

"What has Clive done?" shouted Tom Merry.

"I wufuse to entah into any discussion of the mattah!"

"That's enough," said Clive. "You'll come into the gym, D'Arcy!"

"I'll come into the gym whenever you like, and give you the thwashin' you deserve for your wotten conduct!" said Arthur Augustus disdainfully.

"What has Clive done?" yelled Lowther.

"Acted like a wotten cad, Lowthah."

"But how?"

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus strode away, leaving Clive and the Terrible Three staring blankly at one another.

"Well, this beats it!" said Manners.

"What bee has Gussy got in his bonnet now? What on earth have you done to him, Clive?"

"Nothing that I know of," said the South African junior quietly. "But I'm going to do something, I know that!"

"You haven't been telling him that his waistcoat isn't in the latest style?" grinned Lowther. "Or that his topper is out of date?"

"No, fathead! I'm going into the gym now," said Clive. "You can tell that silly ass I'm waiting for him."

The Colonial junior strode off, and the Terrible Three followed Arthur Augustus, who had gone up to Study No. 6. They found a warm argument proceeding in that celebrated study. Jack Blake turned an exasperated look upon the Shell fellows as they came in.

"What do you think is Gussy's latest?" he exclaimed. "The howling ass wants to fight Clive, of all chaps. And wants me to be his second! I'll second him! I'll bump his fat head on the floor!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What do you mean by it?" roared Herries. "What do you want to fight Clive for?"

"He has challenged me, Hewwies."

"Then, what did you do?" growled Digby. "Clive isn't a chap who's always looking for trouble, like Grundy. I'll bet it's your fault!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Clive's waiting in the gym," said Tom Merry. "I must say it seems to be all Gussy's fault. He's called Clive names!"

"I have chawacterwised him as he deserves, the wottah!"

"Clive isn't a rotter!" howled Herries.

"He is an uttah wottah!"

"Can't you give it a name?" demanded Lowther. "What has the chap done?"

"The mattah is so uttably wevoltin', Lowthah, that I wufuse to discuss it. It is, beneath my dig."

"Oh, blow your dig!" said Blake, disrespectfully. "We're getting rather fed up with your dig in this study, I warn you!"

"Tell us what he's done!" shrieked Herries.

"I wufuse to talk about the wottah, Hewwies! A chap who talks to a chap in a vewy fiendly way, and w'ites wotten things about a chap behind a chap's back, is not a chap that a chap chooses to talk about."

"What a lot of chaps!" murmured Lowther. "Better begin at Chap. 1, and tell us the whole story."

"I wufuse to discuss the mattah, Lowthah! Blake, if you will not be my second, I will wequest Julian or Kewwuish to act for me."

"We'll come to the gym, anyway," said Blake. "Gussy's got some bee in his bonnet, and we'll make him apologise."

"I wufuse to do anythin' of the 'sort, Blake!"

"You're not going to disgrace this study with your bad manners, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! You uttah ass!"

"So Clive's written something about you, is that it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What has he written?"

"It is beneath my dig to take any notice of his wotten insults. I simply intended to cut him diwect, and let him undehstand that I wegard him with despishion—I mean contempt. As he has challenged me, however, I shall give him a feahful thwashin', and let the mattah dwop there. Pway come with me, Blake, as I wequiah your services!"

Arthur Augustus strode out of Study No. 6 with his noble nose elevated, and his chums followed him perplexed and exasperated. They were quite certain that Clive was incapable of a mean action such as D'Arcy believed him to have committed, and the only possible conclusion was that somebody else was at the bottom of it, and that the unsuspecting swell of the Fourth had been deceived. And the six juniors followed Arthur Augustus with the determination to have a clear explanation before the matter came to the punching of noses.

Sidney Clive was in the gym, waiting. He would have asked his study-mate to be his second, but Levison was not to be seen, and he had asked Dick Julian, Julian, surprised as he was, had assented. But he was as anxious as Tom Merry & Co. to have an explanation first.

"Pway take care of my eyeglass, Blake."

"Never mind your silly glass eye now!" growled Blake. "You're going to explain what's the matter first."

"Wats!"

"What's the matter, Clive? I suppose you can explain, as you've got more sense than that fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Blessed if I know!" said Clive. "D'Arcy has called me names, and insulted me, and I'm going to hammer him. That's all I know."

"It's up to you, Gussy," said Tom Merry. "What have you got against Clive?"

"I have already explained, Tom Mewwy, that a discussion of the mattah is fah beneath my personal dig!"

"But you've done gassing now!"

"I wefuse to allow my remarks to be chawacterised as gassin', Tom Mewwy."

"There's some mistake here, or somebody has been pulling Gussy's silly leg," said Manners. "Suppose we bump him till he explains?"

"I wefuse to be bumped, Mannahs! I weward the vewy suggestion as widiculous and wuffianly."

"You've made accusations against Clive," said Tom Merry angrily. "I suppose you don't want to be set down as a slanderer?"

"Gweat Sectt!"

"If you don't, you'd better explain."

"Undah the circs, deah boys, I will explain, as I should be sowwy to leave any fellow undah a misapprehension as to my motives," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "Clive has always acted in a friendly mannah towards me—you have probably noticed that."

"Are you going to fight him because he has always been friendly, you apology for an ass?"

"No, you duffah! But suppose a chap was fiendly to you to your face, and wote wotten untwue things about you at the same time—"

"Well, Clive hasn't done that, fat-head!"

"Clive has done that, Tom Mewwy!" Clive broke in quietly.

"I won't say that's a lie," he said, "because it's clear that D'Arcy believes what he says. The silly ass is making a mistake. But silly asses aren't allowed to make mistakes like that, so you can put up your paws, D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove! Do you venchah to deny it?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, his eyes blazing.

"Yes, you idiot!"

"You fellows, know that you can wely on my statement."

"Nothing of the sort, ass! You're making a mistake, as I said all along," growled Blake. "Who told you Clive had been writing things about you?"

"Nobody told me."

"Then what put it into your head?"

"I have seen it with my own eyes, Blake! I suppose I cannot doubt the evidence of my eyes?" said Arthur Augustus. "Clive has alluded to me, in w'itin', as a swankin' ass and a purse-pwoud snob, if you must know the particulars; and I am goin' to thwash him for it. I suppose you do not agree with the wottah that I am a swankin' ass an' a purse-pwoud snob?" said Arthur Augustus, his voice thrilling with indignation.

"You—you've seen that in Clive's fist?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, watah!"

"That's not true!" said Clive.

"I suppose you never wrote anything

of the kind, Clive?" said Tom Merry, utterly bewildered.

"Of course I did not!"

"I can pwoduce your own w'itin' as evidence," said Arthur Augustus, with cold and cutting contempt. And there was a pause.

#### CHAPTER 9.

#### In Black and White.

SIDNEY CLIVE'S face was very grim now. The accusation was a serious one in the eyes of the juniors. Clive had always been on particularly good terms with the swell of the Fourth. In fact, Arthur Augustus, who was enthusiastic on the subject of the splendid way in which the Colonies had backed up the Old Country in the war, had gone out of his way to be very agreeable to Clive when the South African first came to St. Jim's. If, in spite of that, Clive had really made such caddish allusions to D'Arcy, he might be quite sure of the contempt of every decent fellow. But the juniors could not believe it, though Gussy's assertion that he had seen it in Clive's own hand was "a staggerer."

Arthur Augustus had evidently been wounded in the tenderest part. Swank was a thing he despised with all his heart; snobbery was utterly foreign to his nature; and, as for being purse-proud, Arthur Augustus shuddered at the thought. If Arthur Augustus had been called a purse-proud snob, it was no wonder that he was thrilling with indignation and contempt.

"You say you've seen that in Clive's fist?" said Tom Merry at last.

"Yaas!"

"Then you can let us see it too!"

"And you can let me see it!" said Clive, with a curl of the lip. "You'll find it rather difficult, I think."

"I have not the papah about me now," said Arthur Augustus. "I should not be likely to keep such a wascally papah!"

"And what paper was it, and how did you see it?" exclaimed Blake. "Can't you see that this has got to be cleared up, you ass?"

"I am perfectly willin' to explain. My only objection is that it is beneath my dig to banday words with a wottah who calls me a snob!"

"Oh, get on!"

"I am gettin' on, Blake! I found the papah used as a book-mark in my copy of 'The Boy Without a Name,'" said D'Arcy. "I lent that book to Clive a few days ago. I pwesume he will not deny that. Several fellows were pwesent when I handed it to him in the Common-room—Wacke and Talbot, and some othahs."

"You lent me the book," said Clive. "Why should I deny it, fathead?"

"The uttah wottah returned me the book this mornin'," continued Arthur Augustus. "I was weadin' some of it ovah again when the papah dropped out. I was weadin' it undah the elm yondah, a quartah of an hour ago. I picked up the slip of papah, thinkin' it might be some-thin' Clive had forgotten in the book, and might want to keep. There were a couple of lines w'ritten on it, and I could not help seein' them, of course. It wan: 'As for that swanking ass and purse-pwoud snob, D'Arcy— That was all; it was part of a lettah. I thwew it away.'"

"You ass!" roared Blake. "What did you throw it away for? Do you think you can bring an accusation like that without proof?"

"I did not intend to bwing an accusation, Blake. I simply intended to tweek this person with the contempt he deserves. Natuwallly, I cwumped the wotten thing in my hand and thwew it away."

"Then it's still there!" said Tom Merry. "If you threw it away under the elms a quarter of an hour ago we can find it."

"It is not necessawy, Tom Mewwy. I expect my friends to take my word!"

"Do you expect me to take it?" said Clive contemptuously. "You will have to make up a better yarn than that!"

"Bai Jove! You—"

"Shut up, both of you!" roared Blake. "We'll find that paper, and see about it. Come along and look for it!"

"I'm goin' to thwash you, Clive! Blake—"

"You're coming along to look for the precious paper!" growled Blake.

And he took Arthur Augustus by the arm and dragged him away.

Tom Merry & Co. followed, with Clive, whose face was pale and set. The South African junior was calm, but it was evident that he was very angry.

Arthur Augustus stopped at one of the old oaken benches under the elms.

"I was sittin' here!" he said, with dignity.

"Then shut up a minute while we find the paper!" grunted Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, ring off!"

The juniors searched under the trees. They had, of course, not the slightest doubt of D'Arcy's statement concerning the existence of the paper. Arthur Augustus was incapable of falsehood, even if he had had the strongest motive. And in a few minutes Digby had fielded a crumpled fragment of paper. He picked it up and unfolded it.

"Here you are!" said Digby, his eyes beginning to gleam.

It was a portion torn from a letter—less than half a sheet. It looked like a fragment from a letter that had been written, and then had been torn up and thrown away. A fellow might have picked up the fragment carelessly to use as a book-mark. And there, in plain black and white, was the sentence, with neither beginning nor end:

"—As for that swanking ass and purse-proud snob, D'Arcy—"

The juniors stared at it.

"Is that Clive's fist?" asked Tom Merry, after a long pause.

"Yes," said Blake shortly.

Clive's hand was well enough known to the Fourth-formers. Tom Merry took the fragment, and held it up for Clive to see.

The juniors were looking very grimly at Sidney Clive now. If he had written that ill-natured and caddish description of Arthur Augustus, while keeping on the most friendly terms with him, it was evident that there was a depth of falsity in his nature that merited the most unbounded contempt. And there it was, in his handwriting.

Clive looked at it, and his face reddened, and then paled. He looked at it fixedly for some moments without speaking.

"Well, what have you got to say?" asked Tom Merry gruffly.

The Colonial junior raised his head and looked calmly and fearlessly at the dark faces before him.

"I did not write that," he said quietly.

"It's in your handwriting!"

"It looks like it. I have mentioned D'Arcy in my letters home, but never in a way I shouldn't care for D'Arcy to see. I did not write that, and I never used that, or anything else, as a book-mark in the book D'Arcy lent me. I read the book through at one sitting, and never needed a book-mark. Somebody else has written that in my hand."

Write to the Editor of

# ANSWERS

If you are not getting your right PENSION

"Oh!" said Blake.

"Some chap who is jolly clever at imitating writing, too!" said Clive. "I don't know whom, or why he should do it. I should be taken in myself, if I weren't sure that I had never written such a caddish thing. You fellows have been longer here than I have; you ought to be able to guess who did it better than I can."

The juniors exchanged a quick look. One name leaped into all their minds at once. Clive's explanation was not doubted for a moment. They might have doubted it, perhaps, if they had not known that, at St. Jim's, there was a fellow whose skill at imitating handwriting was almost uncanny—who had played such tricks before, who was as full of tricks as a monkey. But there was such a fellow in the School, and they knew him only too well.

"Levison!" said Tom Merry.

And from each of the other fellows came, like an echo:

"Levison!"

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Meeting.

"LEVISON!"

The name was uttered with conviction by all the juniors in the group under the old elm-trees.

Levison of the Fourth! Who else?

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, utterly taken-aback.

Only Clive had not joined in the chorus.

"Levison!" said Blake. "Of course! You ought to have remembered his tricks, Gussy, you ass!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus was covered with confusion. "I—I nevah thought of that, you know. I—I had forgotten about Levison's wotten forgin' twicks. It's just like the twick he played on Hammond once, and on old Bwooked, too. Clive, deah boy, I beg your pardon!"

Arthur Augustus needed no more convincing. The supposed handwriting of the South African junior had carried conviction, in the first place, and D'Arcy had not doubted, hurt and indignant as he was. But the mention of Levison was enough. It was almost impossible to doubt the clear, steady eyes, the frank and honest face, of the Colonial junior. But it was possible enough to remember Levison's old impish trickery, and his skill at imitating hands. The black sheep of the Fourth had broken out once more, in spite of his pretended reform. Not wholly a pretended reform, either, the juniors had to admit that. But doubtless the wretched junior, so long accustomed to dark and tortuous ways, had been unable to resist sliding back into his old trickery. Doubtless he had deemed himself safe from discovery in this instance.

"I am more sowwy than I can say, Clive!" said Arthur Augustus, deeply distressed. "I weally ought to have known you better; but how was I to guess what an uttah wottah had been imitatin' your handwritin'?"

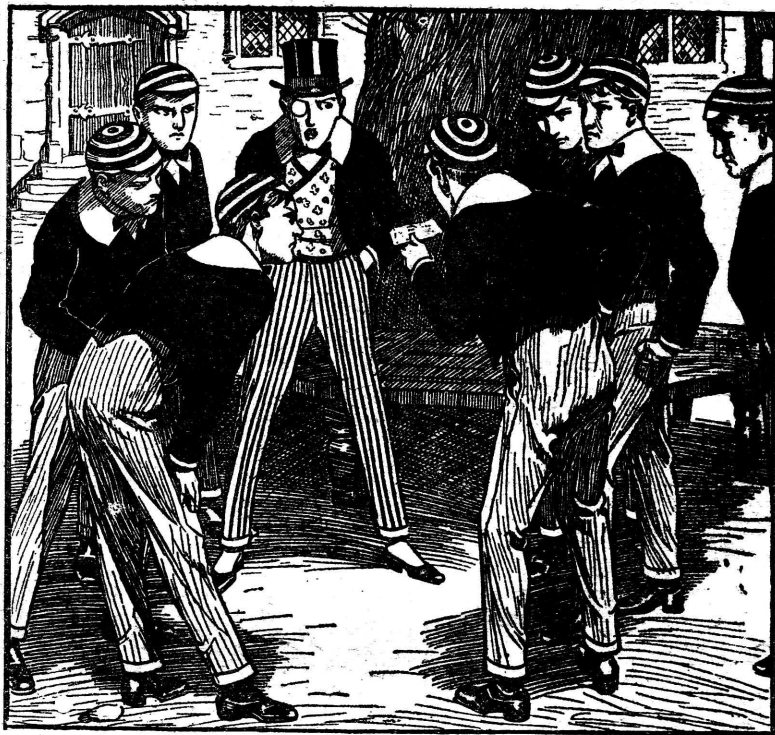
"I don't blame you!" said Clive quietly. "You couldn't think anything else, so far as I can see. I'm glad you see now you were mistaken!"

"Yaas, wathah, and I weally apologise!"

"We can all see that!" said Tom Merry. "You see, we know Levison and his tricks. He played this game on Brooke of the Fourth once, and was jolly nearly sacked for it. Jolly lucky we all know that too. Otherwise—"

He paused.

Clive compressed his lips.



"Here you are," said Digby, his eyes beginning to gleam. It was a portion torn from a letter. (See Chapter 9.)

"Otherwise you would have believed that I had written that rotten, caddish thing, and lied about it!" he exclaimed.

"I don't say that, but it would have been a staggerer, anyway!" said Tom uneasily. "You say yourself you can't see any difference between that fist and your own. What could a fellow think?"

Clive nodded shortly.

"I don't say I blame you," he said. "A fellow's own handwriting is generally supposed to be pretty conclusive evidence. Only that doesn't happen to be my handwriting."

"We know that now," said Julian. "But—but what on earth did Levison play such a trick for?"

"To start a row between Gussy and Clive, as he did once between Gussy and Hammond, by just such another trick," said Blake. "He would have succeeded that time, only Cousin Ethel was here, and she spotted it. He does these things just out of impish mischief, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But—but I—I can't quite believe it of him!" exclaimed Clive. "Why should he play such a trick on me, his study-mate?"

"He's as full of tricks as a monkey!" growled Herries. "Anyway, it couldn't have been anybody else. Only Levison could have done it."

"That's certain!" said Tom Merry.

"And the uttah wottah has been pwe-tendin' to reform, and takin' us all in!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I suppose some chaps are born to go cwooked, and can't help it."

"If so, Levison's one of them," said Manners. "Look here, you fellows, this is a jolly serious matter! The rotter might play a trick like that on any of us. It doesn't make any difference to him if you're on good terms with him, either."

"I can't quite swallow it," said Clive.

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "It's clear enough. Levison's the only fellow who can do it. He's well-

known for it. He does other fellows' lines in their handwriting, at a bob or eighteenpence a hundred—"

"Yes, I know that."

"It's too jolly serious to pass over," said Blake grimly. "Levison's got to have a lesson on the subject of forging other fellows' fists! Anybody know where the cad is?"

"I think he's in the study," said Clive, with a troubled look. "But—"

"You go and fetch him, Julian! Bring him to the Hobby Club-room," said Tom Merry. "This is a House matter. We'll call the fellows together, and Levison can answer for it to all the Fourth and the Shell!"

"Yaas, wathah!" Julian nodded, and went away to the School House.

Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to call the junior meeting. That outbreak on Levison's part exasperated them beyond measure. There was not the faintest doubt of his guilt among any of the Co. It was exactly one of Levison's old tricks—one of the old tricks they knew so well.

True, Levison had changed since then. It could not be denied that he was no longer a smoky and shady blackguard, as he had once been. He had given up smoking and pub-haunting for footer, and he was a credit to the junior football team. But the impish keenness for making mischief apparently remained unchanged.

Possibly, too, Levison did not wholly like the friendship between Arthur Augustus and his own new chum, Clive, and intended to nip it in the bud by this trick. It would be like him—like him as he had been the previous term, at all events.

It was exasperating, and such tricks were not only exasperating, but dangerous. Any fellow might be the victim next; and the juniors did not forget that just such a trick—brought home to

Levison—had caused a fight between D'Arcy and Henry Hammond.

A severe lesson was needed, the juniors agreed on that; and the word was passed round for a general meeting of the Fourth and the Shell to deal with the matter.

The juniors, forgetting tea-time, crowded into the Hobby Club-room, as the news was spread. It was, as Tom Merry said, a House matter, and on such occasions all members of the two Forms had to be present. The Shell and the Fourth turned up to the last man—Baggy Trimble being routed out of the tuck-shop, and Racker and Crooke dragged away from the delights of cigarettes in their study, Bernard Glyn being yanked away from an experiment in the end study, and Brook of the Fourth—the day boy—stopped on his way to the gates.

The Hobby Club-room was soon crowded with Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers, and as the story of the forged letter was now known to all, there were grim faces awaiting Levison of the Fourth when he arrived to face the charge.

CHAPTER 11.

A Dog with a Bad Name!

LEVISON was in his study with his minor when Dick Julian came in. Julian looked very curiously at the two. Frank was deep in Entropius, and Levison major was helping him, with quiet, kind patience.

It seemed odd enough that the affectionate brother—the fellow who was paying up his own leisure hours to help a fag over the stumbling-blocks of learning—should be the fellow who had played a mean and dastardly trick.

But Levison's nature had always been a strange mixture of good and evil. In his worst moments he had shown glimmerings of something better; in his best moments the cloven hoof would peep out now and then.

Julian was surprised, but not really very much so. It was, after all, what might really have been expected of a fellow of Levison's peculiar nature.

"Will you come along, Levison?" asked Dick Julian.  
"What's on?"  
"House meeting."

"Well, I'm busy!" said Levison. "It can wait! What the dickens is the House meeting about?"

"As a matter of fact, it's about you," said Julian drily. "You'd better come along!"

Levison stared.  
"About me?" he repeated.  
"Yes."

"Some of my sins found me out?" asked Levison, with one of his old sneers. Frank looked a little alarmed.

"Something of the sort," said Julian coolly. "You'd better come!"

"Well, I won't come till I've finished this!" said Levison obstinately. "Get on with it, Frank!"

But the fag shook his head, and rose. "It's all right, Ernie," he said. "You cut along! I'll wait for you, if you like. But do go now!"

"Oh, rot!"  
"Do go!" urged Frank. "If it's a House meeting, you're wanted—every fellow has to turn up!"

Levison hesitated for a moment or two, then he nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said. "I'll go. You wait here, and I'll be back soon." He followed Julian down the passage.

"What's the row about?" he asked, as they proceeded to the Hobby Club-room.

"Better wait till you get there," said Julian hesitating. "I—I hope you'll be able to clear yourself."

"But you don't think so?" sneered Levison.

Julian did not reply.  
"Blessed if I like being called over the coals like this!" Levison growled. "But I'll see it through! Here we are!"

The two juniors entered the Hobby Club-room. The room, large as it was, was crowded. The Fourth Form and the Shell were there to the last fellow, so far as the School House portions of the Forms were concerned. The New House, of course, had nothing to do with the matter.

Levison stared at the grim looks that met him on all sides. Even Talbot of the Shell, generally quite friendly with Levison, was looking very grave. Sidney Clive looked troubled and doubtful. Levison fixed his eyes on his study-mate.

"So you're in this, Clive?" he exclaimed.

"Well, I'm present," said Clive. "I

don't know what to think about it, and that's a fact! I can't quite believe it about you."

"Believe what, you ass?" said Blake. "I fancy you can guess!" said Blake, with a sniff. "Think over your last mean trick, Levison, and you'll guess!"

"Yaas, wathah!"  
"So you're all down on me, and you don't mean to tell me what you've got up against me?" sneered Levison. "Pretty set of Prussians!"

"We're going to tell you fast enough!" said Tom Merry sharply. "It's a House meeting, to make you answer for what you've done! Look at that!"

He threw a slip of paper across the table to Levison. The latter picked it up, and stared at it blankly.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.  
"You've seen that before?"  
"No."

"Weally, Levison, if you are goin' to tell whoppahs—"

"Shut up, Gussy! Skipper does the jawing!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You don't know anything about that paper?" asked Tom Merry, with a searching look at Levison.

"How should I know anything about it?" said Levison impatiently. "It's in Clive's fist, I can see that. I think it's pretty rotten for Clive to write like that about D'Arcy, if that's what you mean!"

"I did not write it," said Clive quietly. Levison started a little.

"It's your fist," he said.  
"It is an imitation of my handwriting."

"Oh!" said Levison, with a deep breath.

He began to understand.  
"Clive says he never wrote that, and we all believe him," said Tom Merry.

"I believe him, too, if he says so," said Levison calmly.

"That paper—part of a letter—or, rather, meant to look like part of a letter—was put into a book D'Arcy lent to Clive. D'Arcy found it in the book when Clive returned it. He concluded that Clive had used it as a bookmark, and left it there without noticing it specially. It's clear enough that it was written by somebody else, and put in the book specially for D'Arcy to find it."

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"A dirty trick!" said Grundy of the Shell. "I vote for the frog's-march first, and sending him to Coventry afterwards."

"Shut up, Grundy!"

"Well, I vote with Grundy," said Racke. "It was a dirty trick!"

"Rotten trick!" grinned Mellish.

"Horrid!" chimed in Trimble. "I despise you, Levison. I do, really. You're unprincipled."

"Shut up!" growled Blake. "Levison's got to answer for it. If he's got anything to say, he can say it."

A bitter sneer was on Levison's lips.

"You think I wrote that?" he asked.

"We know you did," said Manners.

"Nobody else in the school can forge a fellow's hand as you can, and nobody else has ever played such a trick," said Tom Merry quietly. "You've done it before. You played it on Brooke, and another time on Hammond. Everybody knows it. It was easy enough for you to put that scrap of paper in the book, as Clive had it in your study. It's clear enough to me. But if you've got anything to say, you can say it. You'll get fair play."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You call this fair play?" sneered Levison bitterly. "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him—that's your motto. You've all made up your minds that I've played a rotten trick on Clive, without a shred of evidence. You don't want any evidence."

"Who else could have done it?" demanded Blake.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, and don't care! You've called me here to answer this. Well, I won't answer it. If you want an answer, here it is. Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

And Levison turned to the door. Blake turned the key in the lock, and put his back to the door grimly.

"Not yet!" he said.

"Have you anything to say, Levison?"

"Nothing!" said Levison coolly.

"I think that settles it," said the captain of the Shell. "Guilty or not guilty, you fellows?"

"Guilty!"

It was an almost unanimous shout from all sides. Loudest of all were the voices of Racke and Crooke, Mellish and Scrope. Levison's old associates were grinning with satisfaction. The fellow who had thrown them over was down at last, and they rejoiced in it.

"Levison, you hear?"

"I'm not deaf," said Levison, unmoved.

"You can take your choice; you'll be dealt with by the House, or the matter can be reported to the Housemaster. Which do you prefer?"

"Go and eat coke!"

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Then we'll deal with you here! You'll run the gauntlet, and you'll be sent to Coventry to the end of the term."

"Hear, hear!"

"Line up!" said Tom Merry tersely.

Talbot of the Shell stepped forward.

"Hold on!" he said.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Talbot Takes a Hand!

"HOLD ON!" There was a buzz at once, as Talbot's quiet voice was heard.

"Cheese it, Talbot!"

"Line up!"

"Don't waste time!"

"Weally, Talbot—"

"Don't be an ass, Talbot!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There's nothing more to

say. I suppose you're not going to stand up for that rotter?"

"Let them get on, Talbot," said Levison, with a satirical smile. "They're going to enjoy this. What's the good of talking? There isn't any evidence required. This will be very entertaining; especially to the chap who wrote that scrap of paper."

"Mind your own business, Talbot!" exclaimed Racke. "Don't you chip in here!"

Talbot did not budge.

"If Levison's guilty, I'll send him to Coventry as fast as anybody," he said. "But we want to see justice done, I suppose?"

"Don't you believe he did it, you ass?" shouted Grundy.

"No!"

"Then you're a silly idiot!"

"Thanks!"

"Look here, Talbot—" began Tom, in a tone of exasperation.

"I think Levison ought to have a chance," said Talbot quietly. "You don't want to give a chap Jedburgh justice—hanging first and trying afterwards. Let's hear what Levison has to say."

"He hasn't anything to say."

"Give him a chance, anyway, Levison," said Talbot earnestly, "don't play the giddy ox now! Say whether you wrote that paper or not."

"They've all made up their minds without asking me," said Levison bitterly. "Still, as a matter of form, I'll say that I didn't write it. I don't expect anybody to believe me."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus. "It is uttally imposs to cwedit that statement, Levison."

"Exactly," assented Levison. "Better go ahead! After all, if I'm sent to Coventry, I sha'n't get any more of your conversation. There will be compensations, you see."

"Bai Jove! You uttah wottah—"

"Suppose we go into the matter?" said Talbot quietly. "It's true that Levison could have slipped the scrap of paper into the book, as Clive had it in his study. But he may not have done it. Somebody else may have had a chance of doing it. When did Clive give the book back to you, D'Arcy?"

"This mornin'."

"But you didn't find the paper till this afternoon?"

"Yaas!"

Talbot was having his way. Punishment was delayed till he was through. Talbot, in his quiet way, had a good deal of influence, and the juniors were willing to hear what he had to say on behalf of the culprit.

"Where was the book all that time, D'Arcy?"

"In my studdy, deah boy."

"Then anybody could have gone there and slipped that paper into the book, for you to find afterwards?"

"Yaas, I suppose so."

"That's clear enough," admitted Tom Merry. "But whether Levison put the paper in the book or not, he wrote it, and that's the point."

"That's the point that's got to be proved," said Talbot. "Levison says he did not write it."

"Only Levison could have."

"Perhaps. We all know that Levison can imitate hands," said Talbot. "We all know he has played tricks like that; but not lately. We know, too—Talbot's voice was hardening now—"we know that there are several fellows in this House who are down on Levison because he has chucked up their company, and refused to go blagging with them. That's no secret, I suppose. We know that they have tried to blacken Levison; such tricks as sticking cigar-

ettes into his pockets, and keeping him away from a footer-match, and trying to make the fellows believe he deserted the team. We know they had a scheme of worrying him with smoking-parties in his study, and that it was knocked on the head by his changing studies. Before we sentence Levison, we want to know whether this is one more of their rotten tricks!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Tom Merry, quite taken aback.

Levison gave Talbot a grateful look. That suspicion had come into the old-time Toff's keen mind, though it had occurred to no one else.

"Levison's trick of imitating hands is so well known, that a scheming rotter would expect all the fellows to jump to one conclusion—the conclusion you did jump to," resumed Talbot. "It's true that Levison could have written that paper in Clive's hand more easily than anybody else. But any fellow could have done it, if he had taken a copy of Clive's hand, and practised it for a long time."

"I—I—I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "But—but—"

"But there's no reason to suppose that anybody did," growled Herries.

"There is reason—good reason," said Talbot. "I think that before the matter goes any further, the fellows who are known to have played tricks on Levison before, should be questioned. We know who they are—Racke, Crooke, Mellish, and Trimble. They shut Levison up in this very room, at the time of the Greyfriars match, and made out that he had left the team in the lurch to play cards and smoke in Racke's study. The truth came out really by accident. I believe this is another cowardly dodge of the same sort!"

"My hat!" said Clive.

"Well, as you put it like that, we'll go into it," said Tom. "Even Levison is entitled to fair play."

"Even me!" sneered Levison. "Good!"

Racke & Co. were looking much less satisfied now. Mellish had sidled towards the door; but Blake was there, and he did not move. Baggy Trimble was looking the picture of consternation.

"Speak up, you chaps!" said Tom Merry, looking at the group of uneasy black sheep. "What have you got to say?"

Racke burst into a scoffing laugh. Aubrey Racke had plenty of nerve, though his comrades lacked it.

"I don't see that we need say anything," he said. "Talbot's talking out of his hat. As for playing tricks on Levison, I shouldn't condescend to take notice of the poverty-stricken cad!"

"That's rot!" said Tom at once. "We all know how you did play a trick on him over the Greyfriars match. We know how you smoked him out of his study, too. Still, I must say that I don't see there's any evidence in this case."

"Let's go into it," said Talbot. "Whoever wrote that paper must have had a copy of Clive's handwriting before him. Clive may be able to tell us whether anybody has wanted a specimen of his fist lately—"

There was a yell from Clive. Back into his mind rushed the recollection of Trimble rummaging in the wastepaper-basket in his study.

"Trimble!" he yelled.

And he rushed at Baggy Trimble, caught him by the collar, and shook him vigorously. And the yells of Baggy filled the room.

CHAPTER 13.

Not a Success!

"YAROOOH! Leggo! Help! Yooohoo!" roared Trimble. Clive shook him savagely. "You fat rotter!" he shouted. "It was you!" "Yaroooh! It wasn't! I didn't! I I never! Yooohoo!" "Hold on, Clive!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That isn't the way to get evidence! Let Trimble alone for the present, and tell us what you've got in your head."

The Colonial junior released Baggy, who scuttled away round the table like a rabbit. Racke was deadly pale now. "It's plain enough now!" panted Clive. "It was Trimble!"

"It wasn't!" yelled Trimble. "Go ahead, Clive!"

"The other day I caught the fat rotter in my study," said Clive excitedly. "I came in unexpectedly, and he was there, rummaging in the wastepaper-basket. I wondered what on earth he wanted with it. He told me a bushel of lies on the spot—pretending he had come there to raid the cupboard at first, and afterwards said he wanted the paper to light his study fire. I let him take it away—all there was in the basket, and it was pretty full of old papers, exercises, and things done by Levison and me. If he wanted a specimen of my fist he had plenty of it there."

"I didn't!" howled Trimble. "I wasn't—"

Talbot smiled. It looked as if he was on the right track, after all, and the truth was coming out. Tom Merry's brow was very dark. He had never doubted for a moment that Levison was guilty. And the thought that he had very nearly taken the lead in condemn-

ing a fellow unjustly was very troublesome.

"Come here, Trimble!" he said.

"I—I—I won't!"

"Bring him here!"

Trimble yelled as two or three pairs of hands were laid upon him, and he was yanked forward forcibly.

"You admit what Clive says, of course?" asked Tom.

"No, I don't! It's a lie!"

"Why, you fat rotter!" shouted Clive.

"I—I mean, it's a mistake,"

stammered Trimble. "Of course, Clive wouldn't tell a lie. It's a mistake. I never was in his study. I didn't touch the wastepaper-basket. I swear that! I was after his grub, as I told him at the time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fat chump!" shouted Tom Merry. "How could you have told him at the time, if you weren't there?"

"I—I mean I told him afterwards," stammered the unfortunate Baggy. "I—I should have said that. Besides, I burnt all the paper in my study—every atom!"

"You burnt it in your study?"

"Every atom," said Trimble fatuously.

"You've just denied that you had the paper from the basket at all!"

"S-s-so I did. I mean, I didn't! It—it was some other paper I burnt in my study," stammered Baggy.

"Bai Jove! What an uttah ass!"

"That much is clear—Baggy Trimble raided No. 9's wastepaper-basket," said Tom Merry. "What did you do it for, you fat idiot? Don't tell any more lies, or you'll get a bumping."

"He was doing it for somebody else," said Talbot quietly. "Trimble hasn't brains enough to play a trick like this himself."

"I think so, too," said Tom, with a

nod. "Trimble had to get some of Clive's fist, that's clear enough. Who made you do it, Trimble?"

"Nun-nun-nobody."

"Did you go to Clive's study of your own accord?"

"Nunno. I mean yes. Exactly," said Trimble, with a helpless glance at Racke of the Shell, who scowled at him savagely.

Trimble's glance did not pass unnoticed.

"Perhaps Racke has something to say?" suggested Levison satirically.

"I've nothing to say!" snarled Racke.

"Did Racke send you to the study to get some of Clive's handwriting?"

Trimble?" asked Tom Merry.

"I—I—I—"

"Answer yes or no, you fat duffer!"

"I—I didn't know what he wanted it for," wailed Trimble. "How should I know? He only gave me a bob."

"Oh, he gave you a bob!" said Tom Merry grimly, "for getting him a specimen of Clive's handwriting!"

"I—I— The fact is, Merry, I—I've got an appointment—"

"What!"

"And I'd prefer to let the matter drop here," said Trimble.

"Bai Jove!"

"I'm late for tea already, you know,"

urged Trimble.

"Never mind tea now," said Tom Merry, half laughing. It was not easy to be angry with the fatuous Baggy.

"Racke gave you a shilling for getting him a specimen of Clive's fist?"

Baggy gave a dismal groan.

"You see, they know all about it."

Racke," he said appealingly. "It's no good, you see. I haven't given you away, have I?"

Racke ground his teeth.

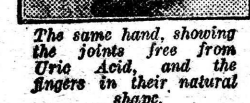
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"Yes or no, you duffer?" demanded Blake.

"Yes!" groaned Baggy. "You— you see, Racke thought a Shell chap might be spotted nosing about Fourth Form studies. I never knew what he wanted the paper for. I didn't know he was a forger, like Levison—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He just said he wanted some of Clive's writing, and he told me to get some from the study, and— and if I was caught there, to own up I'd come in to raid the grub," mumbled Baggy. "He only gave me a bob. I think it was worth more than that, considering. Don't you, Levison?"

Levison grinned.

All eyes were turned on Racke of the Shell now.

"Your turn now, Racke," said Tom. "What did you want with a specimen of a Fourth Form chap's handwriting?"

"It's all lies!" said Racke, between his teeth. "I never asked Trimble to do anything of the kind!"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Trimble in astonishment. "Don't you remember, Racke? You gave me the bob at the tuckshop afterwards, and you wouldn't tell me when I asked you what you wanted the paper for—"

"That will do!" said Tom Merry. "There's only one reason why you should have wanted a copy of Clive's fist, Racke. It was to play this rotten trick, and let us all jump to the conclusion that Levison had done it."

"Which you immediately proceeded to do," grinned Levison.

"Well, I don't see that we were to blame for that. You've got your old reputation to thank for that," said Tom. "You can't live a bad name down all at once. But I'm sorry."

"Yaas, wathah! I am vevy sowwy,

Levison," said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, I did not guess that it was that wascal Wacke all the time.

"And Crooke and Mellish were in it, of course!"

"I wasn't!" howled Mellish, in alarm. "I told Racke plainly that I wouldn't have a hand in his scheme when he mentioned it!"

"And so did I!" exclaimed Crooke. Racke's dear pals were not in the least inclined to share his fate with him. "I thought it was a rotten trick—"

"So you knew about it" said Tom Merry grimly.

"I—I saw Racke copying the handwriting," confessed Crooke. "That's all I knew. I swear that!"

"Gentlemen," said Arthur Augustus, "it was Wacke! It was weally what we might have expected from a wottah who bloats on war-pwofits. I voto that Levison leaves this court without a stain on his chawactah!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Thanks!" yawned Levison. "If you're finished with me, I'll get back to my study. My minor's got to get his Eutropius ready for Selby."

And Levison, quite cool and unconcerned, sauntered out of the room.

The House meeting had finished with Levison, but not with Racke. Racke's guilt was proved, and Racke had to be dealt with. And he was forthwith dealt with in the most drastic manner. There was a terrific din in the Hobby Club-room for ten minutes at least, while Racke of the Shell ran the gauntlet, and then experienced the joys of the frog-march. And by the time the heir of Racke & Hacke escaped from the hands of the indignant juniors, he was feeling that, for an unscrupulous rascal, life was not worth living at St. Jim's.

Clive came into his study a little later, and found Levison major and minor hard at work on old Eutropius. Levison rose and yawned.

"What about tea?" he remarked.

Frank scuttled out of the study with his books. Clive looked rather hesitatingly at his study-mate.

"I'm sorry, Levison," he said. "I had my doubts all along, but—"

"All serene!" said Levison. "A dog with a bad name, you know! I don't blame you. Rather deep of Racke, wasn't it?"

"The rotter!" said Clive. "He's been through it. I don't think he'll be able to take us in again. I don't think he'll try!"

"Probably not," grinned Levison. "He came pretty near succeeding, though, but for old Talbot. Let's have tea."

Grundy of the Shell looked in.

"Hallo, Levison! I've got two hundred lines—"

"Go and do 'em, then!"

"I want you to do 'em, fathead! Mind, in an hour's time!" said Grundy.

"Business suspended until further notice," chuckled Levison. "Grundy, old man, I'm afraid you'll have to do your own lines in future. You'd better be a bit more careful with old Linton."

"Look here—" began Grundy warmly.

"Bow-wow!"

And Levison closed the study door on Grundy's nose.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"DOWN ON HIS LUCK!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

## THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

For Next Wednesday:

"DOWN ON HIS LUCK!"

By Martin Clifford.

The fellow who is down on his luck in this fine story, in which the serious element predominates, is that very cheery and jocular personage, Monty Lowther, a favourite with all readers. Racke—"Moneybags minor"—is concerned, and plays no very worthy part. Something comes to Lowther's knowledge, which looks as if it must very materially affect his whole future. Honour calls upon him to recognise the fact that he must rely upon his own effort—must take nothing more from the uncle who has hitherto been as a father to him. He does not hesitate. Tom Merry and Harry Manners back him up most loyally; but it is a problem whether he can possibly manage to stay at St. Jim's. Hard lines for the genial and mirthful Monty! Little wonder that under such stress his very nature seems to undergo a change, and strained relations develop between him and his best chums. It is not their fault; it is not his—chiefly it is Racke's, for such an opportunity to wreak his malice is not one that Racke can let pass him. How it all turned out in the long run you will read next week.

A MUCH-WANTED LIST.

Spurred no doubt by the excellent example set him by Mr. Frank Richards, Mr. Martin Clifford has kindly consented to let me have a list of the Shell and Fourth Form fellows in the School House at St. Jim's. Of the New House, only

Figgins & Co., Redfern & Co., and Clampe make frequent appearances in the stories.

Here is the list of the

### SHELL STUDIES.

- No. 1.—Nobody's Study—Punishment-room.
- No. 2.—Lucas; Frere.
- No. 3.—George Alfred Grundy; George Wilkins; William Cuthbert Gunn.
- No. 4.—Buck Finn; Lennox.
- No. 5.—Gibbons; Scrope.
- No. 6.—Disused.
- No. 7.—George Gerald Crooke; Aubrey Racke.
- No. 8.—Walkley; Bolton.
- No. 9.—Reginald Talbot; George Gore; Herbert Skimpole.
- No. 10.—Tom Merry; Montague Lowther; Henry Manners.
- No. 11.—Harry Noble; Clifton Dane; Bernard Glyn.

A list of the Fourth Form Studies will be given next week.

### OUR WOULD-BE POETS.

A lady reader in the Isle of Wight sends me the following verses, which I am pleased to print:

Dear Editor,—You came down hard To-day on each well-meaning bard Who sent his humble lay, Hoping for recognition due (Which he received, indeed, from you, Though not the wished-for way!)

I lift the gauntlet thus flung down;

A poet I, with no renown,  
But with a poet's heart,  
To take (although I dread indeed  
Your comments on my act to read)  
Another poet's part.

No doubt they did their little best,  
As I am doing—for the rest,  
No poet can do more.  
Their verses may not scan or rhyme,  
Or yet approach to the sublime,  
Their metre may be poor.

But what is more important far  
Than all their slight demerits are  
Is WHAT they wrote and WHY.  
To praise the MAGNET and the GEM,  
The sterling excellence of them,  
As they did, so do I.

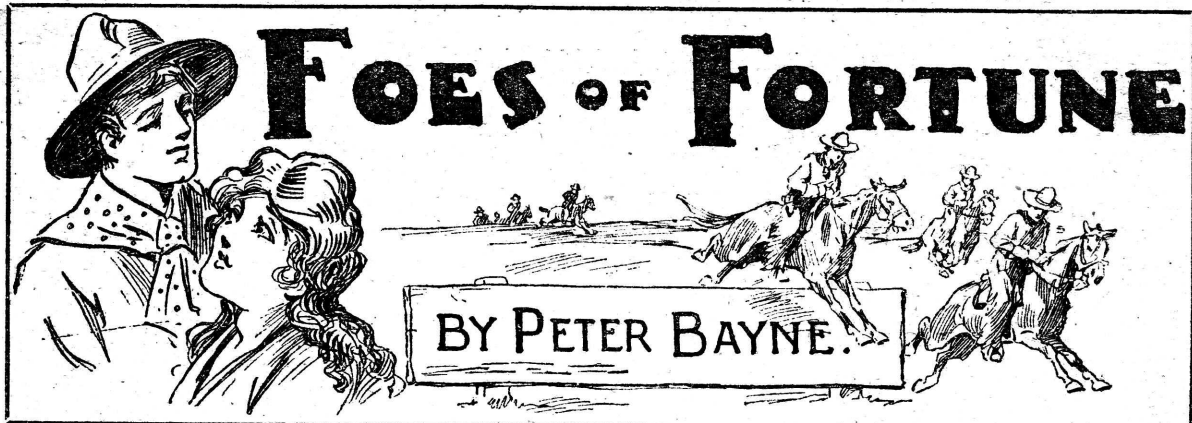
Why did they all break into song?  
With such a theme, 'twill not take long  
To read the answer right.  
No ordinary prose would do  
To sing the praise of authors who  
Are every boy's delight!

And I, though I am not a boy,  
Still find odd moments to enjoy  
The yarns I've loved so long;  
Though I have close on thirty years,  
Their weekly issue still appears,  
Good subject for my song!

So prize the verses, though uncouth,  
Which vibrate with the joy of youth,  
In all things clean and gay.  
And if THESE don't your wrath incur  
Too heavily, I'll send, fair sir,  
Some more—another day!

THE GEM.—No 472.

## OUR GREAT ADVENTURE SERIAL.

THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS  
TOLD HOW

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, sole heir to a great fortune, though unaware of it, is hunted by a party of outlaws led by DIRK RALWIN. He is befriended by HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter LORNA, who lose their home, and are separated in an attempt to defend him from his pursuers.

Ross is captured by the brigands, but, with Lorna's help, recovers his wallet—containing papers which prove his identity—and escapes. Later they fall in with RODDY GARRIN, an Englishman, and his companion, AH CHING, a Chinaman. The outlaws continue the chase, together with HUXTON FENNER, a Yankee, who had previously been a companion of Garrin and Ah Ching, but had deserted them.

They pass through many thrilling adventures, and, later, Harvey Milburne succumbs as a result of the privations he has suffered whilst a prisoner under Dirk Ralwin.

One night, while the four companions are asleep, Lorna and Ross are carried away by Huxton Fenner and a band of Dirk Ralwin's outlaws. Fenner has no intention of taking them to Ralwin, as he hopes to obtain Ross' papers and claim the fortune for himself. Ralwin is warned of the American's treachery by one of his spies, JAQUNY, an Indian. The outlaw, with a band of his men, hurries to San Ramo, where it is expected Fenner and his captives will board a steamer. The ruffians have just reached the deck of a big vessel in the harbour, when a powerful steam-launch appears, and flashes past the steamer and down the river. Ralwin, by covering the captain of the vessel he is on with a revolver, forces him to pursue the smaller boat, which contains Fenner and his prisoners.

The launch runs aground on the bank, and Ross and Lorna contrive to escape from the black who is put in charge of them. But the girl is recaptured, and, in order to force Ross into his hands again, Fenner threatens her.

Carton Ross surrenders himself to Fenner to save Lorna from death, and the two captives are carried farther into the forest. Fenner is surprised by Ayton Aylman and an armed band. The two outlaws come to an understanding, though each is resolved to obtain the fortune for himself. Roddy Garrin and Ah Ching push on through the jungle to find at last they are close to the place where Dirk Ralwin is encamped.

(Now read on.)

THE GEM.—No. 472.

The Pursuit—A Signal from a Tree  
Top—The Waterplane.

The redoubtable chief of the insurgents looked gloomy and morose. No victor in a daring enterprise was he. His whole bearing was that of a man who has signally failed in the purpose he set out to achieve.

"You take it from me, Mista Garrin," said the little Chinaman shrewdly, "that he have no got our two fends. If he had his face would have a merry smile on it, instead of a big, black frown."

Roddy Garrin was of a similar opinion; but, pleased and relieved though he was to know that his comrades were not in the hands of the bandit leader, the knowledge intensified his fears as to what had happened to them.

"Seems to me," he said to his companion, "that Ralwin is engaged in the same search as ourselves, but with the difference that he wants to catch them and hold them as prisoners. That being so, our best plan will be to make ourselves scarce, and give these chaps no chance of spotting us."

Ah Ching wrinkled his domelike brow in solemn thought for a few moments. Then a cunning smile parted his thin lips.

"That velly good, but my go one better," he said. "Suppose we follow them at a nice distance in the rear? We shall see then what they do and where they go to, and it will give us an idea of where we are. At present we're lost as much as ever we could wish to be."

Again Roddy Garrin acknowledged the superior wisdom of his companion, and the two remained concealed in the vicinity of the halting-place and experienced keen enjoyment in the unique experience of spying upon their foes at such scant risk to themselves.

After the lapse of an hour or so the outlaws made a move. Mounting their horses, they rode away in single file. The thick undergrowth rendered it impossible for them to proceed at anything more than a slow pace, and the comrades did not have to put forth any extra exertion in order to keep up with them.

"Hope this'll continue until the next halt," said Garrin. "If they reached open country we should soon lose them."

A few minutes later the very thing that he had spoken about as an awkward possibility came to pass. Reaching a thinly-wooded part of the forest, the outlaws set spurs to their horses and galloped off, being quickly out of the comrades' sight.

"Now we're out of it," said Garrin ruefully. "There's no catching up with them again now, unless Ralwin's horse falls and he breaks his leg."

Ah Ching uttered a spiteful little laugh.

"No such luck come our way," he said maliciously. "Mista Ralwin have the evil one keeping guard over him. He no hurt."

Not many minutes later the comrades again overtook the horsemen, who were once more delayed by the density of the far-spreading jungle. Thereafter it was a lagging procession of riders, swearing and grumbling at the enforced slowness of their progress, and the comrades following in the rear at a leisurely pace that gave them ample opportunity of watching every movement of those in front.

"Hallo!" said Garrin at last. "It strikes me that we're close to the river. I saw something shining ahead of us."

It was the Amazon that he had caught a glimpse of through a rift in the surrounding foliage. Soon the slow, swirling rush of the mighty stream became audible to the ear, and then the broad expanse of water opened out before the delighted gaze of the comrades.

"Looks quite like an old friend," said Garrin. "I was beginning to wonder if we should ever see it again."

Ah Ching chuckled with glee. "Those fellows no can cross it, anyhow," he remarked. "They'll have to turn back again, or follow the banks. In any case we are all vely right. But who is the fellow just come up?"

The individual referred to, a slim, wiry native, had appeared in sight as Ah Ching was speaking. His face and bare chest glistened with perspiration, and he panted hard for breath. Evidently he was at the end of a long and tiring journey accomplished at top speed. Stopping short in his stride, he spoke a few words to one of the outlaws, who at once conducted him to Dirk Ralwin, and the two entered into conversation.

"Great Harry!" muttered Roddy Garrin. "He has brought disquieting news for Ralwin, who looks as if he could kill somebody. I'd give a lot to hear what they're saying."

The bandit chief was evidently upset both in mind and temper. His face was black and lowering as a thundercloud, and, clenching his fists, he shook them frantically above his head.

Suddenly his expression changed. Starting back, he glanced eagerly up towards the sky. Next moment he walked quietly to a neighbouring tree, and, with astonishing agility, climbed the trunk and swung himself up into the topmost branches.

The comrades could distinctly see him, a tall, fine figure of a man outlined against the blue sky. His gaze searched



the heavens with the intensity of an eagle's. All at once he reached up his right arm and fluttered to and fro a black-and-white silk square that he had taken from his neck.

"What the Merry-Andrew can he be doing?" said Garrin. "I've got it! He's signalling! But who to?"

Ah Ching clutched his companion's arm.

"Hark!" he exclaimed. "What thing make that noise?"

There was a low, droning sound, becoming louder every moment, that Garrin heard almost as quickly as his companion. He knew what it was in an instant.

"A flying-machine, by George!" he exclaimed. "Ralwin is as up-to-date as ever they make 'em. He uses wireless and aeroplanes in the running of his business, same as any civilised Government. But I'm about bursting with curiosity to know what it all means, sonny."

"Same with this child," said the little Chinaman. "We'll soon savee."

The flying-machine rushed into view, high overhead, and then descended at a steep slope that swiftly became a headlong dive.

"Crikey!" said Ah Ching, bubbling over with excitement. "It's falling into the river."

"You wait!" advised his companion. "It's a waterplane, my son, and will come to no harm."

With a heavy splash the machine took the water, glided rapidly over the surface for several yards, and then slowed down until it was stationary except for its floating movement with the tide.

There were two men on it, a pilot and an observer and they shouted out something to those on shore that the comrades were unable to hear owing to the wind and the distance.

Almost immediately Dirk Ralwin and two of his followers put off in a small, collapsible boat that they had with them. The little craft drew up alongside the waterplane, the occupants of which talked animatedly to the outlaw chief for ten or fifteen minutes.

Then the boat and its passengers returned to the bank, and the outlaws, at a word of command from their leader, mounted their horses and rode off.

"Aren't we going after them?" Ah Ching inquired, as his companion did not attempt to rise. "They'll be leaving us behind again."

Roddy Garrin, his earnest gaze fixed intently on the waterplane, shook his head.

"No," he replied. "We'll enjoy finer sport by hanging on here for a bit, I'm thinking. Those chaps out there are in difficulties of some kind. They're tinkering at their float, which doesn't seem anxious to rise again."

"Most likely it leaks," hazarded Ah Ching, "and they are trying to stop up the hole. Velly good thing if it sinks."

"Hope it jolly well doesn't," said Garrin. "I've a fine, ripping notion in my think-box, sonny, that I'll open out to you in a minute or two."

The comrades watched the proceedings of the two men on the waterplane with ever-increasing interest. Before the drifting currents the machine was floated closer and closer inshore. At last it bumped against the bank, and one of the men, the observer, sprang ashore and made it fast to a tree by a stout rope.

Returning to the deck of the aerial vessel, he assisted his companion in the task of effecting the necessary repair, which was soon done. Then he stepped on to the bank once more to cast the anchoring rope loose.

"Now then, my brave laddie!" said

Garrin, his eyes bright with excitement and daring. "This is where we come in. We're going to out those chaps and have a flight all on our own."

Ah Ching, too dumbfounded to utter a word, could only stare at the other and clench his hands together as if he were in severe pain.

"Come on!" said Garrin. "We mustn't let that fellow get back on board, or my plan will have failed before we can make a start on it. You needn't feel alarmed. I've piloted more than one flying-machine through space, and I can assure you that the sensation is absolutely ripping. So come along, my son!"

He started off, and Ah Ching went with him.

"Well, well!" said the little Chinaman. "You do take the biscuit, Mista Garrin, I do tell you!"

### The Captured Waterplane—Over the Forest—The Camp-fire.

**R**UNNING with the speed of a centre-forward keen on the ball, Roddy Garrin charged straight at the waterplane pilot, who, taken by surprise, gave a yell, and made a spasmodic attempt to put himself on the defensive.

He was too late. A hard right and left, planted with beautiful directness by his youthful opponent on each side of the jaw, lifted him clean off his feet, and hurled him with a heavy crash on the ground that left him senseless.

"Velly fine!" shouted Ah Ching enthusiastically. "Now for the other fellow! We'll give him socks!"

The comrades reached the waterplane at the same moment. As they sprang on to the small deck a shot was fired at them by the observer, who had hurriedly snatched a loaded revolver from his belt. The bullet went wide, and Ah Ching leapt at the man and wrested the weapon from his grasp with a hoarse, throaty cheer that sounded like the roar of an enraged tigress.

So fiercely formidable looked the little Chinaman, with his teeth bared and his eyes flashing fire, that the discomfited foe was seized by a panic of terrified alarm, and, throwing up his arms, turned sharply round, and dived overboard.

"Let him alone!" said Garrin laughingly, as his companion picked up the revolver that had fallen on the deck. "He'll trouble us no more, I'm thinking. It's a swim to the far bank in record time that he means to do."

"That true enough," agreed Ah Ching. "Allee same, me like to have given him something to remember me by."

"You've done that already," said Garrin. "Your fearsome yell sent him into the water. Now we'll get moving again. Hurrah for the life of an airman!"

It was no idle boast of his that he was a proficient airman. Not only had he made several flights in England, but his knowledge of aero-mechanics had been gained in a practical manner. A quick inspection of the machinery soon familiarised him with its working, and a few minutes later the waterplane was rising high above the river.

"This velly splendid!" chortled Ah Ching, peering down at the scene below. "That fellow still swimming strong. He no stop to watch us. His fiend look up, though, in velly nasty temper."

The pilot—who had recovered consciousness—was running up and down the riverside in a frenzy of helpless rage. Shaking his fists above his head, he stared up at the flying-machine, and poured out a stream of virulent threats and abuse.

"Ta, ta, old sport!" shouted Roddy

Garrin, waving his hand and laughing uproariously. "We're real sorry to leave you, but the best of friends must part."

Up and up through the warm, sunlit atmosphere rose the waterplane. The mighty forest stretched out on every side as far as the eye could see. Winding through it flowed the Amazon, the great, mysterious river that was playing so important a part in the lives of the comrades.

After reaching a height of five thousand feet, Garrin decided that it would be advisable to descend to a lower altitude, where it would be possible to secure a good view of anything that might be going on beneath. Under his skilful guidance and control the machine worked excellently, and it was not long before he was completely master of it.

His attention being centred entirely on his work, he had very little time to devote to his companion, otherwise he would have been excessively amused. The situation he was in Ah Ching found to be novel and diverting in the extreme.

Twisting from side to side, his black, beady eyes all agog with excitement, he stared at the panorama spread out far below, and made audible comments upon it. No previous experience of his had ever been like this one. In his own mind he compared it to that of a captive bird set at liberty and winging its way joyously through space on pinions whose strength would never tire.

"Me likee to go for ever!" he cried ecstatically. "This more better than opium smoke. What for my no savee it before? Suppose it was because I had no met Mista Garrin. He velly fine fellow. Some day my give him nice present. He deserves it."

As his companion could not hear these flattering remarks, owing to the buzzing roar of the engine, they were unappreciated, but Ah Ching went on with them just the same, and was completely and deliriously happy.

"Keep an eye open for anyone who may be in sight!" shouted Garrin into the other's ear. "We're low down enough now to see everything that is passing."

Thus exhorted, Ah Ching took up the post of observer with zealous persistency. Nothing escaped his vigilant eye. Presently a broad smile spread over his yellow face, and, leaning forward, he fixed his gaze on what appeared to be a dark, moving spot close to the riverside.

"There go some of our robber fiends," he remarked blithely. "Suppose they see us, they think we belong to them. My word! That velly, velly funny!"

The object that Ah Ching had seen became separated into several parts, each of which was a mounted follower of Dirk Ralwin. The outlaws were riding south, and were evidently searching for a trail, no doubt that one they imagined would be made by Carton Ross and his companion.

Looking upward as they heard the droning hum of the waterplane, the bandits cheered and waved their hands. They mistook the two comrades for friends, an error of judgment on their part that pleased Ah Ching immensely, the little Chinaman laughing and chortling until he was purple in the face.

Quickly the horsemen were left far behind. Then Garrin altered his course for one that took the waterplane away from the river which gradually faded from sight. On and on, at fifty miles an hour, fled the machine. Never for a moment did Ah Ching relax his close watch on the forest, a task rendered easier by the fact that the waterplane had descended to a height of no more than twelve hundred feet from the ground.

For about an hour the flight continued at the same unchecked speed. Then Ah Ching uttered an exclamation of excited surprise, and turned abruptly round to his companion.

"You see them!" he shouted. "Look down! There! In the opening between the trees!"

Directing his gaze to the spot indicated, Garrin observed a party of men—some on foot, and a few on horseback—passing slowly along a winding glade which happened at that moment to be almost immediately beneath the waterplane.

The swift scan that Garrin bestowed upon the men became riveted on two figures to the exclusion of everyone else. Clear and distinct to his vision they stood out as those of Carton Ross and Lorna, the missing comrades for whom he and Ah Ching had for so many days searched in vain.

For a moment his hand pressed hard on the lever for shutting off the engine-power, and an overwhelming impulse came to him to shout to his captive friends. But he as quickly mastered this double desire, realising that by yielding to it he might betray his identity to those who were his foes.

The flying-machine, seen and wondered at by the travellers below, swept onward. Unable to hold himself in check any longer, Garrin gave vent to a prolonged whoop of joy that was taken up by Ah Ching, and elaborated in a masterly, if inharmonious manner.

Reducing the speed of the machine, Garrin altered his course again, instructing his companion to look out for a suitable landing-place. For some time this was not visible. The forest was at its densest, huge trees and thick, high jungle making a landing utterly impracticable.

Suddenly, however, Ah Ching perceived a large inland lake, where a fleet of ships could have swung at anchor with perfect ease. He pointed it out to his comrade, who uttered a cry of delight.

"The very thing!" said Garrin. "She'll settle on the water as nicely as a duck. Look out for a splashing, my son!"

Under his adroit management the machine took the water evenly, and glided towards the bush-covered banks. A few yards from shore she stopped, and Ah Ching, swimming to land, made her fast with the mooring-rope to a tree.

The little Chinaman was speedily joined by Garrin. The two comrades were in high fettle, more especially because they had seen their friends than on account of the successful flight they had made. There were plenty of provisions on board, consisting chiefly of various sorts of compressed food, a sufficient quantity of which to last them for several days they removed from the waterplane.

"Our luck's in again!" said Garrin jubilantly. "We shall soon have Carton Ross and Lorna with us once more! We'll devise a plan of escape for them, sonny, never you fear. Then we'll bring them along here and carry them away on our waterplane, for it is ours now, by right of conquest!"

The little Chinaman looked mystified. "What thing you mean?" he inquired. "My no savee."

"It's like this, my lad," answered Roddy Garrin. "We took that machine, forced it away from the two fellows in possession because we were the better men. They were our enemies, who'd have shot us dead without scruple if we'd given them half a chance to, and they were also working for Dirk Ralwin to capture Carton and Lorna. Therefore

we had every right on our side when we acted as we did, and don't you make any mistake about it. Now do you understand?"

"My savee!" said Ah Ching smilingly. "You make it plain this time. But," and his face grew grave, "Mista Ross and Missy Lorna are prisoners, as it is."

"Quite true," replied the other; "but they're not Dirk Ralwin's prisoners. I'm perfectly sure on that point."

"Then who have catchee hold of them?" asked Ah Ching naively. "The men I saw them with were Ralwin's, by the look of them."

"Some, but not all," said Garrin. "There were four or five natives in the party, who seemed to be guarding our comrades. It strikes me that Lorna and Ross have been caught by men who are not in Ralwin's service. That is extremely likely when you remember that Ross is heir to a tremendously big fortune that kings themselves might envy. Why, sonny, to get possession of even a hundredth part of his wealth men would gladly sell their very souls!"

Ah Ching sighed, and solemnly shook his head.

"Yes," he said, "you speakee true. Mortal man is velly greedy and corrupt. He likee money too mucchee."

While eating a hastily-prepared meal the two comrades planned their course of action for the immediate future. Judging from memory, Garrin was of the opinion that his missing friends and their captors were on a course that was bringing them straight in the direction of the lake; and he resolved that the best thing was for him and his companion to push forward and intercept them.

The waterplane was perfectly secure at its anchorage. The banks of the lake were walled round by reeds and bushes of extraordinarily thick growth, and standing from fifteen to thirty feet high. Behind the jungle rose the trees, in uncountable number, their foliaged branches towering up towards the sky, and turning the brightness of day into the sombre gloom of eventide.

It was improbable that human foot had ever trodden this wild and isolated region before. Certainly no traveller would venture so far, whatever his quest might be, and the comrades at first had serious doubts as to their ability to penetrate the wooded fastnesses that confronted them.

But experience had given them skill and craft of the highest order where forest lore was concerned, and it was not long before they were threading their way through the jungle with an ease that might well have excited the envious admiration of an old backwoodsman.

"If we can keep it up," said Garrin, after two hours of steady progress, "we ought soon to be seeing something of our friends the enemy. We've got over the worst part of the journey, I'm thinking. The jungle is more open here."

It was as he stated. The thick growth of bush and creeping plant became patchy and thinner than it had been nearer to the lake, and frequently the comrades struck natural trails, of which they made the fullest use.

"More better one of us climb tree to have a look round," said Ah Ching, at last. "Night is coming on. Soon it will be dark. Suppose my go? My eyes can travel velly great distance."

"Up you get, then," answered Garrin; "and good luck be with you! I'll take it as a sure promise of our complete success if you see anything of our party."

Climbing the tree, a huge banyan of uncommon height, Ah Ching stationed himself on a topmost branch, and surveyed every part of the landscape. But

the light was bad, and he had not been many minutes on his lofty perch when the sun sank behind the horizon in a glowing ball of blood red, that only too swiftly presaged the ensuing darkness.

Muttering his wrath and vexation, the little Chinaman was about to descend, when a ray of light suddenly pierced the gloom ahead. It increased in size and intensity, and Ah Ching observed that it rose from a newly-kindled wood fire burning in an open space not more than three hundred yards away.

The voices of men talking and laughing came to his ears. As the fire strengthened, and the leaping flames dispersed the fast-gathering darkness, he saw the figures of those camping on the spot with tolerably clear distinctness.

The men were the same he and his companion had seen from the waterplane. More than that, he was sure that he could distinguish Carton Ross and Lorna amongst the little gathering. Shaken out of his habitual calm by strong excitement he slipped quickly down the trunk to the ground, and communicated the information he had to give to his companion.

"By George!" said Roddy Garrin, his eyes flashing. "We've tracked them down now, Ah Ching, and we'll have them safe and sound out of those fellows' clutches before the night is over."

#### Near Yet Far—To the Rescue—Unkind Fortune.

Side by side, Roddy Garrin and Ah Ching crept towards the camp on hands and knees. They had formulated no definite plan of immediate action in their minds. All they thought about was the amazing fact that at last the comrades whom they had lost and searched for were close to them.

The outlaws were making merry. Seated round the blazing fire, that was constantly replenished by two of their native carriers, they drank, smoked, and chatted to one another with the characteristic animation of the South American.

Their leaders, Huxton Fenner and Aytton Aylman, were similarly engaged in conversation that, judging from their smiling faces, was of mutually pleasing interest to both of them. A few yards away, in the background, were Carton Ross and Lorna, under the watchful eye of their black guardian.

They were bound wrist to wrist, a harsh measure of precaution on the part of their captors that excited Garrin's contemptuous scorn and anger.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "One would imagine that Ross and Lorna possessed superhuman cunning and strength, and had to be guarded accordingly. Fancy being tied up like that, with all those big, hulking brutes to watch over them!"

"Don't you speakee so loud," whispered Ah Ching warningly, "or they'll hear you. Then the kettle would be in the fire quick and hot. We no want an accident of that sort."

Garrin uttered a little laugh of amused assent.

"Quite right, sonny," he replied. "I'll be more careful in future."

Crouching amongst the bushes, the comrades watched the spectacle before them with curious eyes. They were no more than ten yards from the edge of the camp, and could see and hear everything that was going on. The sense of their own security gave them a confidence that waxed stronger as time went by.

His quick recognition of Fenner and

Ayton Aylman told Roddy Garrin a great deal. He realised instinctively that these two clever, unscrupulous men had made a prisoner of Carton Ross for the purpose of converting the fortune that his friend was the inheritor of to their own uses.

What puzzled him to account for, however, was their association in such an enterprise. He knew their character—grasping, avaricious, utterly selfish—and he was unable to believe that they would ever agree to a division of the spoils that they apparently hoped would fall into their net.

"No doubt they found Ralwin too strong to work against singly," he said, "and so combined forces to get Ross out of his power. They seem to have succeeded, but though they had the best of Dirk Ralwin, they'll have the worst of it with me and Ah Ching up against them."

The little Chinaman, guessing the train of thought that was running in the mind of his companion, smiled, and nodded his head.

"You bet!" he said. "We one too many for them. Suppose we move round to the other side of the camp? Then we watch for our chance to speak to them."

"An excellent suggestion," Garrin rejoined. "Follow me. We'll do the change of position at once."

Leading the way, he skirted the camp, with Ah Ching close at his heels, and in a few minutes they were on a level line with their captured comrades, from whom they were only separated by a clump of feathery-leaved bushes. The necessity for using the greatest caution was quickly impressed upon them.

The slightest rustle of the grass appeared to be heard by the gigantic black who had charge of the captives, and to excite his curiosity and suspicion. Continually he gazed in the direction the comrades were in, and once he stepped forward and peered into the bushes as though under the impression that someone was hiding there.

"What a velly ugly fellow!" whispered Ah Ching, after the negro had retreated. "His face almost frightens me. No see anything like it anywhere before. He make proper joss to frighten Chinese children with, and no mistake about it. When I see him next time, face to face, I shut my eyes."

Garrin could hardly keep back a laugh at this remark.

"Don't you do that, my lad," he advised, "or else he'll collar you and eat you up. Looks a cannibal. If he isn't one he ought to be. It's you who must do the chewing when you meet the brute. Don't wait for him to knife you, but sail right in and give him hard nuts in plenty. Then you'll stand a chance of being the victor in the scrap."

At this moment the dark-skinned individual referred to took up a big, wooden bowl from the ground, and walked across to the camp-fire, at which two or three of the natives were roasting long strips of meat, and attending to pots of stew that gave out a savoury, appetising odour, which caused Ah Ching to sniff and smack his lips again and again.

Filling his bowl from a pot, the black squatted on his heels and commenced eating his supper with greedy relish. He sat facing his captive charges, but gave them no more than an occasional glance; the meal he was enjoying absorbing most of his attention.

"Now's our time!" Roddy Garrin whispered. "You keep watch on the camp, while I go and tell Ross that we are here. If you should think it necessary to warn me for any reason give the jaguar's call to its mate. I

shall know then that I'm in danger of being seen."

Lying flat on his chest, he wriggled forward through the grass until he was but a few inches from Ross and Lorna. The former being nearest to him, he stretched out his arm and gently touched his comrade's arm. Soft though it was, there must have been something magnetic in the pressure, for Ross started violently, and instantly looked round.

He could see nothing, however, although he peered intently at the dark, shadow enshrouded objects that everywhere met his gaze. Then came the sound of a familiar voice that thrilled him to the heart.

"Don't give the show away, old chap!" murmured Garrin. "Ah Ching is with me. We've been searching for you ever since you disappeared, and now we have found you we mean to hang on to you. Look the same way as you were looking before, and Lorna, too. Then that ugly giant with the ebony dial won't suspect anything."

Strong emotion held Carton Ross speechless for a moment or two. He had often wondered what had become of his two comrades, but never in his wildest dreams had he dared to hope that, while he was still a prisoner, he would see them again.

"How did you find us?" he asked at last. "It seems impossible to realise that it is really you speaking to me."

"I guess it must be mighty hard to do so," Garrin answered. "Anyway, it's true enough. I'll tell you all about it later on. At present the one thing that matters is to set you and Lorna free."

Overhearing the mention of her name, Lorna turned her head and looked full into Garrin's face. An expression of indescribable surprise and delight coming over her beautiful countenance, she would have given vent to a loud cry had not the other quickly shaken his head and raised a warning hand.

"Quiet!" whispered Garrin. "Silence is the principal thing that will save us all. In two minutes you will be free and away from this robbers' haunt."

Using the keen-edged, broad-bladed knife that he had placed between his teeth, he severed the rope that bound the prisoners' wrists together. As the last strand parted, the warning call of the jaguar came to his ears.

"That's Ah Ching!" he whispered. "Remain exactly as you were. I'll lie flat at the back of you."

The uttered signal again sounded. Scarcely had it ended when the black lurched forward from the fire near which he had been sitting. Coming close up to the prisoners, he stared at them suspiciously for a few moments. Fortunately he did not see Garrin and Ah Ching, who were protected from observation by the enveloping shadows all about them, nor did his keen eye catch a glimpse of the severed rope that had bound Carton Ross and Lorna wrist to wrist.

Satisfied with his scrutiny, he turned away, and went back to his former seat by the camp-fire. The other members of the party were either amusing themselves in their own way, or selecting comfortable resting-places for the night.

"Now's our chance," whispered Roddy Garrin. "Come, Ross and Lorna. Follow me. The quicker we are out of it the better it will be for us all."

Slowly and cautiously, with every nerve on the alert, the comrades crept away from the camp of their enemies. They were almost out of sight when a loud, hideous cry from the negro warned them that their escape had been discovered.

"Confound it!" said Garrin. "We shall have the whole pack on our trail now."

The cry of the black was instantly taken up by the outlaws, and the entire camp was immediately in an uproar. The voices of Hixton Fenner, and Aylman, hoarse with rage and alarm, were heard shouting orders to the men, who were quickly on the move.

Bounding along in front of them, rushed the black, into whose especial charge the captives had been given. He had picked up their trail almost at once, and, spurred on by eager desire to recapture his missing charges, and also by terror at the thought of what the consequences would be for himself should they elude the pursuit, he ran at a speed that soon brought him near to the comrades.

"He's seen us," said Lorna, glancing back over her shoulder as a shout of vindictive malice and delight burst from the dusky foe's lips. "But he seems to be alone. I can see no one else with him."

"That's all right, then," remarked Roddy Garrin cheerily. "We'll soon settle his hash for him. Here goes."

Stopping abruptly, he swung round with the intention of rushing at the black and overthrowing him by the mere impetus of a violent and unexpected charge. But he was too late, for Ah Ching, who had fallen back with the same purpose in mind, was before him.

Springing out from behind a bush, where he had crouched in concealment, the little Chinaman dived in between the legs of the negro who, thrown off his balance, was flung to the ground.

Then Ah Ching, his eyes flashing furiously, snatched up a broken branch from the grass, and, as the other lunged at him with a swinging right fist, struck with all his might at his foe.

The stout, serviceable weapon caught the negro on the neck and shoulder, and he rolled over unconscious from a blow that would have killed most men.

"He got to sleep for a little time," said Ah Ching, with a chuckle of the most intense satisfaction. "Suppose he not so thick in skin and bone, he make die chop-chop!"

Leaving the black where he had fallen, Ah Ching rejoined his comrades. Together they hurried on, following the track made by Garrin and his Chinese companion a few hours previously, and secretly rejoicing at the knowledge that every yard brought them nearer to liberty.

"We'll soon be up in the air," said Roddy Garrin, "then we can snap our fingers at all the outlaws in the forest. Feeling done up yet, Lorna?"

The girl laughed softly, and shook her head.

"Not in the least," she answered. "I'm as fit and active as ever I was in my life. Don't forget that Carton and I have been having an idle time of it lately."

Carton Ross smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Not much idleness about it," he rejoined. "We were on the move almost all the while, and that horrible brute of a black man wouldn't let us rest undisturbed, even when we were given the opportunity to. But he's a back number, I hope, and certainly we don't want to see him again. How far is it, Garrin, to this lake of yours?"

"Not much farther," the other answered. "The track leads to it now in an almost straight line."

Exerting themselves to their utmost, the comrades hastened onward through the forest. Of their enemies they heard no sound. It seemed as if the outlaws had lost the trail and were unable to find

## FOES OF FORTUNE.

(Continued from previous page.)

it again, but the fugitives were too wise to suppose any such thing, knowing well the crafty nature of the men with whom they had to deal.

"They'll be along here shortly," said Ross, "and with a sudden rush, too. Shouldn't be surprised to find that they've made a ring all round us, and are closing in."

Roddy Garrin vigorously shook his head.

"You say that, old chap, because you don't know this part of the forest like Ah Ching and I do," he remarked. "There is only this narrow trail of our own making that those chaps can follow. If they ventured to make a fresh one they'd lose hours of precious time, and make such a row besides, forcing their way through the bushes, that we should hear them a mile off."

"There's the lake," suddenly cried Ah Ching. "Now we sha'n't be long!"

The lake opened out before them, a large, still pool of deep water, on whose calm surface the moon shone radiantly. Close inshore lay the anchored water-plane, looking like some wonderful, gigantic toy.

"Nobody's been here," said Garrin, with a quick glance round. "It's just as we left it. In you get, Ross and Lorna. Ah Ching and I will set the beauty going."

The mooring-rope was cast free, and, with his comrades all safe on board, Roddy Garrin took his seat at the driving-engine.

"She's off!" he cried, as the water-plane commenced to move. "Hurrah for aerial locomotion! It beats trains and motor-cars every time."

Suddenly, almost the moment after Garrin had spoken, the water-plane came to a dead stop with a loud, spluttering noise from her engine. The comrades glanced at one another in surprise and consternation. This speedy check to their departure seemed ominous to their sanguine hopes of escape.

In vain Roddy Garrin tried to discover what it was that had gone wrong with the machinery. He could discover nothing that would enlighten him as to the nature of the fault.

"Hark!" said Lorna. "Do you hear them?"

From the shores of the lake sounded the voices of men and the trampling of horses' feet. The outlaws had tracked the fugitives down. Powerless to move in the disabled flying machine, the comrades watched the approach of their enemies.

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Wednesday's issue of THE GEM LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)

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COMESTALL CELTIC (19-13) 3-mile r.—Ernest Pickford, 173, George St., Comestall.

CAMPDEN ROGERS (15-16) Wormwood Scrubbs or Clapham Common.—John Noakes, 64, Somerleyton Rd., Brixton, S.W.

RECTORY ROVERS (16) reasonable distance Clapham Common.—J. Marson, 19, Rectory Gardens, Old Town, Clapham, S.W.

HARROW (16) 8-mile r., away; also want a goalkeeper. H. P. Glynn, 171, Plashet Lane, East Ham, E.

MANOR UNITED (16½) 10-mile r.—A. Butters, 1A, Marsland Rd., Walworth, S.E.

WESTCLIFF ARGYLE (18) 10-mile r., Wednesdays.—C. Ball, 123, London Rd., Southend.

FOREST UNITED (16) 8-mile r.—W. P. Scott, 24, Northbank Rd., Walthamstow.

LAWRENCE JUNIORS (14½) 4-mile r.—L. Sergeant, 69, Alderson Rd., Waverree, Liverpool.

RAINHAM EXCELSIOR (16-17) 10-mile r.—L. F. Francis, 5, Ridgwell Terrace, Rainham, Essex.

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HURLINGHAM ATHLETIC (17).—G. Morley, 36, Munster Rd., Fulham, S.W.

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### OTHER FOOTER NOTICES.

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F. Temperton, Ryeburne House, Cleethorpes, is forming a footer club, and would be glad to hear from readers of about 15 who would care to join.

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By Reginald H. Kemp, 25, Morten Road, Colchester—with boy readers in Colonies or foreign countries.

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