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Blake's Debt of Honour

A Grand, Long Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I.

A Friend in Need.

"I'M sorry, kids, but it can't be done!"

Tom Merry of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, shook his head ruefully as he made that remark. He looked round as he spoke at the juniors who were in the study. Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries and Digby, who were in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and at Monty Lowther and Harry Manners, who shared a study with Tom in the Shell passage. The six juniors appeared to be quite as rueful as Tom Merry himself.

"If Gussy hadn't spent that five on his blessed waistcoats, we should have been all right!" growled Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake, you must admit that my othah waistcoats were lookin' wathah wuff!" expostulated D'Arcy indignantly.

"Besides, how was I to know that Tom Mewwy was goin' to win short of money for sports gear?"

"I didn't run short of money, you dummy!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, if you refer to me as a dummy, I—" began Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Herries, in tones of great disgust.

"Have we got to listen to Gussy as well as Tom Merry?"

"Weally, Hewwies—" "Shurrup!" roared Jack Blake.

"Can't you realise the seriousness of the position, Gussy?"

"I weallie quite well, deah boy," said D'Arcy graciously.

"Things were in a bad way with the Lower School Sports Club at St. Jim's. Funds were low, and there was much gear wanted. Many of the fellows did not receive such magnificent

"tips" as they had at one time received. Fathers would write and say that money was tight, as trade was not too brisk. And bad trade at home meant bad trade at St. Jim's.

Now that gear was wanted, Tom Merry, who was captain of the Lower School, and president of the Sports Club, was forced to admit that much of the gear required could not be bought.

He had put forward his accounts, which tallied exactly with his expenditure and receipts, and all that saw them could not but admit that Tom Merry had done well to get as far as he had with the little money at his disposal.

It was therefore a point of argument in the Shell study after tea one evening as to what was to be done in the circumstances. They could not and would not attempt to obtain goods on the credit system. What they had they paid for, and what they couldn't pay for at the time they wouldn't have.

That was Tom Merry's way of doing business, and it was the way that was best in the end.

It behoved the skipper of the Shell to do something, however, and with that object in view, he called upon his chums of the Fourth to help him out of the middle.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, being the son of Lord Eastwood, had often been in a position to help his chums, and was, moreover, only too willing to do so if he got the chance. But with Gussy money came and went very easily. His allowance had been received some days before in the shape of a "fiveah," and that had been spent, most of it, at the tailor's. Hence Blake's disdain, and Gussy's repentance.

"Got any suggestions, Tommy?" asked Blake.

"I haven't at the moment," said Tom Merry, with a frown.

"I was hoping that perhaps Gussy would be able to put down a few quiddees until better times. I hardly like asking the chaps to do another sub."

"Half of them wouldn't do it!" snorted Herries.

"And the half that wouldn't would be the ones who would use most of the gear—Mellish, and that giddy crowd," growled Digby.

"Of course, we could get up a concert, deah boys," said Gussy thoughtfully. "I could sing a tenor solo, you know—"

"You could, but we wouldn't get many people to attend the concert if you were billed to sing," said Blake. "The chaps know you, old son!"

"Weally, Blake—" began Gussy.

"Shurrup, there's good chaps!" interrupted Tom Merry.

"We've got to get down to the rock bottom, not float about the top. The concert stunt is too old."

"Much too old!" said Digby.

"Got whiskers on it," said Herries.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not answer those observations. He subjected the speakers with an icy stare, and maintained rigid silence.

"How much have you got, Tom?" asked Jack Blake.

"One pound three shillings and eightpence!" replied Tom Merry, after a glance at the paper in his hand. "That will just about buy one football. No more, no less!"

"Well, then, get the football, and trust to our receiving a remittance during the next few days," said Blake. "That's all I can suggest. And I don't see what else you can do."

"I might tap my aunt," murmured Tom. "She's a dear old soul, and would do anything for me. But I don't like writing for money these times."

"Quite right, too!" said Blake indignantly. "Why should your aunt help pay for our sports gear? If she came and offered to do it, it would be a different matter. But as for asking—"

"Wathah not, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, speaking at last.

"I am in agreement with Blake on that question, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom nodded. There was really no way out of the matter. They would have to wait until something turned up. At any rate, they were not exactly in desperate need for gear. They wanted match footballs, but they had enough old ones to be able to get a good game when they wanted to. It was for matches against such as Greyfriars, or Rookwood, that they required brand new balls.

The nets attached to the goalposts were in need of repair, and the Co. valiantly decided that they would do the repairs themselves as best they could. That would save a little money—but it didn't guarantee the job being done perfectly. However, that couldn't be helped, and beggars could not be choosers.

The meeting broke up without much having been arranged, and the juniors set about their prep. It was later in the evening they met again, and then it was only to go over the same ground, and achieve just the same result—which amounted to nothing.

They gave it up in the end, and made up their minds to do the best they could with what they had.

The night passed, and after afternoon lessons the next day, Tom Merry went down to the outfitters to get a new match ball, to be kept in readiness for any special match that might turn up. The chums of the Fourth went with him, and they were just about to enter the shop when Blake suddenly came to a halt to stare at a young man who was looking in at the outfitter's window.

"Wally!" exclaimed Blake.

The young man turned sharply, and it seemed to the Co. that he bit his lips as he saw Blake. But if he did he recovered himself in a fraction of a second, for he turned with outstretched hands to meet Blake.

"It's Jack Blake!" he ejaculated, in surprise. "Dear old Jack! Fancy meeting you! But, of course, you're at school here, are you not?"

"St. Jim's, Wally. This is my cousin, Wallace Sanderson, your fellows," said Blake, turning to the St. Jim's juniors. "Wally, my pals!"

And he introduced Tom Merry & Co., and his own chums of the Fourth. Sanderson looked sharply at them each in turn, bowed as the name was mentioned, and smiled a good-hearted sort of smile.

"Jolly pleased to meet you, beans!" he said affably.

"Going inside, Jack?"

"Just to buy a footer, old son," said Jack. "Pop in, Tommy, while we wait here. What are you doing in these parts, Wally? I haven't seen you for donkey's years!"

"Nor I you, as a matter of course," said Sanderson, with a smile. "As a matter of fact, Jack, I'm taking life a little bit easily just now."

"Oh!" said Blake.

Tom Merry came out at that moment, the purchase of a football not occupying much time. And, seeing that they were about to return, Sanderson walked on with them.

"Guess it's like old times, seeing you again, Jack," he said. "Are you going straight back to St. Jim's?"

"Straight as we can," answered Blake. "Which is by a winding lane!"

"Then I'll come up with you and have a chat," said Sanderson easily. "Don't mind?"

"Not at all!" replied Blake.

Welcome, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy graciously.

"Thanks!" said Sanderson, with a pleasant little laugh.

He chatted on the way home mostly about sport, and made a few inquiries about Jack Blake's people. Blake naturally returned the compliment, and by the time family matters had been discussed, they had arrived at St. Jim's.

Sanderson looked curiously about as he entered the famous old School House at St. Jim's. To a stranger there was a great deal to like about the ancient doorway, and the as equally ancient staircase. The historic antiquity of the place had long since failed to interest the St. Jim's fellows, they only feeling the natural pride in being a member of such a famous old school.

Jack Blake led the way to the study in the Fourth Form passage, and Sanderson glanced round the cosy, simply-furnished room with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Much like my own study at school," he observed, with a chuckle. "Ink on the carpet, on the walls, and even on the ceiling. Chairs showing signs of having been bumped about a bit. Coalbox denied, and a bone under the table showing that one of you has a dog, You, Jack?"

"No; Herries has a bulldog!" answered Blake, with a curious look at his cousin. "You seem to have a dickens of a keen eye, Wally!"

"Training, my dear chap—training!" answered Wally, with another pleasant smile.

Blake went to the cupboard, and glanced ruefully inside. He shut the door of the cupboard, and grinned rather sheepishly at his cousin.

"You've come at rather an inopportune moment," he said. "We've nothing in the way of grub to offer you. Sorry, and all that, you know!"

"Broke?" asked Sanderson interestedly.

"Very!" replied Jack. "But that's neither here nor there. Sit down, and make yourself at home."

"Thanks! But I only wanted to come and see what sort of study you had, old boy," answered Wally. "I didn't even come for a footer. But I'd like to leave one, if I might."

Jack Blake's eyes gleamed for a moment, and Tom Merry felt his heart beat just a little faster. There was no real reason why Blake shouldn't accept a tip from his cousin. Blake's evident hesitation was undoubtedly only because he had just met his cousin for the first time for years. In fact, he had so far forgotten the existence of his cousin Wally as not to mention him since he had been at St. Jim's. That was really nothing much, for most of the fellows had a heap of relatives of whom no word had been spoken since they arrived at the school.

"The last time we met, I think, Wally," said Blake suddenly, "was when we went to Uncle Jim's place, and he gave us both a tip?"

"That was the time—when I was jolly hard up," said Wally. "I've been to the giddy ways since then, obtained a gratuity, and turned it to good account on the stock-markets before they came down with a crash. You can accept a tip from me, Jack, without thinking I'm missing it."

"Hand it over, old son!" said Blake, with a chuckle. "You're a friend in need!"

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Sanderson's hand went to his pocket, from which he withdrew a wallet, and from the wallet he took a little bundle of notes. Blake's eyes opened wide as he mentally reckoned the value of those notes; there must have been close upon a hundred pounds in that wallet.

Sanderson handed over a fiver without a word, but with another of the smiles that gave him such a pleasant appearance.

"Thanks awfully! But do you usually carry such a large amount of money as that with you?" asked Blake.

"Yes—nearly always. I obtain goods, and sell them quickly. Small profit, quick turnover—that's the way to make money, Jack!" answered Sanderson, with a smile.

"Now I must be off!"

"We shall see you again, Mr. Sanderson?" said Tom Merry. "We would like you to come to one of our study feeds—off our own tip, needless to say!"

"Rather!" said Sanderson. "But drop the 'mister,' chaps. Any pal of Jack's is a pal of mine. So-long!"

"Cheerio!" said the juniors; and they left Jack Blake to escort his cousin to the gates.

It was in a very short time that Jack came back, and his face was positively beaming.

"That's the sort of cousin to have, my bucks!" he said gleefully. "Blessed if I don't think Wally is a decent fellow! I couldn't get on very well with him when I was a kid. But when a chap comes down with a fiver when we're really hard up—well, corn in Egypt!"

"What ho!" said the others, in unison.

"I must say I regard Sanderson as a weal sport!" observed D'Arcy. "He offed the tip vevy gwacefully, you know."

"Anyhow, it's nearly time for bed, and I've not quite finished my prep!" said Blake. "Buzz off, you Shell fish!"

And Tom Merry & Co. "buzzed off," the Shell leader taking the fiver with him to put in a safe place until such time as it was decided exactly what to do with it.

CHAPTER 2.

Rolling in Money.

"HALLO, Baggy! What do you want?"

Jack Blake asked the question as the door of the study was opened and Bagley Trimble of the Fourth Form poked his head round the corner.

"I say, Blake, old fellow!" began Trimble.

"He's after something!" interrupted George Herries sagely. "You can always tell when Trimble wants something free, gratis, and for nothing. He calls you 'old fellow' or 'old chap'!"

"Look here, Herries—"

"Rats, Baggy! What do you want, any old how?" demanded Jack Blake.

"Ahem! I happened to hear that you were in funds, Blake, and as I am rather short for once—"

"Ahem! Well, and long, and the short of it is—will you lend me half-a-crown?" asked Trimble.

"I'll pay you back when my next remittance comes along."

Blake put his hand in his pocket and withdrew the lining, thus showing that his pocket was quite empty.

"You see how I stand, Baggy?" he said dolorously.

"But—but you had a fiver last night!" said Baggy, in dismay.

"What I had last night and what I have this afternoon, Baggy, represents two different questions," replied Blake.

"Why, you—you—Do you mean to tell me you've blown a whole blessed fiver since last night?" almost shouted Baggy Trimble. "Oh, my hat! All on yourselves, too!"

Blake handed an inkpot, and glanced from it to Bagley Trimble. The fat junior of the Fourth looked from Blake to the inkpot, and dodged behind the door.

"Yah! Stick to your money!" he said derisively. "I wouldn't come to your feed if you asked me to!"

"Splendid!" said Blake, with a chuckle.

The door closed with a slam, and the juniors resumed their preparation without further interruption from Bagley Trimble. But Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther put in an appearance a few minutes later, and Blake pushed his books resignedly on one side.

"Fat lot of good expecting a chap to do prep when he's interrupted every five minutes!" he growled. "What's the matter, Tommy?"

"Just brought a list of things we can buy with your fiver, Jack," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Have a look at it."

Blake took the proffered list and glanced quickly, almost casually, at it, and handed it back.

"Good!" he said. "We'll have a little over, so we may as well have a bit of a feed with it."

"I've just had a letter," said Tom Merry. "It's—"

"A remittance in it?" asked Herries eagerly.

"No; from Harry Wharton at Greyfriars," answered Tom, with a smile. "He wants us to go over there on Saturday

and give 'em a match. It's a question of funds—fares, you know, and all that.”

Digby looked puzzled.

“Surely there will be enough left out of the funds for that purpose?” he asked.

Tom Merry shook his head.

“I'm afraid there won't be enough left to take eleven fellows over to Greyfriars,” he said—“unless, of course, some of the chaps have plenty of cash. My experience at this time of the term is that a fellow is mighty short.”

“Yaas; I wewgetfully agree on that point, deah boy,” put in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy solemnly. “You see, by the time a fellah has paid his tailah's bills, and got weady for the wintah, there's not much left of a fivah!”

“Blow the tailors! Blow the winter!” said Herries emphatically. “I think we ought to make a special effort to get over to Greyfriars. They beat our frat eleven recently, you remember, when they had an Old Boy playing for them. I suggest Tom Merry puts the word round, and see how funds are in the Fourth and Shell.”

Blake nodded, and, as he looked round questioningly at the others, they nodded, too.

“Right!” said Tom Merry. “Manners, Lowther, and myself possess about threehalfpence and a copy of this week's ‘Boys' Herald.’ That sums up our little lot. We know you fellows are short. There's Glyn, Lumley-Lumley—”

“He'll probably ask to be allowed to pay all the fares if he knows we are short,” put in Manners. “Lumley-Lumley's like that.”

“Can't be did!” said Tom Merry. “That's not what I like.”

“It's what we may have to put up with that matters, my son,” said Blake. “Can't you rake up the fares from the funds, and leave some of the gear to be bought at another time?”

“That's for you to say, Blake,” said Tom Merry quietly. “It's your fiver, you know.”

Jack Blake frowned, and was thoughtfully silent for a few moments. When at last he spoke, his expression was just a little grim.

“No,” he said, “we can't do that. After all, all the Fourth and Shell want football gear. We can't very well bust the fiver on eleven fellows at a time like this.”

“Very nice of you,” said Tom Merry.

“Rats!” snapped Blake. “You'll have to write to Harry Wharton and tell him that the game is off for the present. Needn't tell him why, of course.”

And there the matter rested for that day, for by the time the letter to Harry Wharton was written it was time for bed. And at St. Jim's bedtime was bed-time, and the juniors were not allowed to stay in their studies after the bell went.

The next afternoon, however, brought a change. Tom Merry & Co. were on their way to post the letter, when a tall, dim figure loomed up in the shadowy darkness of the quadrangle. They were passing on one side, when a cheerful voice broke in upon them.

“That you, Jack?”

Blake stopped.

“It am—it are!” he said cheerfully.

“I suppose that's Wally Sanderson?”

“I am—it is—it are!” said Blake's cousin, in the same merry strain.

“Going out?”

“Just to post a letter—putting off a football match for Saturday, as a matter of fact.”

“Putting it off?” repeated Wally.

“Why on earth are you doing that?”

Gated, or something?”

“N-n-no,” stammered Blake in confusion. He did not want his cousin to know that all the fiver was being spent on gear. Besides, it might look as if he wanted more money. But Wally settled the matter for himself.

“Cash, I suppose!” he said brightly.

“Come on back with that letter, kids!”

“But—but—” began Blake.

Wally seized Jack Blake by the sleeve, and almost dragged him back into the School House. The others, slightly surprised but greatly interested, followed in the wake of the cousin.

Sanderson did not release Blake's sleeve until they were in the Fourth-Former's study. And in the gaslight the juniors could see that there was a

bright gleam in Sanderson's eyes—a gleam that told of suppressed excitement.

“When's the match for?” he asked suddenly.

“Saturday,” answered Blake. “But look here—”

“I'm looking, and I'm thinking!” interrupted Sanderson.

“Is it far to the place you wanted to get to?”

“Not so very far; but I can see—”

“Then we'll bus it! Where is it, by the way?” asked Sanderson.

“Greyfriars School, in Kent,” said Blake. “But—”

“Oh, you're butting enough for any old goat!” said Sanderson, with a laugh that took away the sting in his words. “We'll bus it to Greyfriars on Saturday, then. That's settled.”

“Bus it?” echoed Tom Merry. “How the dickens are we going to bus it, Mr. Sanderson?”

“I'll arrange for a charabanc,” said Sanderson, seating himself in a chair by the table. “I'll come with it, and pick you up at the gates of the school. How will that do?”

“Hopping!” said Tom Merry. “My hat! This is an unexpected bit of luck, you fellows!”

“Ripping!” said Blake. “Seems to me, Wally, you've been hiding your light under a bushel too long. You're the sort of cousin one likes to see knocking about the place—a sport, plenty of cash, and not afraid to spend some of it on your pals! That's blunt, and it might seem like our wanting you just because you're turning on the gold taps and looking after us like a prince. But you're welcome, all the same.”

“When I think that I'm not welcome I'll tell you so,” said Sanderson, smiling. “As it is, I'm just thinking that I was not too nice to you when I was a kid. Now I've struck oil I'm making up leeway a bit.”

“Thanks; jolly good of you!” said Blake gruffly.

“Tommy, my son, I think we can afford a few buns, some butter, and a tin of cocoa now. Hop off, you Shell fish, and visit the tuckshop!”

Tom Merry & Co. went out of the study, and the leader of the Shell purchased bread, buns, butter, cocoa, a tin of condensed milk, and two tins of salmon. With that little lot, when they returned to the Fourth-Formers' study, the seven juniors and Wallace Sanderson sat down to a cheerful, if plain, meal.

It was late when Sanderson went, and it was not until after he had gone that Tom Merry bethought himself of



The chums of the Fourth were just about to enter a shop when Blake suddenly came to a halt to stare at a young man who was looking in at the outfitter's window. “Wally!” “Dear old Jack! Fancy meeting you!” said the stranger in surprise.

the number of questions concerning Greyfriars that Sanderson had asked. He had wanted to know everything.

On the whole, Tom Merry thought that Sanderson was very pleased indeed he was going to Greyfriars on the coming Saturday. The questions he had asked were undoubtedly because Sanderson was of the kind that likes to know all about the place to be visited, so as to be more at home when he got there.

Be that as it might, Tom Merry was glad enough to be able to accept Harry Wharton's challenge to a match. There was an old, old rivalry between the two schools, and many a strenuous battle had been fought on the fields of sport.

It remained to be seen who would be victorious in their next meeting.

CHAPTER 3.

The Greyfriars Match.

WALLACE SANDERSON arrived with the charabanc at twelve o'clock on the Saturday, and the juniors, having a special early dinner, trooped out with their bags, in high spirits.

"This is some style!" said Bernard Glyn, who was playing for Tom Merry's team. "Jolly good of you, Mr. Sanderson!"

"Hear, hear!" said the other members of the team heartily. "Rat!" answered Sanderson. "Jump up, kids!"

The "kids" jumped up, and in a few seconds the charabanc was being driven swiftly down the lane from St. Jim's. There were twelve juniors in the charabanc—Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, Bernard Glyn, Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy, and Talbot, of the School House; and Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn, of the New House.

The span through the country was extremely enjoyable, and the brisk air put heart and life into the St. Jim's juniors. They were positively boiling for the battle when the teams lined up. There was little time to spare, for it was two o'clock when Wingate, the stalwart captain of Greyfriars, blew the whistle for the start, and it was certain to be dark by four o'clock.

The first half was goalless. Wharton and Tom Merry, rival captains and centre-forwards, worked hard to score, but found the goalies were in fine fettle, and they fisted away every shot that looked dangerous. Bob Cherry, the champion fighting man of the Remove, and Vernon-Smith of Greyfriars, played a game that was only equalled by Blake and Manners of St. Jim's. But despite the rushing from one end of the field to the other, despite the clever dribbling and the neat passing, neither side could record a goal, and when Wingate sounded the whistle for the ten minutes' respite the teams trooped off the field for the lemon.

"Jolly good game!" said Jack Blake, seating himself on a form in the dressing-room. "The Greyfriars fellows are in toppling form."

"We'll win yet!" said Tom Merry confidently. "Hallo! Here's Mr. Sanderson!"

Wallace Sanderson came in at that moment, and with him was a fat junior they knew well. He was William George Bunter, and there was a smug grin of satisfaction on his fat face, and quite an affable smile on his lips.

"I say, you fellows," he began, "I've been showing Mr. Sanderson round."

"Good!" said Blake, with a grin. "How long did it take to show him the tuckshop, Billy?"

Billy Bunter looked indignant.

"Oh, really, Blake!" he snorted. "Of course, as the tuckshop at Greyfriars is quite the most famous part of the school we had to spend some time—"

"And some money!" put in Blake.

William George smiled.

"Mr. Sanderson was extremely generous," he said. "He insisted upon standing me a feed, and, naturally, I had to be polite to the stranger within the gates. After the match, you see, I shall be very busy, as I have promised—"

"Bunter was good enough to show me all over the place," said Sanderson quickly. "I found much to interest me. I shall probably come here again. There goes the whistle, Jack!"

And the St. Jim's players went back to the field of play without knowing the nature of Billy Bunter's promise. However, they learned very shortly after they came off the field, the victors by one goal to none. Blake had been responsible for the goal, after a brilliant run by Tom Merry, a neat pass to D'Arcy, and a forward pass to him.

The Greyfriars fellows around the field shouted their encouragement to their representatives, but Harry Wharton & Co. could not break down the barrier of defence put up by the St. Jim's players. And Fatty Wynn, a confident

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smile on his face, had kept the St. Jim's lead until Wingate sounded time.

Sanderson met the teams as they came off, arm-in-arm, warm, and not a little tired after their strenuous exertions.

"I've got a little surprise ready for you fellows," said Wally. "Tea is waiting for you in the Common-room. Bunter has arranged everything. He seems an adept at that game."

"Oh, my stars!" said Fatty Wynn. "That's the very ticket, sir! I can do with a snack!"

In less than twenty minutes the two teams, with Talbot and Billy Bunter, Sanderson and Lord Mauleverer, sat down to a feed of such magnitude that even the wonderful appetites of Billy Bunter and Fatty Wynn were satisfied.

"Been having another look round since half-time, Wally?" asked Blake, as he pushed away his plate at last.

"Yes. Lord Mauleverer has been showing me the school trophies and the cups the fellows have won!" said Wally, with a smile. "Jolly decent of him, wasn't it?"

"Rather!" said Blake, in tones of great surprise. "I—ahem—I always thought Lord Mauleverer was a bit of a slacker—you know what I mean—rather tired!"

"Pleasure to entertain such a sporting chap, you know!" said Mauleverer.

Wallace Sanderson had evidently made a good impression, for when the St. Jim's fellows climbed into the charabanc to return to their school, half the Remove seemed to turn out to greet them a send-off, and not a few of the cheers and cries of farewell were for Sanderson.

The last Tom Merry & Co. saw of the Greyfriars fellows was their dim, shadowy forms as they waved their hands in farewell. Then, happy in their victory over their rivals, and after Wally Sanderson's fine feed, they struck up songs of the most popular, if unmusical, type.

In that way they arrived back at the school, and all the Fourth and Shell knew before they were told that the St. Jim's team had won their match. Excited demands for the score, who had scored, and who had played the best, went up as the St. Jim's juniors climbed from out of the charabanc.

The questions were answered a dozen times before as many seconds had passed, and doubtless there would have been more questions asked had not the attentions of the team been demanded by the departure of the charabanc and Wallace Sanderson.

The juniors thought it was up to them to give Blake's cousin a rousing send-off, and they did so in a right hearty manner. Sanderson's face was beaming as he leaned back in his seat and waved his hand.

"So-long, boys!" he sang out. "Glad to have been of service to you! See you all again soon!"

"Rather!" shouted back the juniors.

But they were all wrong. They were not all to see Wallace Sanderson again in a short space of time. Some of them were destined to see him again in somewhat different circumstances than they expected, and some were never to see him again!

CHAPTER 4.

A Strange Request.

LETTER for you, Jack!"

George Herries uttered that remark as he tossed a registered letter on to the table immediately in front of Jack Blake as he sat with his prep before him.

Blake looked up quickly, and took up the letter. The writing on the envelope was strange to him, and he could not think for the moment what such a fat letter could contain. He slipped his penholder under the flap, a thoughtful frown on his brow.

"Blessed if I know what this is!" he said.

"Another tip from your cousin, p'waps, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"A pretty big tip, I should imagine," said Digby, looking curiously at the big envelope.

At that moment the door of the study opened, and Tom Merry & Co. walked in.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "All as solemn as owls!"

There was no reply to that remark. The Fourth-Formers were looking at Blake as he opened the registered envelope. No one took any notice of Tom Merry & Co. as they came into the study and shut the door.

The next moment a gasp of surprise went up from the juniors. Jack Blake, his eyes almost starting from his head, took from the envelope a thick wad of crisp, white paper banknotes.

"M-m-my hat!" he gasped. "Some tip!"

"That's not a tip—it can't be!" said Tom Merry, taking a quick stride to the table and staring down at the wad of notes.

"Is there a letter with the notes, Jack?"

Jack Blake's eyes seemed fascinated by the sight of so

much money. There must have been hundreds of pounds in that wad. He did not release them as he fumbled for the letter which must have accompanied the notes.

He found it at last, and, laying the notes on the table, he opened out the letter. For a moment his brows corrugated in deep thought, but the next they lifted as he smiled understandingly.

"Nothing much!" he said. "Listen to this, chaps!" And he proceeded to read:

"Dear Jack,—I have been called away from town on urgent business, and I am not likely to be back for some considerable time. I want you to bank the enclosed money in your own name, and keep it safely for me. I also want you to make use of the interest which will accrue from the money, but don't touch the capital unless some dire need arises. I shall want it all at some future date, but when, for the present, I cannot say.

"Give my best regards to all your chums, and accept same for yourself.

"Believe me,
"Your affectionate cousin,
"WALLACE SANDERSON."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You'll have a banking account of your own now, Jack!"

"How much is there?" asked Manners curiously. There was deep silence whilst Jack Blake counted out the notes. There were twenty-five notes in all, and each was of the value of ten pounds.

So there were two hundred and fifty pounds in the wad. Blake looked up with amazement in his eyes. Never before had he handled so much money.

"That cousin of mine must be rolling in money to have two hundred and fifty quid in his pockets!" he said. "My only Aunt Sempronia! If he has gone away, and left me two hundred and fifty quid to look after him, how much must he have taken with him?"

"And how is it he doesn't bank it himself?" asked Monty Lowther curiously.

"Great pip! That's rather funny!" said Digby slowly. The junior looked at one another curiously. It was indeed a most strange request, for surely, if Sanderson was going away for any length of time, he could have banked the money himself in his own name. It would have been quite safe like that. Why, then, had he asked Jack Blake to bank it for him, and in Jack's name?

That was extraordinary. And the more the juniors thought of it, the more bewildered they became. For quite three minutes there was silence in the study, and it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who broke it.

"I regard the whole affair as most strange!" he said thoughtfully. "At the same time, Blake, dear boy, you cannot refuse the request, for you don't know where he has gone. You'll have to bank the cash."

Blake looked down at the letter, and started.

"There is no date on the letter, and no address!" he said, in amazement. "My only hat! This beats the giddy band, you fellows!"

"It does!" said Monty Lowther. "But blessed if I can see what you can do about it. Your cousin was pretty decent to us, you know, and you'll have to do this favour for him. There can't be anything in it, and when he comes back he is certain to offer some explanation. Take my tip, Blake, my son, and hand over that money to Railton for to-night. Bank it in the local bank in the morning, and wait for the giddy interest to pop up!"

Jack Blake nodded thoughtfully, and slowly formed the notes into a wad again. By that time he seemed to have come to a sudden conclusion, for, without a word, he rose from his chair, opened the cupboard, and flung the notes inside.

"You're asking for trouble, my son!" said Herries darkly. "If you're going to leave those quids there—"

"I am!" said Blake firmly. "I don't half like this, and I'm not going to say anything about it for the time being. I'll bank the money in the morning, and then only we chaps will know any-

thing about it. If I took the notes to Railton, he might ask questions."

"They wouldn't hurt you," said Tom Merry, in surprise. "You have only to show him the letter, and there is nothing left to explain!"

"All the same, I'm keeping it dark," said Blake. "Blessed if I know why, only I am, and that's all there is about it!"

The juniors did not press the matter. After all, it was not their business. Jack Blake could do as he liked about the notes and the letter. But, at the back of their minds, there came the same unbidden thoughts as had come to Jack Blake. There was a question unanswered—why had the money been sent to Blake, when it could have been banked by Sanderson himself?

Late that night, as he lay in his bed in the dormitory, Jack Blake turned the question over and over in his mind.

He dropped off to sleep at last, however, to awake in the morning, heavy-eyed, and with an indescribable feeling that something was going to happen. In fact, the thought preyed so much upon his mind that he went down to his study before he had washed, and looked into the cupboard. The notes were just where he had thrown them, and quite safe.

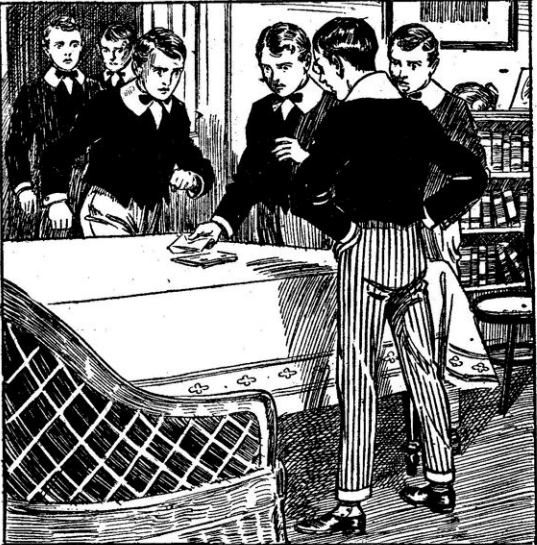
Feeling somewhat relieved, Blake returned to the dormitory and washed and dressed. No one mentioned the money in the dormitory. Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy had guessed why their leader had gone down to the study, and, realising how foolish it would have been to ask questions at that time, they wisely held their peace until they had had breakfast and gone into the study for their prep.

"The money was all right, Jack?" asked Digby. "Quite! Why shouldn't it be?" asked Blake. "There was nobody else knew but Tom Merry & Co. and ourselves."

Digby did not reply to that question, for the obvious reason that there was no answer. The juniors gathered up their books and their prep and walked away to the Form-room, thoughtful and silent. The presence of those notes seemed to depress them, but why it should, not one of them could have said.

Immediately after dinner Blake took out his bicycle, and rode into the village, where he banked the two hundred and fifty pounds that Wallace Sanderson had sent him. And, once back again in the study, with the banker's receipt in his pocket, Jack Blake felt considerably relieved.

"Of course, it's all rot, what we've been thinking," said



The next moment a gasp of surprise went up from the juniors. Jack Blake, his eyes almost starting from his head, drew from the envelope a thick wad of crisp banknotes! "That's not a tip—it can't be!" said Tom Merry.

"Blake, with an effort at brightness he by no means felt. "The money's gone now, and there it stops until Wally sends for it. His explanation will make us feel silly asses, when he comes here again."

"P'waps so, dear boy!" agreed D'Arcy. "And the subject of Wally Sanderson and the money was dropped. Blake sincerely hoped that the memory of the notes and the letter would disappear in the requirements of the class-room and sports field that afternoon, but he was sadly disappointed.

The letter was literally burned into his mind, and the sight of the notes was ever before his eyes. Long before tea he was as depressed as he had been the night before, and even the warmth of the cosy study, and the genial companionship of his comrades, failed to lift that depression. Herries and Digby and D'Arcy seemed to have forgotten all about Wally Sanderson, for they chipped and ragged one another in quite their usual fashion. If Blake was quieter than usual, they did not appear to notice it.

And the evening passed quite uneventfully, and Jack Blake went to bed more cheerful than he had been for twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER 5. A Staggering Surprise!

MASTER BLAKE!" The rising-bell had not finished ringing when Toby, the page, poked his head into the Fourth Form dormitory and called out the name. Blake, who was only half awake, turned round sleepily.

"Wharrr marrer?" he mumbled. "The Head wants you immediate, sir," said Toby. "Immediate, sir, was what he said!" And Toby closed the door and went down the corridor, whistling cheerfully.

Blake did not whistle, although he awakened with startling suddenness. He sat up in his bed, and stared in a bewildered manner in the direction of the door, and from the door to his chums.

"What have you been up to?" asked Herries warmly. "Were you out last night, Jack Blake?"

"The Head wants you immediately," said Toby. "He dressed in record time, and hurried away to Dr. Holmes' study. He had no need to open the door, for before he reached it the Head himself opened it from the inside.

"Ah, Blake!" he said quietly. "Come inside, my boy." Blake, bewildered, entered the dreaded sanctum, and beheld therein a strange man, tall, wiry, and sharp-featured, who wore an overcoat, and sat with his velour hat on his knees. Jack was aware of a keen pair of eyes that surveyed him sharply from head to foot the instant he placed his foot in the study.

There was nothing more said until the Head had carefully closed the door and taken his seat at his desk.

"This gentleman, Blake, has a few questions to ask you," said Dr. Holmes quietly. "You may commence, sir."

The gentleman referred to nodded and turned to Blake. "Your name is Jack Blake?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You have a cousin, Wallace Sanderson?" Blake started.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"You received a large sum of money—two hundred and fifty pounds, in fact—by registered post a day or so ago?" asked the stranger.

"Y-y-yes, sir," he mumbled.

"Sanderson sent it to you?"

"Yes, but—"

"And you have placed it to your credit in the bank in the village?" interrupted the relentless stranger.

"Yes, but Sanderson is calling for it shortly," answered Blake. "I don't see—"

"Neither do I, yet," put in the stranger. He turned to Dr. Holmes with an almost apologetic look in his eyes. "I'm afraid I shall have to take this young man away with me, sir."

Blake started back as if he had been lashed with a whip, and his face went white.

"But—but—" he stammered hopelessly for a moment.

"Dr. Holmes, what does this man mean, sir?"

Dr. Holmes' lips set grimly.

"He will tell you, Blake!" he said curtly. "He is Inspector Musgrave of Scotland Yard!"

"So-So-Scotland Yard!" gasped Blake.

"Exactly," said the officer. "Your cousin, Blake, has been arrested for—"

"A-r-r-rested!" stammered the junior.

His knees seemed almost incapable of keeping him on his feet, and he absolutely staggered to a chair and sat down.

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The Head looked at him sharply, as if about to remonstrate with him for the liberty he had taken, but a glance at the junior's white, set face stifled the words that rose to his lips.

"Sanderson was arrested a few days ago," resumed the inspector grimly. "He had been robbing houses in all districts ever since he was cashiered from the Army, just after the armistice, and we have caught him out at last. The money he sent you, Blake, was stolen money, and well you knew it!"

Blake gasped again. "I—I—I didn't!" he said wildly. "Wally—Sanderson, that is—send me the money, asking me to bank it. I can bring a dozen fellows to prove that!"

"Why on earth should he send you money to bank in your name?" thundered the inspector. "Can you tell me that?"

It was the same question again. The same question that had cropped up when the money had first arrived, and had remained in Blake's mind ever since. Blake could not answer it. He had not found any answer to the question, even after hours of thought.

"I—I—I—we—are you trying to make out that I knew it was stolen?" he burst out furiously. "My hat! Me! A thief! Dr. Holmes, I refuse to stop here and be insulted—"

The inspector laughed mirthlessly.

"You'll have to answer that in a court of law, my boy!" he said curtly. "As it is, I arrest you as an accessory after the fact, and you will have to come with me and get that money out of the bank! That's the long and short of it, and I warn you that anything you say now may be used as evidence against you!"

Blake started to his feet, and almost ran across to Dr. Holmes' desk.

"You don't believe the inspector, sir?" he demanded hotly. "You know me well enough! You know that I am no thief!"

"I know you well enough to believe in you, Blake," said the Head soothingly. "But—but I am afraid the Court will have to decide. You must admit that it is extraordinary that your cousin should have sent you money to bank in your name—and a large sum of money like that. You cannot blame the inspector; he has his duty to do, and the matter must be thrashed out!"

Blake's head sunk low upon his breast for a few moments, and then he raised it suddenly, and stared straight at the inspector.

"I am ready, sir," he said quietly. "But I shall clear myself!"

"I hope you will, young man!" said the inspector gruffly, as he rose to his feet. "Go and get your hat and coat!"

Without a word Blake turned on his heels and walked out of the study, with his head held high in the air. His bearing was proud and certainly he looked anything but a receiver of stolen money as he quietly closed the door and hurried away to the study.

His chums were there when he arrived, and they looked at him quickly as he took up his coat and cap.

"Don't ask questions, chaps," he said, holding up his hands as they opened their mouths to speak. "This is the long and the short of it. Tell Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, but don't tell anybody else. Put it round that I'm going away—"

"Going away!" echoed the three juniors.

"Yes. Listen!"

In a few terse sentences, Jack Blake made known to his chums exactly how he stood, and then he hurried away before they could open up a tirade of questions which he would not have time to answer.

Five minutes later Jack Blake and the inspector were on their way to the village. Not a word was spoken by either of them until they entered the private office of the manager of the bank. There Jack Blake demanded a cheque-book, was told the way to fill in the cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds to be paid in banknotes, and in another minute he left the bank, the notes being carried in the inspector's pocket-book.

Naturally, the affair aroused the curiosity of the bank manager, but he did not ask any questions. It was no business of his, and he shut the door of the bank behind his visitors without knowing why the money had been banked one day and withdrawn the next. If he thought there was an official bearing about the man who had accompanied Blake, he kept the thought to himself, and business went on as usual.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Blake was taken into the police-station at Wayland and led to the charge-room.

"This is the case likely to come on?" he asked quietly.

"To-morrow at the latest," said the inspector, not unkindly.

"I think that if you turned King's evidence, young man—"

"Rats!" interrupted Jack Blake early. "I can't turn King's evidence when I know nothing about the beastly

business! And that's all I'm going to say until there is a magistrate in the room!"

The inspector looked sharply at Blake's white though determined face, and he frowned. A few moments later Blake was left alone in a cell—alone with his thoughts. He sat down upon a rough wooden stool, and, resting his elbows on his knees, and his face on the palms of his hands, he contemplated his position.

The disgrace which Sanderson had brought upon him, curiously enough, did not worry Blake quite so much as the fact that he had used stolen money. He had gone to Greyfriars in a charabanc with his chums, paid for out of stolen money. He had partaken in a gorgeous spread at Greyfriars, paid for out of stolen money. He had handed stolen money to Tom Merry to buy footer gear for the Junior Sports Club.

Perhaps the questions that Sanderson had asked in the study about Greyfriars had been because the scoundrel had designs on the silver at the famous school. Perhaps his desire to know such as Vernon Smythe and Lord Maulverver had been because he wanted to fool them into parting with some of their money.

And that money might have come back to St. Jim's—or part of it—added Blake and Blake's chums with tuck.

Blake groaned as he thought of it all, and bit his lips in an effort to stifle his agony of mind. How he wished that the night would pass, and that he could get to the court and clear himself, and face his comrades in the full knowledge that the Court had declared his innocence to the whole world!

But the night was to pass slowly—slowly—agonisingly slowly—to Jack Blake of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. The uncertainty of the evidence that might be brought against him; the difficulty he might experience in proving that they were all wrong, that he was innocent—the uncertainty was terrifying to the junior as he sat almost motionless in the cell at Wayland Police Court, counting the quarter-hours as they struck upon the bells of a neighbouring church clock. But the thought that worried him most as he sat there alone was—would his chums believe in him?

CHAPTER 6. The Trial.

"JOHN BLAKE!"

The name was called out, and Jack Blake was led into the dock at Wayland Police Court by a stalwart warder. His face was haggard and drawn as a result of his sleepless night, but there was a gleam of hope in his eyes as he glanced round at the people in the court. The magistrate was already in his place, and the gallery was thronged with spectators.

Blake almost stopped dead in his tracks as he saw several well-known faces in the gallery. There was Tom Merry, and there was Herries, Digby, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Manners, and Lowther, and Mr. Latham and Mr. Bailton. Jack Blake saw them all—saw them all smiling their encouragement and their faith. And the sight put fresh heart in the very soul of the prisoner-schoolboy.

Blake faced the magistrate bravely and without lowering his eyes under the justice's searching gaze.

A man in a wig rose from his chair by a table in the well of the court, and Blake watched him eagerly.

"You are John Blake, of St. James' School?" was the question.

"I am."

"You are a cousin of Wallace Sanderson's?"

"I am."

"You are aware that he has been arrested for theft?"

"I am."

"When were you first aware that he was a thief?"

"When Inspector Musgrange arrested me yesterday."

"Not before?"

"Not before."

There was silence for a few tense seconds. Then the cross-examination of Jack Blake was resumed.

"What did you think when the money was sent to you?"

"I thought that it was strange. My chums thought it was strange, too."

"We are not concerned with what your chums thought," said the prosecuting counsel shortly. "We are more concerned with you. Now, tell the Court why you did not hand such a large sum of money over to the care of your master, seeing that you could not have banked it before the morning of the next day. I suggest that it was because you were afraid that awkward questions would be asked."

"Your suggestion is entirely without foundation," observed Blake calmly. "I knew that only my chums knew the money had been sent to me, and I knew that the money would be safe, in the circumstances."

"You have remarkable faith in human nature—"

"I have steadfast faith in my chums, sir!" corrected Blake quickly.

"Ahem!" muttered counsel, as there came a faint cheer

from the gallery, to be instantly suppressed by the court usher. "You pretend, then, that you had no knowledge that your cousin had sent you stolen money?"

"No knowledge at all. If I had—"

"Then can you account for the fact that the money was sent you at all? How was it, in the first place, that the money was already addressed to you, and reached you after the arrest of your cousin? Was it not because it was a pre-arranged plan that, should he be caught, the funds in hand should be passed to you?"

"Certainly not! I knew nothing whatever of my cousin's money. He certainly paid for several little things which I could not have paid for at the time—"

"Ah! So you, too, were short of money?"

"Broke to the wide, sir!" answered Blake frankly.

Counsel turned to the justice, with a smile of satisfaction on his lips.

"I put it to your Honour that prisoner's shortage of money is the prime cause of his having accepted the stolen money. There is the motive—and a sound one at that. The prosecution does not urge that this prisoner was concerned in the actual burglaries or thefts. It merely contends that the prisoner was a receiver of stolen goods!"

"My hat! I'm not!" burst out Blake.

"Silence!" snapped the magistrate. "You must not interrupt counsel!"

"But I tell you, sir—"

"Silence! You will be allowed to speak later on." And the magistrate turned to the prosecuting counsel. "Pray proceed."

"We have sufficient evidence to prove that the prisoner, Wallace Sanderson, is guilty of the thefts. In fact, I believe he will enter a plea of 'Guilty.' It remains for your Honour to decide whether this prisoner shall be sent for trial, or whether he is innocent. I think that the fact of his having banked the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds only a day or so before his arrest, tends to prove that he is an accomplice of the older criminal. That is our case."

The magistrate wrote a few words on a paper before him and then looked up.

"Has a counsel been appointed for the defence?" he asked mildly.

"I have, your Honour!" said a young man, rising from the opposite side of the table to that occupied by the prosecuting counsel. "My case is that the prisoner is entirely innocent of any crime. He is the victim of a clever scoundrel—a thief, who, to be able to save some part of his ill-gotten gains, used his cousin as a means to an end. I claim that Wallace Sanderson met his cousin quite accidentally and quite recently, and that I have witnesses to prove it."

"Yass, wathah!" came in an excited voice from the gallery.

"Silence!" thundered the magistrate. "Usher, if there are any further remarks from the gallery, you will clear it."

"Yes, sir," said the usher quietly.

"Sit down, you ass!" came in a stage whisper from the noisy quarter.

"Bai Jove—"

"My witnesses are there, your Honour," said defending counsel hastily. "They are schoolboys of St. Jim's. They can prove that one of their number—Thomas Merry, by name—went to the village to purchase a football, and that the prisoner and several others went with him. That it was at the shop that the prisoner first saw his cousin, and that Wallace Sanderson returned to St. Jim's with the party and relieved their monetary troubles with a five-pound note. Further, they can prove that the whole of that five-pound note was devoted to the common football fund, and that they did not share, personally, any benefits."

"Call Thomas Merry!" said the magistrate.

Blake looked hopefully at the Shell fellow as he walked quickly to the door of the gallery and disappeared, to reappear in a moment or two in the well of the court. He was sworn, and looked fearlessly at the defending counsel.

"Tell the Court how you first met Wallace Sanderson!" said the counsel.

In a few brief sentences Tom Merry explained how they had been short of money, had only been able to purchase one football, and had met Wallace Sanderson outside the out-fitter's shop in the village. He told how the five-pound note had been given Blake, and how it had, or would have, been spent.

"What did you think when Blake received the registered letter containing the two hundred and fifty pounds?" asked counsel, when he had finished.

"We all thought it strange that there was no date and no address on the letter, neither was there a word to show where Wallace Sanderson had gone," replied Tom Merry.

"We all commented upon it."

"That will do, thank you, unless the prosecution wants to ask you any questions," said the defending counsel, turning to his learned friend, the prosecuting counsel.

The latter shook his head, and Tom Merry stepped down from the box.

"I should like to know if the prisoner, Wallace Sanderson, is aware of the fact that his cousin has been arrested?" said Blake's counsel.

"No, sir; he has not been told," said Inspector Musgrave, rising from a chair by the dock.

"Then may I question him? Might I suggest that he could say something in his cousin's favour, that he might be considerably surprised if he saw his cousin in the dock?" said counsel calmly.

Blake's heart leapt. He saw the clever move which was being carried out by his counsel, and he waited impatiently for the magistrate to speak.

"I can see no harm in such a procedure," said the magistrate slowly.

A warder disappeared, and in a few moments Wallace Sanderson, his chin almost touching his breast, was ushered into the court. For a moment he did not look up, although he must have felt that every eye was upon him.

But when he at last did raise his head, and he caught sight of Blake standing in the dock, with a warder by his side, his face went as white as a sheet of notepaper.

"Jack! You!" he gasped. "What—"

He was placed in the dock beside Jack, and the defending counsel turned to him with contempt in his face.

"You see the predicament in which you have placed your cousin?" he said. "He has been arrested as your accomplice—"

"But—but—" Sanderson broke off and bit his lips. For a tense moment he was silent, then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned to the magistrate.

"My cousin is innocent, sir!" he said, in a low voice. "I will explain everything. I had arranged with the landlady of the house where I was staying that, in the event of my not returning any night, she was to post a letter, which I had already stamped, and which she would find on the mantel-piece of my bed-room. I sent that money so that I should have something to work with when I came out of prison. Blake did not know that it was coming! I told him to bank in his own name, so that there would be no suspicion against him, as he is only a schoolboy. I suppose Inspector Musgrave ferreted that out!"

"Is that all you have to say?" asked the magistrate, after a glance at the counsel for the defence.

"Is there anything else necessary your Honour?" asked Sanderson, with a tinge of insolence in his tone.

"Take the prisoner to the cells!" snapped the magistrate.

Not until Sanderson had disappeared did the case proceed. Then the magistrate turned to the prosecution.

"I suggest that the prisoner be placed on remand, to enable Inspector Musgrave to ascertain the facts concerning the person who posted the letter. If he did arrange with the landlady to post the letter it is reasonable to believe that Blake is but an innocent victim."

"Your Honour forgets that it might have been a pre-arranged affair between the two prisoners," said the prosecuting counsel respectfully.

"In view of the evidence of Thomas Merry, that their meeting with Sanderson was unexpected, and in view of Sanderson's confession, which convicts him absolutely, I am of the opinion that the prisoner is not guilty. I consider the evidence for the prosecution is not sufficient to justify my sending the accused for trial by jury. He must, however, be warned as a witness at the trial of Wallace Sanderson. In these any difficulty in arranging bail if I place the accused under remand, pending the result of Inspector Musgrave's investigation?"

"None at all, sir!"

The magistrate looked up towards the gallery as two voices uttered those four words in unison. They belonged to Mr. Latham, master of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and to Mr. Railton, the Shell master. A faint smile crossed the magistrate's lips.

"Very well," he said quietly. "I remand the prisoner on bail, and trust that, for obvious reasons, Inspector Musgrave will hurry forward his investigations."

"I will, sir!" said the inspector.

"Come out of it, sonny!" said the warder, in a stage whisper. "You're all right!"

Blake, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, turned and walked out of the dock, and even the usher could not restrain the cheers which rose from the gallery. Neither could the officials stop the stampede for the door as the excited juniors rushed to meet their chum.

They met outside on the pavement. And they collared Blake as if he had been released after having been a prisoner for years.

"Up with him!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!" shouted D'Arcy excitedly. "Collah him, deah boys, and wush him to the newest tuckshop!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 719.

"Chuck it, you silly asses!" panted Blake. "Lemme down, you dummies! My hat, I'll—"

It was not a bit of good Blake saying what he would do. He had to go with the juniors, and even Mr. Railton and Mr. Latham smiled as they saw Blake being borne shoulder-high down the main street of Wayland.

"They seem rather pleased!" observed Mr. Railton drily.

"Even though Blake is not by any means cleared!" said Mr. Latham grimly. "Personally, of course, I believe in the boy. But there is much to be obtained in the way of information before Blake will be finally discharged without a stain upon his character."

"In my opinion, they have only to find the fence—that is the name, I believe, that is given to the professional receiver—who really accepted the rest of the proceeds of the various robberies, to be able to put two and two together, and clear Blake absolutely," said Mr. Railton. "I think we had better join the boys. There may be rather—boisterous scenes otherwise!"

"Quite, my dear Railton!" said Mr. Latham, with a chuckle.

They found the juniors in very boisterous spirits, and they did not interfere until Blake had been given a feed commensurate with the funds in hand. Then the masters took them to the station, and so back to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Jack Blake's Resolution.

"Gussy!" Jack Blake turned to his chum suddenly as they sat in their study in the Fourth Form corridor late that afternoon.

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"Will you fetch Tom Merry & Co.?" said Blake. "I'm not anxious to be mobbed by the fellows who wish me well, or sneered at by those who hope the case hasn't ended yet, or I would go myself. I want old Kerr, of the New House, too, because he's got a level head on his shoulders."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Of course, deah boy! Anything to oblige," he said gracefully. "I must agree that Kerr has a remarkable head for a youngstah in the New House. Howevah, as a fellow of tact and judgment myself, I hope you'll allow me to—"

"Fetch 'em all in, Gussy, there's a good chap!" interrupted Blake. "I want advice by the bushel, so to speak!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

And D'Arcy left the study, to reappear a few minutes later with the three New House juniors, Tom Merry & Co., and Herries and Digby, who had been visiting Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage.

"Heah we are, Blake, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "Sit down, you fellahs!"

Figgis & Co. looked round, but there were no seats available. However, at such a critical time as the present, they did not pass any remarks concerning the poor way in which the School House fellows entertained their visitors, but squatted on the floor. Herries took the coal-box, whilst Tom Merry sat beside Blake at the table.

"You're all pretty well aware of the scrape my cousin has put me in," said Blake, as soon as everybody was settled down. "You're all aware that I'm right down in the dumps—"

"Cheese it, Jack!" said Tom Merry almost sharply. "That's the wrong way to look at things!"

"It's all very well to speak, Tommy," said Blake. "I've still to be proved innocent, you know. Of course, I know you believe in me, but the counsel chap has got to make the giddy magistrate believe me innocent. He's the one that matters."

"Inspector Musgrave will see to that," said Kerr.

"Anyhow, something's got to be done!" said Blake, with sudden resolution. "Fools have been robbed by my cousin, and, to a certain extent, I have shared in the proceeds—"

"So have we!" said Monty Lowther quietly.

"That's not it. The people who have been robbed have got to be paid in full!" said Blake quickly. "And I'm going to do it! Sanderson has landed me with a debt of honour, and I'm going to pay it off. Had I never had a share in the money—however innocently I shared—I should have got my pater to settle up. As it is, I'm going to pay back every farthing, and pay for every pot or salt-cellar that Sanderson stole and that can't be traced! The question is—and for that I am seeking your advice—how am I going to do it?"

There was a few moments' silence in the study, and it was Kerr, the canny Scot of the New House, who answered.

"There are plenty of fellows willing to help, Jack," he said slowly. "I suppose you are determined to do it off your own bat?"

"Absolutely!" said Blake.

"My patah would square up like a shot!" said Gussy.

"Your pater would, but he won't be allowed to," said Blake calmly.

"Weally, deah boy, I assuah you it would be a pleasuah!" said Gussy solemnly.

"I dare say it would. He's a sport of the first water!" agreed Blake. "But it can't be done, Gussy. Lord Eastwood has nothing to do with my affairs, and I don't particularly want him to know anything about it."

"The papuals will do that, deah boy," said D'Arcy sagely.

"A concert—" began Manners thoughtfully.

"Too old!" said Blake instantly. "Besides, it would appear too much like charity to me."

"I've got it!" yelled Tom Merry suddenly. He brought his fist down upon the table with a thump which made it tremble. The other juniors jumped, startled for the moment, then looked expectantly at the Shell leader.

"I've got it!" said Tom excitedly. "There's a football competition running in one of the weekly papers—you know, forecast the results, and if you get them all right you win a prize. How's that, Jack Blake?"

Blake's eyes glistened.

"The very ticket, if—"

"If what?" demanded half a dozen voices, as Blake hesitated.

"If I could get them all right!" said Blake dismally.

"Try, my son; and if you fail at the first attempt, try again!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "We'll all help you make up your mind what team is going to win, and what team you'll win. Fatty Wynn is a dab at footer, and knows all the teams inside out. Kerr is a lucky boulder—ahem!—I mean, fellow. Let's help you fill up your coupon!"

"We'll try, at any rate!" said Jack Blake. Tom Merry darted away to his study, and returned with the weekly periodical he had mentioned. The coupon was quickly found, and the juniors settled down to make up their forecasts.

"You haven't another copy, have you?" asked Blake suddenly.

"No. Why?" asked Tom Merry, looking up from the weekly.

"Only—only I should like to send in one coupon of my own forecast, and another with our united efforts," explained Blake. "You—you see, if I could win it myself, I'd—I'd feel ever so much more bucked—not taking any part of—of your prize, you know—and all that!"

Tom Merry surveyed the Fourth-former severely.

"John Blake," he said at last, "you're asking for the biggest thumping you've ever had in your life!"

"And the thickest ear!" said Herries darkly.

"Yaas, wathah! And the blackest eye, bai Jove!" added D'Arcy.

"All the giddy dame, I know where there is another copy. Scrope has one," said Digby. "I'll go and buy it from him!"

And he went off to see Scrope. For once that worthy was in an amenable frame of mind, and he handed over the copy without a word, and Digby did not have to buy it.

And thus Jack Blake was granted his wish, and he sent in the two coupons—one he had filled in himself, and the other which had been filled in by himself but with the aid of all the other juniors present.

After that, Blake felt a bit happier, although the shadow of the court was still over him. He was not yet clear of the slur upon his honour, and it was likely to be some time before he was clear.

Much depended upon the activity of Inspector Musgrange.

It was much to the surprise of the school, therefore, when it became known that Inspector Musgrange had been to see Dr. Holmes before breakfast the next morning, and had departed again. Blake heard the news long before Toby brought him a message that his presence was desired in the Head's study.

And the news gave Blake heart, for it meant that the inspector had been the bearer of good news. Otherwise he—Blake—would have been sent for immediately the inspector had made known his business.

Blake tapped upon the door of the

Head's study, and waited for the summons to enter. It came almost at once.

"Ah, Blake!" said Dr. Holmes kindly. "Sit down, my boy!"

Blake, wondering, sat down.

"You are released from your bail, Blake," resumed the Head. "The inspector has been here this morning, and had some startling news to impart. It appears that he visited the landlady whom your cousin mentioned in court yesterday, and from her he obtained proof that the letter had been waiting for days on the mantelpiece of his bed-room—days before you could have known that he was in the neighbourhood. There was also another letter found—a letter from an undesirable person in the East End of London."

"Oh, sir!"

"A receiver of stolen goods, in fact, was the person who sent the letter, and Inspector Musgrange, with really commendable promptitude, followed up the clue, and arrested the fence. From him has been obtained nearly all the stolen property, but nearly two hundred pounds' worth of silver articles and money has yet to be traced. I am afraid the police will never find that. However, the inspector informs me that you will not be called upon as a witness against your cousin at his trial in London. You will, however, have to go to Wayland Police Court to-morrow to be formally discharged without a stain upon your character, and it is my pleasure to be the first to offer you heartiest congratulations at your release from what must have been an extremely unmeriting predicament. I shall take the opportunity, after prayers this morning, to inform the school, for the story must have got around."

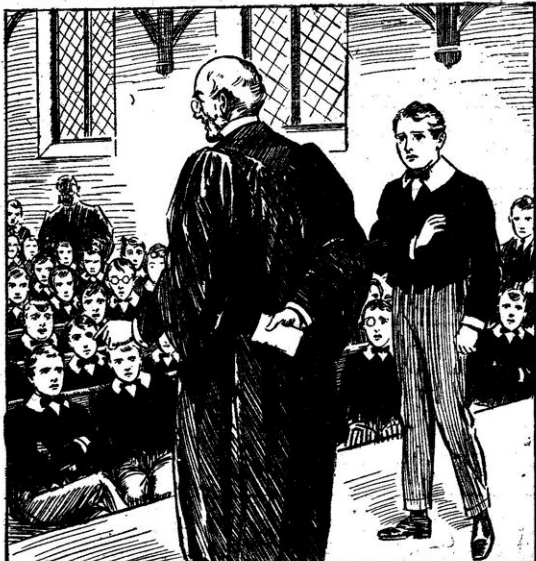
And the worthy old gentleman held out his hand to Jack Blake, who took it and shook it warmly.

"Th-th-thank you, sir!" he stammered. "And—and some day, sir, I am going to repay every farthing my cousin had, sir, for I don't know what part of the robberies the money I had a share of came from. If I know that it is all paid back, sir, I shall feel easier in my mind."

"I will help you, Blake—" began the Head.

"N-n-no, sir; if you don't mind, I'd rather do it myself, sir!" stammered Blake.

"Very good! I admire you all the more for that resolution, Blake!" said the Head warmly. "You may go now. It is time for prayers."



"Blake of the Fourth come up here—others remain where they are, please!" said Dr. Holmes quietly. Blake walked towards the raised dais at the end of the chapel—the only person in the place besides Dr. Holmes who knew what was coming. The others waited breathlessly.

Blake went, his head held high, and his thoughts in a whirl. He was clear! He was innocent—proved innocent! He could look his chums in their faces and know that he was as honest as they were—although he knew that he had always been so! But Mellish & Co. could not possibly believe he had any complicity in the crimes for which his cousin would be convicted and sentenced to imprisonment. Nobody could believe it after he had been proved innocent!

Blake went to the chapel for prayers, and found the school already assembled, and two minutes after he got there the Head came in, and said prayers.

The masters would have ushered the scholars out of the chapel immediately prayers were over had not the Head held up a warning hand.

"Blake of the Fourth, come up here—others remain where they are, please!" said Dr. Holmes quietly.

Blake, flushing to the roots of his hair, walked towards the raised dais at the end of the chapel—the only person in the place beside Dr. Holmes who knew what was coming. The others held on breathlessly for the Head to speak.

"Boys," said Dr. Holmes firmly yet quietly, "you have known that a pupil at this school has been under a cloud for a few days. You are aware that one of your number has been tried in a court of law as an accomplice of a thief. It is my duty to publicly announce that Blake has been proved innocent—absolutely innocent—of any connection with the crime. His greatest misfortune is that Wallace Sanderson, the self-confessed thief, is a cousin. That reflects no discredit on Blake! Many here might have relatives of whom they have no cause to be proud—but that is nothing against them. It is Blake that matters—and I am proud to have him for a pupil!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped Blake.

"There may be a few boys present now who might take the advantage to utter derisive remarks concerning Blake's cousin. Such contemptible remarks, once uttered, should receive immediate and just punishment. But I most sincerely trust that no such person as I suggest exists. I utter that warning in case there might be!" said the Head grimly. "You may pass out!"

For a moment it seemed as if there would be an outburst of cheering; but, remembering where they were, juniors and seniors held their peace until they got outside. There, in the quadrangle, Jack Blake received a magnificent ovation, and he was lifted on to the shoulders of his comrades.

Blake was almost sobbing with emotion as he was whirled towards his study.

The fellows who were staggering under Jack Blake's weight staggered faster, and got him to the study, when they let him down. Then, with the study filled with juniors, the door was slammed and locked.

"I'm clear of all that stigma," said Blake, when he had obtained his breath and control of his emotion. "It now

remains to settle the debt that Wallace Sanderson has landed me in!"

"Hop out of it, you chaps!" said Herries. "Blake wants to rest a bit. Buzz off!"

"Yeas, wathah! Buzz off, deah boys!" said D'Arcy. And the fellows, respecting Blake's feelings, buzzed off.

CHAPTER 8. The Competition Result.

"HERE'S the paper, you chaps!" Tom Merry burst into Jack Blake's study the next Sunday morning after service, and waved a pictorial newspaper excitedly above his head. Tom had been to Mr. Railton's room, and had borrowed the paper from him.

For that paper would make or shatter a dream. It would announce the results of the previous day's football matches—the football matches which the chums of St. Jim's had dared to try and forecast.

Blake, pretending not to be in any haste, but inwardly bursting with excitement, rose from his chair, and took from his pocket a slip of paper upon which was written the forecasts they had sent in.

Tom Merry and the others scanned the list of results, and shouted to Blake whilst he checked off the list in front of him.

All forecasts seemed to be turning out correctly until they came to Watford. Here they had to pause, for that team only managed to draw on their own ground—not a bad performance really, as they were playing a "warm" team which figured at the top of the League.

"Only one wrong!" said Tom Merry hopefully. "There might be a chance yet!"

"Yes, rather!" assented the others, looking at Blake's white face.

Well they knew what little chance they had of carrying off the prize of two hundred pounds with one forecast incorrect. Seldom had it been won for that, and it was not likely that they would win it this time.

As a matter of fact, the juniors had a pretty good sauce in expecting to win it at all. It was only their hopes which carried them so confidently along.

"There's my coupon, chaps," said Blake. "We might be different! I'll have a squint. I know all the results!"

The first result Blake looked at was Watford. He gasped with pleasure. He had forecast a draw! With eyes that almost started from his head he looked at his other forecasts. They were all right! Every one was correct!

"They—they're correct!" he stammered.

"My hat! Gussy, lend me your back!" shrieked Monty Lowther.

Whack, whack!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" shrieked D'Arcy, for quite a different reason from Lowther's. "My back, you dummy! Ow!"

"Blake's won it!" hooted Manners and Dighty.

"Perhaps not all of it!" said Blake, striving to keep calm. "The coupons might have been lost. The Editor accepts no responsibility for lost coupons—that is distinctly stated in the rules of the competition!"

"We'll wait and see!" said Monty Lowther.

They waited three weeks, and they saw. And by that time Wallace Sanderson had gone for a trip into the country—to Dartmoor, in fact—with two or three nice companions in blue uniform to look after his harem for three years!

The paper which would announce the result arrived, and Blake, with hands that trembled with hope and fear, opened it out at the page which would give the result. Almost immediately he saw a column with the result printed in heavy black type.

"I've won it, you fellows!" he cried excitedly.

"What!" exclaimed the others.

It was only too true. The paper stated distinctly that "the following reader sent in a coupon correctly forecasting all the matches, and the prize has therefore been awarded to him."

The next moment a roar went up.

"Hoorah! Blake's won it!"

No one could describe the scene in the study after that. Blake was overwhelmed—with congratulations and with relief. The debt could be cleared—could be lifted from his shoulders! The money could be sent to Wallace Sanderson's victims—and the whole unpleasant episode could be wiped out of their memories.

Inspector Musgrange saw that the money went to the right quarter, and there was sufficient over to supply the needs of the sports club, and to enable Jack Blake to stand a feed to the whole Form and the Shell chums as well.

THE END.

(Next week will appear the first of a fine series of "barring-out" stories by Martin Clifford. Please see that you order your copy EARLY, and thus avoid disappointment.)

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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 719.

The Queer Case of Mr. Brutell

Written by Professor Hector Gordon, Science Master of St. Jim's.



The Hypnotised Chinaman.

WHEN the doctor retired to bed that night it was oppressively hot, and it seemed that a thunderstorm was brewing. Dr. Brutell dreaded this. Although he knew not why, the possibility of a violent storm worried him considerably. It was not actually cowardice, for Brutell had more than his share of courage when it came to the point. It was a fear of the unknown.

The doctor woke from his sleep on two or three occasions that night. In the distance he heard the faint rumbling of thunder, and he arose, and, going to the window, endeavoured to shut out all signs of the storm. But, unfortunately for him, at that moment there was a vivid stroke of lightning, followed by a terrific crash of thunder.

Once again that strange, uncanny feeling overtook the doctor, and a moment later he was in the grip of the mad again once more. The lightning flashed more vividly than ever, and the peals of thunder grew louder and louder.

The storm increased in intensity with every second, and it had a terrible effect on the unfortunate doctor, causing him to tear round the room like some maddened animal.

Presently the doctor calmed down a little. The desire to die had now completely mastered over him, and he roared with laughter as an idea entered his mind. Every evil spell of which Brutell was a victim had a different effect upon him. Sometimes he was less violent than at other times, but always he had an overwhelming desire to commit some lawless action. He was quite powerless to fight against these criminal desires.

The doctor was at that moment thinking of Kwang, the Chinese cook, who had earlier in the evening been the willing subject of his hypnotic tricks.

Strangely enough, when in his evil moods, Dr. Brutell's hatred was always directed against his best friends, and upon this occasion he selected for his victim none other than Madeleine, the daughter of Robert Stanton, and the unfortunate girl whom he had resolved to help and protect.

Brutell, once again "the mad doctor," had thought of a cunning and most ingenious scheme. It was to make Kwang, the Chinese cook, actually commit the crime. Brutell concentrated all his thoughts, and by a marvellous effort succeeded in sending his mysterious hypnotic summons through the walls of the room, and into the bed-room occupied by the yellow man.

It was a tremendous and nerve-racking ordeal for the doctor, and this supreme concentration took a great deal out of him. His hands were shaking, and beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. But he knew that he had succeeded in the task he had set himself.

Presently Kwang himself could feel the hypnotic power. He awoke from his sleep, and blinked his eyes in a puzzled manner. A curious feeling hung over him, and he gradually felt that he was losing control of himself. The fact that Kwang had already allowed himself to be hypnotised by the doctor earlier in the evening made him a fairly easy subject for his experiments now.

Kwang tried to shake off the queer feeling, but it was impossible. Slowly, in a dream, he arose from his bed. Brutell felt that the Chinaman was answering to the hypnotic suggestion, and he prepared to take further steps. He desired that Kwang

should arm himself, and the Chinaman obeyed the instructions of his unseen master. He straightway walked over to the far end of the room, where there was a large knife fastened on the wall. Kwang took this down, then, opening the door of his bed-room, he walked along the corridor.

Brutell, although some distance away, and shut in by four walls, seemed to be able to see the Chinaman, who, happening to see his eyes sparkled with glee, and he waved his arms about frantically with excitement. He still spurred on the unconscious Chinaman, and presently the man stopped at a door, and quietly turned the handle.

In one hand he grasped a big, cruel-looking knife. A few more seconds passed, and the yellow man had crossed the room, and was standing beside the bed of his intended victim. He raised the knife above his head, and was in the act of bringing it down again when a piercing shriek echoed through the room.

Madeleine had awakened in the nick of time, and was conscious of her peril. She put her hand forth, and grabbed hold of the arm of the Chinaman, so that he was unable to plunge the knife into her. But urged on by the demon power of the evil doctor, the Chinaman wrenched the hand containing the knife away from the girl, and tried again and again to plunge it into her.

Just In Time.

MADELINE gave one last despairing cry, and then swooned away. But, fortunately, her signal of alarm was loud enough to be heard by some of the other people in the house.

Meanwhile a curious man was coming over Dr. Brutell, who had hypnotised the Chinese servant into a murder frenzy.

The trance into which the doctor had forced Kwang had been a great strain on him, and he was feeling a curious weakness from him. By great concentration of mind and thought he had forced the yellow man to carry out his will, and now the climax had arrived.

Brutell was no longer the evil man; the tremendous effort he had recently made had so exhausted him that he was brought out of his evil spell, and in very few seconds he was his normal self again.

The change came about just as Madeleine, downstairs, had uttered her final cry for help. Brutell heard it, and rushed with a number of other alarmed members of the household towards the room occupied by the threatened girl.

The party were only just in time, and, entering the room, an extraordinary sight met their gaze. Standing in front of Madeleine, with his arm raised above his head, and a dagger held tightly in his hand, was Kwang, the Chinese cook.

Another second and the yellow man would have plunged the sharp blade into the body of the unconscious girl.

Kwang did not seem to hear the door open behind him, nor was he aware that the room contained three or four other people beside himself. Apparently he was too interested in his grim task to notice the entry of the alarmed people.

Dr. Brutell, who was in the foreground, did not resist him. As soon as he had taken in the situation, he bounded across the floor towards the spot where Kwang was standing. The doctor sprang at the yellow man and forced him to the floor; then he wrenched the murderous-looking weapon from the hand of the Chink.

The other witnesses of this extraordinary scene were murmuring excitedly to one another, but could the meaning of this affair be, they were asking each other.

Kwang had been a member of the household for a long time, and never before had he shown such a dangerous tendency as this. There was a great feeling of relief that they had heard the alarm, and that Mr. Stanton's daughter had been saved from such a hideous death before it was too late.

Brutell had acted splendidly. He had seen the danger, and had acted at once. What would these good people have said, however, had they known that the respected doctor was the cause of the Chinaman's action? But there was a big surprise in store for everybody!

Dr. Brutell was quick to notice that the Chinaman was not in a normal state—that he was, in fact, in a hypnotic trance. It did not occur to the doctor, of course, that this man's condition was due entirely to his own recent efforts. For it was a peculiar fact that Brutell never had the slightest recollection of what he did, or what took place when he was in his evil moods.

The doctor stood deep in thought for a moment, he was trying to find a solution to the problem, when it suddenly occurred to him that earlier in the evening, during the entertainment, he had mesmerised the Chinaman in order to perform some tricks. Here, then, was a possible answer to the question.

Dr. Brutell turned to the other people; nearly everybody in the house had by now joined the excited crowd.

"I must make an explanation," he said, and instantly there was an impressive hush. "I am certain our friend Kwang, here, is not the sort of man who would knowingly commit a crime of this nature. This evening, as you all know, he volunteered to allow me to hypnotise him, and it is obvious that he is still in a trance. I will at once bring him round!"

Dr. Brutell passed his hands in front of the Chinaman and waited a few seconds. Soon the man who had just been unconscious upon the floor, commenced to stir uneasily. A minute or so later he opened his eyes; then he sat up and looked around the room in a bewildered manner.

When the Chinese cook was quite normal again, Dr. Brutell briefly told him of the extraordinary event which had recently been enacted. Kwang could scarcely believe that what he heard was true, but he loudly protested his complete innocence of any desire to hurt Mr. Robert Stanton's daughter. The rest of the household were quite satisfied with the explanation.

It was obvious that, as Dr. Brutell explained, the Oriental was still under the hypnotic influence which had been placed upon him at the entertainment earlier in the evening.

Soon afterwards Madeleine regained consciousness, and the maid who was taking care of her gave her a full explanation of the strange affair, in which she had been one of the principal characters.

Although the incident made a considerable impression on everybody at the time, it was soon forgotten, and Kwang, the unwilling villain of the drama, was completely forgiven by Madeleine.

The Great Raid.

SO far no news whatever had been heard of the missing millionaire ranch-owner.

The police, however, had been far from idle. They had followed up every clue, and had already succeeded in learning quite a lot about the ways of the villainous Black Circle gang.

The country for miles around Mr. Stanton's home had been searched by detectives, and the sheriffs and their men. Thus it came about that one night, some time after Kwang's attack on Madeleine, a stranger came to the door of the ranch-house, and asked for shelter for the night.

"I've been out in the hills all day hunting the trail of the Black Circle," he said. "Can you put me up for the night?"

It was only too plain that the man had had a very gruelling day in the saddle, and he now looked thoroughly exhausted and very near to a complete breakdown.

"Let me have something for a cover, and I'll 'bed' down right here," pleaded the man. "I've got to be off again at six in the morning."

(To be continued next week.)

The ST. JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

Blake in a Fix.

CHARGED WITH THEFT.

COUSIN ETHEL'S INTERESTING "GEM" HISTORY.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

I have at last been able to secure another article, dealing with 'early St. Jim's,' by Miss Cleveland. Her long absence (due to a rather bad illness) has been regretted by all who enjoyed her rattling fine series of articles. As she is now quite fit and able to carry on her good work, I have given her a whole page, to make up for her absence during the last few weeks.

TOM MERRY.

FIGGINS, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn were supposed to be in their study, writing out an imposition for Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House. Their anxiety to scramble through a hedge bordering the road can thus be understood when they saw their Housemaster approaching in the rear. But the truant juniors were not in time—the Ratcliff bird spotted them and gave chase. Figgy & Co. tore across the field on the other side of the hedge, and successfully crossed the loose, slippery plank which bridged a deep stream running alongside a high fence. After scaling the fence they found themselves in the main road leading back to St. Jim's.

In less than a minute they were in the High Street of Ryleomb. Just after this they passed by the garden of the Green Man, and had a very narrow escape. Coming down the path where Figgy & Co. were hidden was the well-known figure of a New House senior. It was Sleath, and the trio at first thought he was acting with Mr. Ratcliff. This idea proved to be wrong when Sleath turned into the rear entrance, and asked for Mr. Joliffe. George and his chums were then able to slip away, and when Ratty eventually arrived at St. Jim's he found three innocent-looking youths working away on their impositions as if for a wager.

Later that evening, when Figgins' study was deserted, Blake and D'Arcy arrived to pay their compliments. They decided that the room was shockingly untidy, and set to work to put matters right. Gentle Jack filled Figgy's footer boots with ink, emptied a tin of syrup over the picnic-pic, and poured the contents of the tea-canister over the top of it. Then they strewed the contents of the drawers around the place, and wrought a really surprising amount of damage in a very short space of time.

Just as they were leaving the House, Blake remembered that they had left no personal note to let Figgy & Co. know who had been. After he had done this he followed Quasy. But fortune was against Blake, for he was only half-way along the corridor when he heard someone ascending the lower stairs. There was only one thing left to do to escape detection, and Jack did it. There was a study door open, and as no light gleamed underneath Jack guessed it to be empty. In a moment he was within the study, and had closed the door.

To Jack's dismay the footsteps halted at the door, and the next moment Lucas Sleath entered and lighted the gas. Blake looked

oddly at Sleath when he saw the latter's face ghastly white and strained, and the torrent of questions which Sleath rained upon the junior made Blake still more puzzled. Jack, of course, watched Sleath warily, and when the burly senior made to grasp him by the collar, Jack ducked under his arm and bolted for the door. But it was not to be. Sleath seized him before he could make good an escape, and boxed his ears unmercifully. Blake naturally retaliated, and Lucas Sleath received one or two which made him gasp. Finally Blake was pitched out into the passage in an extremely hurt and dazed condition. Before a single door had opened Jack was up and off. He bolted down the stairs three at a time. Fortunately he met nobody in his wild career, or there would have been a catastrophe. He reached Study No. 6 at last, with his collar hanging loose, his hair tousled, and with a very red and flushed face.

He took out his handkerchief to mop his manly brow, and as he did so a coin was jerked from his pocket, and fell clinking to the ground. Herries picked it up, and found it to be a half-sovereign.

"I didn't know I had it," Blake declared. "I wonder where it came from! But we're in funds we'll go down to the tuckshop and lay in a feed. We can't spend our wealth in a nobler cause!"

And every the pur forthwith went down to the tuckshop and "biled" the half-sov on a royal feast.

The Missing Money.

Just before bed-time that evening Lucas Sleath entered Monteith's study. He was promptly asked if he had been chatting with "who."

"No," replied Sleath. "It's worse than that. Somebody's taken all the club funds from my desk. It was over twelve pounds, and had been subscribed by fellows in both Houses."

A long, painful silence followed, and it was broken by Sleath, who remarked that earlier in the evening he had caught Jack Blake hiding in his room. At the very mention of the name of Jack Blake a steely glitter shot into the evil eye of James Garrison Monteith. He saw a chance at last of repaying his long grudge against the boy he hated. But Webb was sceptical, and asked that every inch of Sleath's study should be searched. Sleath was quite agreeable, and every the search was turned out to which there was the barest possibility of the money having been carelessly stowed. The hunt was quite fruitless, and they were just about to quit the study when Baker put his head round the door to see what was taking place.

"I think I've found what you're looking for," he said.

Blake was naturally curious, and the state of affairs were explained to him. The four seniors then crossed to the School House to have it out with Eric Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's was very grim during the explanation, and at length sent for Jack Blake.

The Third Form fag found Jack Blake in the tuckshop "doing himself royal," and the news of Kildare's request made Blake green. He remembered what George Figgins' study looked like, and he was feeling in no condition to stand a licking.

Blake told the fag to have some tarts, and asked him as he did so whether there was anybody besides Kildare in the study. The fag said there was.

"And was the Monteith pig and the

Sleath beast among them?" asked Blake dolefully.

"Yes; and another couple as well," answered the fag.

With a very gloomy countenance, Blake betook himself from the tuckshop to Kildare's study, and was quite astonished at the grave faces of the seniors. What did they all want, he wondered, and why were they with Kildare? What did all the solemn faces mean? He was soon to know.

"Hallo, Monteith," began Blake. "Still the same delightful kind of pig, ain't you? Still got the same polite manners!"

"The New House prefect scowled his well-known scowl. But he had never been able to frighten Jack Blake with black looks, and his failure in this respect annoyed him. Kildare then told Blake he had been sent for about a very serious matter. Jack, of course, thought it was an account of his visit to Figgins' study, and he said:

"Here I am, as large as life, and twice as natural. All ready to be made a giddy martyr of. Which hand, and how many?"

Kildare watched Blake closely to see whether such light behaviour was genuine, or mere acting, before disclosing the reason for his summons.

Monteith, however, was convinced immediately that it was acting.

"Stop putting this on," he said. "You may as well get up and give up meddling about."

Blake began to look bewildered, and he stared from one prefect to another. Then Monteith made the statement, and quickly followed it up with the terrible accusation.

It took several seconds for the meaning of Monteith's remark to sink. When it had done so, Blake's amazement turned to indignation.

He took a step forward, quivering. His usual coolness had completely gone, and his temper was aroused. Right at Monteith he dashed, his fists flying out right and left.

The prefect staggered back under the sudden and unexpected attack, and went heavily to the ground. When Monteith recovered himself, he drew back his arm, meaning to fell Blake with a heavy blow. But Eric Kildare interposed, slung Monteith across the study, and let Blake loose. Monteith was simply white with rage, but in the presence of the seniors he had to give up. Jack Blake, speaking only to Kildare, firmly insisted that he was innocent, and the generous Irish captain believed him. Blake gave all reasons for his up-coming about the study, but the three New House prefects plainly disbelieved him, and even Kildare's brow grew more serious and clouded. Then the subject of how Blake had lifted a half-sovereign in the corridor was brought up.

Jack told them all he knew nothing about it. The three seniors then left the study—bound for the headmaster!

When they were gone Kildare dropped his hand on Jack Blake's shoulder. Blake, with a fearless look in his eyes, gave the captain of St. Jim's his word of honour that he was innocent, and Kildare again said he believed him. Then Kildare, with a worried frown, went along in the footsteps of Monteith to the Head's study.

COUSIN ETHEL.

(Do you think that Jack Blake was guilty? What happened when Blake was called before the Head, and the seniors go to know that Jack spent half-a-sovereign in the tuckshop, after the money had been missed? All these questions will be answered shortly in the "St. Jim's News.")

How I Saved the School, and Caught It in the Neck.

By PERCY WYATT (Fourth Form).

(NOTE.—Perhaps the biggest request I have received since the "St. Jim's News" made its first appearance is for a series of articles in which those fellows who have been in the background are brought to the front. I have decided that whenever I have a couple of columns to fill on these background individuals shall be given the job of filling it. Of course, whether he knows how to write an article or not is not in my mind, if he doesn't find something to talk about he can prepare to get it where the soap never reaches.—TOM MERRY.)

Of all the most beastly awful horrid jobs I've been given to tackle, I reckon this one takes the Gally Luncheon. Of course, Tom Merry would like to drop upon me to do the rotten job, wouldn't he? There are simply dozens and dozens of chaps who would have given all they possessed to get a chance of filling a column or two in the "News," but he couldn't ask one of those. It's just my luck, I suppose!

Accordingly, I sat down in my study that evening, and at length decided to describe a recent football match which took place between Sammy Bunter's XI and some of the fags at St. Jim's. Just when I dipped my pen in the ink a second thought struck me. I had decided to pay my compliments to the silver screen in Wayland, and see the doings of Douglas Fairbanks in his latest film, "The Lark and the Sparrows." So instead of tackling my silly old article, I scribbled a pen across the room so that it stuck in the wall.

The pictures were jolly good, and I must say it is simply the best film old Dufferin ever made. I got back to St. Jim's with just sufficient time to slip into the dormitory. I had just reached the last turning, when, of course, I had the misfortune to run bang into Tom Merry.

"How's that article getting on?" he demanded.

"Enjoying good health and the very best of spirits," I said jovially.

"Well, whatever its condition, don't forget I want it first thing in the morning," said Tom Merry warily.

I got into my little cot that night with all sorts of dread misgivings whizzing through me. I slept until about thirty-one seconds past eleven. At that cheery hour I got out of bed, thrust my legs into my bags, grabbed up some other articles of clothing and softly stole down towards the Fourth Form passage. Of course, I am as bold as brass by nature (of course—Ed.), but I don't mind admitting I was in a dead faint of knocking across a burglar robbing the Head's safe, or something like that—you know the sort of thing that always happens when the morning goes along of the dorm after closing-time. So I did it, I got to the Head's beastly study. I reached the Shell passage first, and then, as my silly old heart was going with the regularity of a machine-gun, I dropped at the second study along. The passages looked a trifle too dark to get down to my own dug-out.

"What do you think? I struck lucky! The second study was Tom Merry's." I jerked on the lights, and quickly spotted the typing bus which the editorial staff of the "St. Jim's News" use. It's called a Corolla, or something like that. Anyhow, I'd never done any typing articles in the "St. Jim's News" before, so I became fearfully interested in the thing. It fell to the floor twice, and made a most fearful row, but nobody came down, so it was quite all right.

"Boom—boom—ditto ten more times! Midnight had struck!

At that bewitching moment I remembered about fifty thousand awful things. I knew Tom Merry's study was No. 19, and that Bernard Glyn's study was No. 31. A day or so ago I heard Glyn talking about

explosions. He was telling what happened on the real Guy Fawkes' Day. If I remember, Bill Sykes tried to burgle St. Paul's Cathedral, didn't he? Well, as I sat in that quiet study, I thought of all sorts of deadly gunpowder things, another thought struck me. S-s-supposing St. Jim's were to be blown up by gunpowder! Supposing some horrid nameless man in contact with the devil, I know he keeps tons of dynamite and T.N.T. in his drawers. Why, good heavens, we might all be blown to pieces!

A tremblingly opened the study door, and crept in. I reached the kitchen of Bernard Glyn's chamber of horrors. I listened intently. Tick-tick-ratchet-rach-rach-tick-tick-click-click! and so on. That was the nerve-breaking sound heard.

At last I screwed up enough courage—for I'm as bold as a lion, you know—and entered. The same awful noise came louder to my ears, and I s-s-shud-dud-dud-dud! It was awful—horrible! I went to switch on the electric-lights—click!—and then—

"Mother! Wow! Hellup! The end of the world's arrival!"

I was blinking fast, and I found myself sitting upon the floor. Silence reigned. After about twenty minutes' dose I remembered again. Bernard Glyn always left his switch connected with a magnesium flash paper, so that he would secure any blinding glare to Jerrykoo. At length I discovered some lucifers, and lighted a stump of candle.

Then I made another discovery. It was, that the weird noise I heard proceeded from a donkey clock which hung on the wall. The clock, I thought, worked on dynamite, which had three teeth missing. Then, in the awful creepy, flickering light which a candle gives, I saw a strange, sinister-looking jar on top of myself. I gingerly grasped a chair, and mounted it. I stretched my arm up, and put my hand inside the jar. I felt something soft and sandy—'m! I drew my hand out, and saw it was black with dust. "Gunpowder!" I gurgled, and felt back towards the chair and outed the rotten candle. I cocked up my ears, and listened for the explosion—but it didn't come. Then, at eight-thirty next morning, I saw the sinister-looking jar caught my eye. I rose to my feet, and approached it in the same manner that a spoonful of blonk-monge approaches Bismuth.

I reached for the jar, and I put my hand into the jar, and some hard stuff with out of the jar, and some hard stuff was in it like—like like—d-d-d-dynamite!

I threw the awful stuff across the room, and heard it knock a big vase down into the ground. The vase crashed! The stuff was the Shell passage like—a cake of soap skimming down a ball-room floor.

Down to the Hall I flew, where I knew was the great fire-bell. I tugged at it with all my might, but it was heavy. I tried to get on immediately overhead rang out, and in every dormitory the electric buzzer went. Within five minutes the whole pyjama-clad school came tearing down the stairs.

"H.O.F.!" I yelled. "H.O.F.!"

The Housemaster came tearing down at that moment, and grasped me by the shoulder. By now every Form had been marshalled together and led towards the playing-field. There, I saw the matter, my study was a trifle cold. I tugged at the bell for all I was worth, and continued to yell: "H.O.F.!" "H.O.F.!" "P.A.T.E.!" "P.A.T.E.!" "H.O.F.!" "H.O.F.!" "P.A.T.E.!" "P.A.T.E.!" "H.O.F.!" "H.O.F.!" "P.A.T.E.!" "P.A.T.E.!" "Where is the fire?"

"H.O.F.!" "P.A.T.E.!" I howled lustily. "H.O.F.—house on fire!" "P.A.T.E.—place about to explode!" The Mr. Railton jerked me away from the bell and smacked me across the ear. At that moment up ran the corporal in charge of the Wayland Fire-Engine, and he said that had received the main alarm from the college, and wanted to know whether the fire was serious.

"I am just about as wise to what has happened as you are," said Mr. Railton. "This boy can tell us all we want to know, I think."

"H.O.F.!" I yelled, and I think the letters were very impressive. "It's in Study No. Double-one, Shell passage, sir! Guy Fawkes has been at work. Barrels of gun-cotton! Hundreds of dynamite. Hundreds of squibs! Yow-ow-ow! Leggomyear!"

Railton grasped me by the scruff of my neck, and hauled me away to the Shell passage. "If I was a man, I would have been a day at Study No. 11 the Housemaster hesitated—which proves he half believed my

story, so there! But the fire general took out his axe, and gave the door a sash. It promptly opened, but no fumes or smoke came out, so they both took a deep breath. In their march, Mr. Railton coughed. Then I gave a shout which made them jump.

"That's the jar up there, sir!" I said, pointing to the big jar up on the shelf. The fire sergeant had it down in the twinkling of an eye, and the two old fogies inspected it carefully, and I also glanced my eye at the label which was carefully pasted on the side of the bottle. Then the fireman saw it, and then old Railton digested it.

"It was a huge surprise, and was worded as follows:

"Sib. TOOTH POWDER, specially invented by Bernard Glyn, Shell Form. Extra strong, and guaranteed to make any teeth pure white. Patents pending.

"What a fearful morning we've all had, sir," I remarked, looking over the top of my glasses in narrow of a sympathetic glance from Mr. Railton.

"I expect you'll be taken to hospital to-morrow, your mental state impeded," was the Housemaster's abrupt remark.

"What about the other jar containing the dynamite?" I remarked; and, to prove my words, I brought over the huge, great jar which contained the dreaded explosive.

Railton picked up the jar, but, in his stupid manner, didn't look at the dynamite inside. Instead, he looked at the label on the side. It was a big blue label, and bore just one word. When he lowered it to the table again, I saw what the word was. "Dynamite, but something which I am quite sure is just as bad, and might have easily blown the whole school to pieces if I hadn't been brave enough to enter the room and find it out. The rotten stuff was called 'H.Y.Q.' Glancing at my watch, I saw the time was ten past one. Railton then took his piece of paper off his nose and pointed at me with them.

"Boy," he shouted, "go to your dormitory at once! You will come to my study to-morrow morning—ahem! I should say, later—at eight-thirty, and I will deal with you then!"

"Hundred pounds reward!" I murmured, as I walked away down the corridor towards the Fourth Form dormitory. I had been in bed for five minutes when the other fellows came back again. There was all sorts of grumbling and many questions asked, because nobody knew whether there had been any fire, it had been put out, or where it had taken place. Naturally, of course, he had taken place where I had been, but in doing so I should have had to pose as the hero of the hour, and, being modestly inclined, I kept quiet.

Sharp at eight-thirty next morning—my mistake, I mean the same morning—I tapped at Mr. Railton's door. I, of course, expected to see him at his cheque-book, but he was at his desk with a frightful thick case in his hand. I wondered who it was intended for, and was not long in discovering the unfortunate individual. It was me!

I expect you've all heard of that veil which I drew over my face, but I might as well describe. Well, that well-worn veil must be brought into use again here. I got it across the seat of my trousers, and I'm feeling a little more comfortable. I'll tell you, I'm sure, in saying that even though I saved the school, I caught it badly in the neck. That is all I have to say.—PERCY WYATT, Fourth Form, Ag. 15.

(You unsophisticated, chuckle-headed chabacoon! Your dense, lunatic actions all but signed the death-warrant for the "St. Jim's News." There is no need for any further explanation required as to what sort of individual you are. In fact, I am more than amazed that you have got the pluck to admit doing such howling actions as you have recorded in this weird and wonderful "article.")

HARRY NOBLE, our super-brilliant Soccer representative, has unfortunately been entirely squashed out of the programme this week, as the result of that donkey-brained Wyatt taking up six times more room than he had allowed him. Next time Harry must always be given together with Dick Julian, and all the other favourites it is possible to find accommodation for.—TOM MERRY.

THE GEM-LIBRARY.—No. 719.

THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE

Read this magnificent story dealing with the adventures of three chums in a strange country.

By REID WHITLEY.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Hobby Tarrant and Tony Mathers, with Billy Kettle, a trusted negro servant, are on an expedition in the Andes. A volcanic eruption, causing a tremendous tidal wave, carries their canoe into the Valley of Surprise. The party explores the valley, and meet many weird and wonderful animals, and experience many adventurous times. Reaching a village, they are confronted by a race of strange, primitive men, who show great hospitality and make friends. Travelling on again, they see, moving along a branch above, a huge jaguar, drawing itself together to spring upon them.

A Ride with Death.

HERE are moments that seem to last for years. That moment after the three caught sight of the monstrous jaguar gathering his mighty muscles for the spring that must certainly land him among them, was one such. For a space that seemed to stretch to half a lifetime, but which in reality barely lasted a second, they sat as if petrified.

Then Tony's rifle leapt to his shoulder, and a streak of flame spurted from the muzzle. The echo of the report was drowned in a frightful roar as the great beast launched itself into the air. Again the rifle flamed and crashed, while Billy's big pistol boomed—and the jaguar landed on the outflung branch that served as a doorstep to the camp.

Brung-ung! Hobby had brought his shotgun into action. At close range the charges of shot had no room to spread, but travelled almost like a bullet, to smash against the brute's forehead. Its hind paws slipped from their hold. Clawing frantically to regain its position, it hung suspended over the gulf, while its bellows of pain and wrath roared answering roars from far and near.

Then Billy leapt forward, swinging his hatchet, and brought it down with all the strength of his lough sinews upon the creature's upturning head. There was a crash as if he had struck a hollow log, a last, shattering snarl that broke off suddenly, and, loosing its hold, the jaguar dropped like a plummet into the darkness below.

They heard the thud. Then there came a scurry, a flurry of leaves, a long chorus of dismal laughter, and a dim of whirling growls. The hyenas were out in force that night, and luck had sent them a meal.

Billy laughed triumphantly.

"Dem laughs best dat laughs last!" he cried. "Dem loo hyenas and me! we both laughs at you, Mislah Jagger!"

"I wish we could have had the skin," mourned Hobby. "It would have been a beauty. It would have made a fine rug to sleep in."

"Lie down again and thank your stars you have your own skin to sleep in!" said Tony. "You sleep, too, Billy. I'll take the next turn. Perhaps that beauty's mate may turn up."

But though he kept watch till well on in the small hours, nothing more formidable than an odd mosquito appeared to him. He then aroused Hobby, and slept peacefully for the remainder of the darkness.

That day passed quietly. They caught a number of fish, without being visited by any monster from the deep water, and spent the remainder of the day in strengthening their nest. Billy contrived a hiding-place for the ammunition in a niche of the fork under the rude flooring.

"Dere!" he grunted, with much satisfaction when it was finished. "If dem Mangas was to get here while we was away, dey wouldn't find much. Dem ain't got brains enough to think o' looking dere, I reckon."

"Oh, they've had their lesson! I don't think they'll meddle with us again in a hurry," said Hobby. "But at least we'll be more comfortable now. What shall we do tomorrow, Tony?"

"Go to visit the Arki. I want to get the chief for a guide. Then we'll try to explore the cliffs a bit, and have a look at the place where we came down. Then, perhaps, we could think of some way of getting up!"

Hobby agreed, with a sigh, that they had better think that. Nothing happened to disturb them that night, and very early next morning they set off for the Arki village.

The villagers were barely awake, but the few who were already made them welcome when they were seen. The bridge was lowered, they passed across, and Lalo appeared.

"Tell him what we want, Billy, before that medicine-man comes," said Tony. "Ask him to come with us to-day."

But though Billy began the request, he was not destined to finish it that day. Even as the opening words came from his lips there was a cry from the seamy of duty—a cry which sent Lalo scurrying for his bow.

Something was moving beneath the village, swinging swiftly along from bough to bough, head downward. It tossed aside the liana as that hung in its path, or simply tore its way through the dangling masses of greenery. Hobby almost yelped as he caught sight of the thing.

"It's a sloth—a giant sloth!" he cried. "They've been extinct everywhere else for ages. If we could only get its skin!"

"We must save cartridges," said Tony sharply, grabbing Hobby's arm as he raised his gun. "Lalo is going to shoot!"

The chief's bow twanged, a long arrow, headed with a sharp flint, drove deep into the sloth's flank. It turned and bit savagely at the shaft. Another followed, and another. Then a fourth struck home, and this time the wound was mortal.

The sloth shuddered, arched its body convulsively, and fell. But not to the ground. Some twenty feet or so above the earth there hung a sort of natural hammock of creepers, swinging from the boughs far aloft, and into this the creature dropped, and hung swaying.

"Hurray! Now I can have a look at it!" yelled Hobby. And, without waiting to consider that the animal could easily be hauled up to the staging, grabbed a liana, and began to descend.

"Come back, you see!" called Tony. "But Hobby paid no heed.

At last he had something which he could examine to his heart's content—something which no man of science had ever set eyes on in the flesh before, and he apparently grudged every moment lost before he laid hands on the thing.

"I'm all right!" he replied indistinctly, and continued his descent.

"We must go after him! If there is anything on the ground it may reach him," said Tony, and with his rifle slung at his back, followed his exorbitant friend.

"Ough! I got to go, too!" grumbled Billy, and followed auit. While Lalo, quite at a loss to know why they were in such a hurry, turned away to roust out men for the job of hauling up the kill.

As he did so, a man who had been lurking underneath the main platform moved nimbly along a rope bridge till he was within reach of the natural cables which supported the dangling sloth and the three strangers.



The Woman with the Tiger Heart

Thrilling New Story by SESSUE HAYAKAWA

This remarkably powerful story has been specially written for "Kinema Comic" by the famous Japanese Screen Actor, and should not be missed on any account. Start reading **TODAY**. It is only one of the many good things appearing in this week's

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ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2:

(Continued on page 18.)

:: EDITORIAL ::

My Dear Chums,—

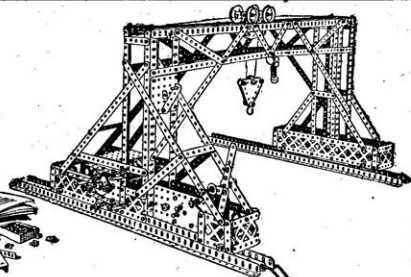
I am always getting requests for more about Mr. Ratcliff. Not that Ratty is popular, nothing of the kind; but where he is, there is fun—much fun—as in the case of the fine yarn a few weeks back about Tom Merry's victory. Mr. Ratcliff figures largely in our ripping new

series of "harring-out" stories, which start in our next issue. Don't miss them! Most interesting questions connected with the Fourth and the Shell continue to pile in on me, and I hope to work these off all in good time in the columns of the "Gem." It is impossible to give detailed answers to all the friendly queries; of course, as, for instance, "What is the exact cost of D'Arcy's silk hats per annum?" The figure must be considerable, since Gussy never wears anything but the glossiest variety of hat, and in the course of his adventures his

"toppers" certainly suffer horribly. Still, I shall do my best. Now a word about Christmas Numbers. The "Gem" Special Number will be a record! It will contain all the usual features, and heaps more attractions besides, so give your order early. The "Boys' Herald" has also a splendid extra for Christmas coming along. By the way, are you going to win one of the huge money prizes offered in this week's splendid number of the "Boys' Herald"? Get a copy at once!

YOUR EDITOR.

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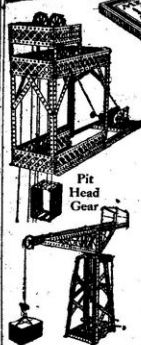
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THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE.

(Continued from page 16.)

It was Maxia, the medicine-man. His face was distorted with rage. Since the coming of the new gods he had felt himself slighted. The people said openly that the black stranger was cleverer than the medicine-man, that the one with the strange, round eyes—that was Hobby—could see as far as two men, while the third had proved that he was able to throw lightning. They had hinted that till Maxia could do at least as well he had better slink softly!

Therefore, Maxia hated the three with an abiding hatred. Now he saw a possibility of getting rid of them altogether. He drew his flint knife from its sheath, and waited expectantly.

That dreadfully-smelling midden often attracted beasts which were not very particular which they ate, and others which came to gobble up the scavengers. One of these latter, a nightmarish thing covered with bony plates and spikes, often lurked in a thicket hard by where the sloth hung. More than once it had served the unscrupulous medicine-man as executioner.

If only it happened to be there on this morning, what a jolly ending for the three strangers who had upset Maxia's apple-cart! He hung, staring, while Hobby neared the sloth, and the two others neared Hobby.

Something moved in the thicket. Maxia's evil eyes glinted. Hobby had reached the sloth. Billy Kettle and Tony slid down the last few feet of cable, and stood beside him, balanced on the swaying network of tendrils in which the sloth had been caught.

Then Maxia smote with a will.

Thrum-um-um! His knife of flint, sawed, but effective enough, hacked through one tangle line, through a second, a third; and as he began upon the fourth, out of the thicket burst something which at any other time and place would have rejoiced the heart of Hobby.

It was a great reptile, covered all over with scales and plates of horn. A snake head swung on a short neck. It trailed a spiked tail which switched furiously among the brushwood, a double row of spikes adorned its rounded back. With its jaws half-open in anticipation, it rushed forward eagerly, as though the three thrumming strokes were a call to dinner.

As the first of the lianas was cut through and fell snaking down upon the three, Tony

looked up. He caught one glimpse of the medicine-man's hateful, triumphant face, guessed what was happening, and, without leaving his life for a split second, the second and third lines which supported them had not given way an instant later.

One end of the network sagged, throwing the three together as they grabbed at the last line; the monster heaved a gasp, and fell short, and as he alighted the line gave way, precipitating the trail of creepers, the dead sloth, and Hobby, Tony, and Billy upon the creature's horned back.

Luckily for them, the fall was but a short one, and the dead sloth, together with the mass of creepers, served to break its force. By great good fortune they did not drop upon the double row of horny spikes, but between them, and there clung white from all aloft. Lalo, who had seen the catastrophe, though he could not see its cause, howled in dismay.

Never in all its long life had that formidable beast been so assailed. For a few seconds it stood perfectly still, while the three gathered their scattered wits. Then its head lashed back in a vain endeavour to reach them, while its tail whirled up, thrashing the air a foot or two short of Hobby, who was the farthest aft.

And with this failure to dislodge its burden the beast seemed to lose its head altogether. It reared up on its hind legs, gave out a piercing scream, and set off at full gallop.

"Hang on for your lives!" yelled Tony. "Don't shoot, Billy! It's no use. Hang on, and trust to luck!"

Indeed, for the next minute they could do nothing else. The creature plunged through the forest, smashing down the undergrowth, and was presently careering along an open stretch close by the lake shore, followed by a number of hyenas, who, scenting trouble from afar, had raced from their lairs.

The three were in a desperate fix. Every strike of the strange steed was carrying them farther from the comparative safety of the tall timber, towards a barren region of rocks and ravines which they glimpsed far ahead. Most likely they had it some cavern beneath the beetling cliffs, and, once arrived in its home, would easily scrape off its passengers against the overhanging crags.

Yet they dared not try to alight. The brute snared continually back and forth. On the ground they would be seen, overtaken in an instant, and trampled underfoot—or beaten to pulp by a sweep of the terrible tail. Even should they chance to escape this fate they would still have to reckon with the hyena pack, which still kept pace with them.

It grew momentarily. These were no cowardly beasts, either, but big, very formidable brutes, made the more daring by numbers. Even with their firearms, the three could not hope to withstand them.

"Us is sure done for dis time!" wailed Billy, and drew his hatchet from the loop of his belt, where he always carried it. "I shall I start digging in Marsa Tony! I reckon I could sure get at him backbone wid dis little picker."

"Wait!" replied Tony. "We us get a chance of jumping off and climbing some rock where those hyenas can't get at us. Hang on!"

On they tore, their huge mouth taking every obstacle in his stride. Once it crossed a patch of boggy ground where a lurking alligator made a rush at the pursuing hyenas and

sent them scampering to higher ground. But they quickly overlooked their quarry, and galloped in a snarling, howling pack on either flank, just out of reach of the big beast's tail.

Now the ground began to rise. They were leaving the lake and the thickets that grew near it behind. The long, barren slope lay before them, covered with boulders that had fallen from the cliffs and rolled far. Deep clefts ran across it. Their mount leapt and swayed, and the dead sloth and the hyenas. The pack began to thin, only the strongest animals keeping up the chase.

At this moment Hobby, who had been lying half buried among trails of creeper, hanging on with both hands, raised his head.

"I know!" he shouted. "I've been puzzling about this brute, but I know what he is now. He's a stegosaurus. Most interesting."

"You laughed. The thought of an friend's pleasure at identifying the brute that was most likely carrying them to their death was too absurd."

"That's splendid!" he chuckled. "It'll be a great consolation when he rubs us off against a rock and starts pounding us to pulp!"

All these here beastless make me sore," growled Billy. "I don't care if dey is stegosaur or brown toes-sore, dey's all bad. Oh, golly, look dere! De ground's on fire! Ow!"

Wonderful to tell, it was true. Before they had lay another chasm, wider than any they had yet seen, and a wall of fire, a wall of flames! Most likely some store of petroleum lay far underground, and the gas from this, rising through the split in the rocks, had been fired by lightning.

It burned with a pale blue flame, shot here and there with orange, and a thin cloud of smoke drifted slowly from it up the face of the cliffs beyond, raising his head, a wall that should have daunted any animal, but though the hyenas came to a whimpering halt, the stegosaurus made straight on.

With a crash, it was quite familiar with the flaring barrier. It did not hesitate, but dashed forward.

Almost within touching distance of the outer fringe of leaping, hissing tongues of flame it halted, drew its big hind legs under it, and leaped.

For one dreadful instant the three adventurers were in the very heart of a burning, fiery furnace. Flames lapped and surged about them as they leaped, and the heat was so great that through their clothes, through their flesh, deep into their very vitals. For a fraction of a second it seemed as though they would dissolve into flaming gases—and in the next moment they were through.

Tony opened his eyes. Yes, he and his comrades were still alive! They were scorched, their clothes were smoking, Billy's hair and beard were fringed into an ash mat, and the creepers, that still trailed about Steggy's flanks steamed. But the three were still in good condition, even though Tony's sleeve dropped off as he raised an arm to point.

Before them rose the cliff, not a quarter of a mile away. At its base were several dark patches, the mouths of caves or clefts, which the monster had just dashed into. A wall of rock which would easily serve Steggy for back-scratchers.

"Chop away, Billy!" cried Tony. "Quick! If he gets us alongside one of those rocks, it's good-night. He'd have us down in a jiffy!"

Crunch! Billy's hatchet rose and fell, biting deep between two plates which protected the monster's joints. Steggy faltered, flung up his tail in a futile effort to reach the aggressor, then hurried forward at redoubled speed.

Crunch, crunch, crunch! Billy struck furiously, putting every ounce of his great strength into each blow. The keen steel bit deep, while the frenzied creature leapt frantically to avoid a great mass of projections of which would rid him of his tormentors—if he could reach it before the hatchet cut through the vital nerve cords of his back.

Billy glanced ahead. One leap more and they would all three be crushed between horny back and unyielding rock. With a loud yell he bore the hatchet and struck one last terrible blow.

(To be continued next week.)



For one dreadful instant the three adventurers were in the very heart of a burning, fiery furnace. Flames lapped and surged about them. For a fraction of a second it seemed as though they would dissolve into flaming gases—and in the next moment they were through.



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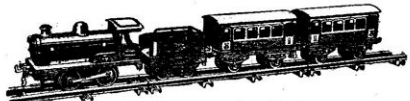
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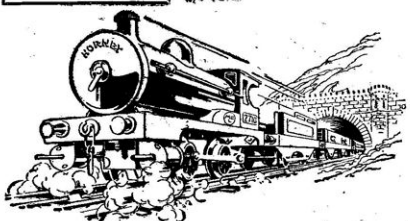
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