

"PONGO PLAYS UP!" This week's grand School Story—
Inside!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

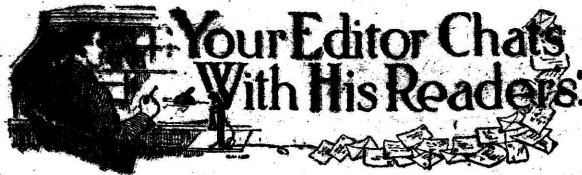
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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

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1926.



THE SECRET OF THE OAK TREE!

An amazing discovery by Tom Merry & Co. during their stay at Eastwood House. (See the splendid school tale inside.)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

"BAT" BARSTOW!

YOU'VE got his name, chums. Gee, you'll be pleased to meet him, take my word for it. Hefty of shoulder, beefy of fist, and with a heart of gold, Bat Barstow is a fellow in a thousand. You'll find him appearing in the GEM next week. His weekly adventures will hold you enthralled. Look out for the title of No. 1—"Bat Barstow's Night Out!"—and be prepared for something extra special in the way of a complete adventure yarn.

WHEN IS A DOOR NOT A DOOR?

That's the conundrum a Scottish reader sent me. Of course, everyone knows the answer. But it's not really the answer I'm concerned about. Mention of the word door suggests a Chat par. There are some people who never shut a door when they go in or out. Sheer thoughtlessness, as a rule, but very noticeable, and very objectionable to the person whose door is left open. Then there's the fellow who never knocks at a door before entering a room. Often that little courtesy is thoughtlessly omitted. Now we come to the "slammer." Doubtless you have met the chap who suddenly goes off into a huff and walks out of the room slamming the door behind him in a manner that suggests he wants to take it off its hinges. This fellow is the worst offender. To slam a door in the circumstances I have enumerated shows a very weak and petty nature. Spitefulness is indicated, too, and a host of other bad traits. Ware, then, chums, and don't slam the door when father or mother says something pretty straight to you that you don't like.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL!"

Just a mention here that there are still a few copies of the H.A. available. If your newsgiant hasn't got one in stock ask him to ORDER you a copy. For six shillings the world-famous Holiday Annual presents the finest bargain on the market. Remember, boys, it's the only Annual containing long complete stories of your old favourites, Tom Merry & Co., Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, and Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood. 'Nuff said!

RABBITS!

No, no, it's not the first day of the month! A reader from Horley, in Surrey, raises a very interesting point on the subject of feeding rabbits. Should he give his rabbits water? he asks. Certainly! A supply of water should always be kept in the hutch. But the cabbage, lettuce leaves, etc., that you give a rabbit should be kept dry, otherwise your rabbit will suffer from diarrhoea. A good "feed" for them is fresh bran, and it should be given once a day.

FOR NEXT WEDNESDAY!

"THE ST. JIM'S TREASURE QUEST!"

That's the title of next week's GEM story, and it's a peach of a yarn, too. As the title suggests, Tom Merry & Co. go treasure hunting. What they find I'm leaving to Martin Clifford to relate. Look out for this yarn, chums.

SPECIAL "SANNY" SUPPLEMENT!

You all know that "sanny" is a contraction of sanatorium, and it is to this "slacker's retreat," as it is often termed, that Tom Merry & Co. take us in their next issue of the "St. Jim's News." It's full of sparkling humour, and you'll enjoy every line of it.

"BAT BARSTOW'S NIGHT OUT!"

By Cecil Fanshaw.

As mentioned above, the first of these ripping, complete adventure stories, featuring Bat Barstow, the modern Hercules, will appear in our next issue. Don't on any account miss it.

HARRY MANNERS.

Harry Manners, the "camera fiend" of the Shell, figures in our next poem by the St. Jim's Rhymester. Cheerio, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

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You Know A Good Joke? Let's Hear it, Chum.

Delicious Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes
Awarded for Interesting Pars.

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

SURREY SCORES!

NO LEG TO STAND ON!

Teacher (to pupil): "Now, Tommy, can you tell me why people refer to the 'Wisdom of the Serpent'?" Tommy (after a little hesitation): "Please, miss, 'cos yer can't pull a snake's leg!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to Stanley Cowland, 24, Shrewsbury Road, Redhill, Surrey.

FULLY EXPANDED!

"I say, Harry," said a man to his mate, "what's a cosmopolitan?" "Well," said the friend, "suppose there was a Russian Jew living in England with an Italian wife, smoking Egyptian cigarettes near a French window in a room with a Turkish carpet on the floor. If this n' drank American ice-cream sodas while listening to a German band playing 'Come Back to Erin' after a supper o Swiss cheese made up as a Welsh rarebit, then you might be safe in saying he was a cosmopolitan!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Alexander Forrester, 5,779, Eighth Avenue, Rosemount, Montreal, Canada.

A GOOD SHOT!

A certain old lady, whilst visiting the patients in a hospital, approached a bandaged sufferer who was sitting up in bed. After a little preliminary talk, she said to him very sympathetically: "I suppose your wife must miss you a good deal?" "No, mum," came the quick reply. "She's got a wonderful aim for a woman!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Robert Moon, 25, Kingston Street, Hulme, Manchester.

THAT DID IT!

City Man: "What fine air you have in the country—so much fresher than in London." Farmer: "Jes' so; and what licks me is why all them big cities ain't built in the country!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Alleyn T. Riches, The Mill House, near Herne Bay, Kent.

ROUGH ON NEDDY!

An Irishman, wishing to take his donkey a journey by train, went to the stationmaster and asked him where he should put the animal. "At the back of the train," he was told. Eventually the Irishman himself got in with the guard. "And how fast might we be goin' now?" he asked, after about an hour's travelling. "About sixty miles an hour," answered the guard. "Begorra," exclaimed the man from the Emerald Isle, "my neddny must be steppin' it out!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to George Dyos, 23, Edgell Road, Staines, Middlesex.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.

No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY! This might be truly said of Wally D'Arcy's mongrel, for by way of a change from tearing up carpets, and a "fellow's twousahs," Pongo does something really useful!

PONGO PLAYS UP!



CHAPTER 1. Sat Upon!

WALLY—"Bow-wow!"
"Weally, Wally, you young wascal—"
"Don't you begin, Gus!" implored D'Arcy minor.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, breathed hard and deep.

Half a dozen other St. Jim's juniors, who were gathered round the big log-fire in the old oak hall at Eastwood House, grinned.

Wally of the Third had just come in, and he was warming his hands at the glowing, crackling logs in the wide hearth. It was a cold, windy day, and snow still lay among the trees in the park and in the hedges along the lanes. Gussy's guests at Eastwood House had been making themselves comfortable around the log fire for a chat before tea—the talk running on the late robbery at Lord Eastwood's residence. Tom Merry & Co. were taking their ease in a half-circle of comfortable armchairs; Arthur Augustus was standing in a graceful attitude before the fire with his hands in the pockets of his elegant trousers.

"You talk too much, old bean!" said the cheerful Wally, as he warmed his hands. "Give us a rest, and give these chaps a rest! The Head's given us a holiday to celebrate the pater's birthday—why can't you do the same?"

"I wegard you as a cheeky young wascal, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus sternly. "It is only my bwothahly wegard for you that pvevents me fwom givin' you a feahful thwashin'!"

Wally of the Third chuckled.
"Keep up that brotherly regard, old bean!" he said. "It will save you from asking for a licking."

"Bai Jove!"

There was a chuckle from some of the St. Jim's juniors. Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his eye and looked round the circle of smiling faces. It was growing deeply dusk in the old hall, illumined only by the firelight and a glimmer of a pale sunset at the deep old windows. But it was light enough for Arthur Augustus to catch a smile on every face round the fire.

"Weally, you fellows, my young bwothah's impertinence is not a laughin' mattah!" he said. "It weally isn't, you know!"

"Our mistake," murmured Tom Merry.
"I appeal to you fellows," went on Arthur Augustus. "You have all seen that w'etched mongwel Pongo, which Wally calls a dog—"

A New Long Complete
Story of Tom Merry & Co.,
dealing with their adventures
whilst on holiday
at Eastwood House.

By
Martin Clifford.

"Jolly good dog, too!" said D'Arcy minor warmly. "You don't often see a dog like Pongo."

"I have nevah seen one like him, Wally—if it is a dog at all," said Arthur Augustus. "I am vevy fond of animals, but that howwid bwute is worse than Hewwies' bulldog at St. Jim's. He has no respect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs. The pater has given stwict ordahs that he is not to be allowed in the house. But Wilkinson tells me that

he has sneaked in again."

Wally chuckled again.
"Some dog, Pongo!" he said. "I left him chained up in the stables since I found him after he was lost. But he has a way of slipping his collar; he's cute, Pongo is."

"It's only a few days, Wally, since he got into my woom and wovvied my silk hat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Is that a laughin' mattah, you young wapsallion?"
D'Arcy minor seemed to think that it was.

"I insist, Wally, upon that bwute bein' kept out of the house!" said Arthur Augustus hotly. "If I find him in my quartahs again I shall kick him! I shall weally kick him vevy hard!"

"Look out for his teeth if you do!" said Wally cheerfully. "He will have a lump out of your calf!"

"What do you fellows think?" demanded Arthur Augustus, appealing to his guests. "Is a fellow bound to win the wisk of havin' his silk hats chewed up by a howwid mongwel?"

"Never!" said Blake solemnly.
"Well, hardly ever!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Horrible!" said Manners.
"Perish the thought!" concurred Digby.
"Hear, hear!" said Herries.

This general agreement ought really to have pleased and satisfied Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But perhaps he suspected that his friends were pulling his nose.

"Weally, you fellows—" he said.
"Oh, ring off, old man!" urged Wally at the Third. "Give us a rest! If Pongo's got loose again I'll find him and take him home. Where is he?"

"I weally do not know where he is, Wally; büt, accordin' to the butlah he sneaked into the house, and is some whah about."

"Chewing up another of your hats, perhaps," suggested Lowther.

"Bai Jove!"
"Look here, Gussy, you keep your silly silk hats locked up!" protested D'Arcy minor. "They won't do Pongo any good!"

"What?" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Weally, you fellows, there is nothin' to laugh at. I am gweatly afwaid that I shall be dwiven to givin' Wally a feahful thwashin'! He is askin' for it evvey day!"

Arthur Augustus moved away from the fire, having thoroughly warmed his noble person, towards a vacant armchair.

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At all events, he supposed the armchair to be vacant, as no one was sitting in it.

In the deep dusk he naturally did not observe a diminutive shaggy figure curled up in the depths of the chair, and he did not catch the gleam of two bright little eyes that were blinking at the fire. The elusive Pongo was nearer at hand than he dreamed.

"Now, Wally, I insist upon your lookin' for that howwid dog at once and takin' him back to the stables," he said. "If he will not keep on the chain, I will, if you like, tip Joyce, the keepah, five shillin's to shoot him. Perhaps that would be the best way."

"Why, your frabjous ass!" said D'Arcy minor, in breathless indignation. "You—you frumptious chump—"

"Weally, Wally—"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not finish that remark. He was sitting down in the deep armchair as he spoke.

He remained in a sitting posture for about the millionth part of a second.

Then there was a fearful yell, which almost drowned the growl of a dog, and Arthur Augustus leaped up as if he had been electrified.

"Yawwooooh!"
"What the thump—" exclaimed Tom Merry, jumping up. "What—"

"Gussy—"
"What—"
"Yawwooop! Dwagginoff! Wescue!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

There was a howl from Wally.
"My only Aunt Jane! He's found Pongo!"
"Oh, my hat!"

"Or Pongo's found him!" chortled Blake.
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had leaped clear of the floor under the influence of the sudden shock. He had sat on Pongo, and Pongo was not a dog to be sat upon with impunity.

As Arthur Augustus leaped Pongo went with him, clinging to Arthur Augustus with a set of teeth that had closed like a vice. Fortunately, they had not closed on Arthur Augustus himself; Pongo was a wise dog, and knew just how far he might go. But the grip of Pongo's teeth was like a vice on D'Arcy's elegant "bags," and as D'Arcy flew from the chair Pongo flew with him.

"Bai Jove! Help! Dwag him off!" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Dwag that feahful beast off! Oh cwikey!"

"Rescue!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Here, hand me the poker, Blake—"

"Keep that poker away!" roared D'Arcy minor. "Don't you touch Pongo with a poker! I'll call him off! Pongo! Pongo! Pongo!"

Pongo did not heed.
Arthur Augustus writhed and twisted and turned, to shake off the little beast, but the little beast refused to be shaken off; neither did he heed the voice of his master.

He held on.
"Sit down, Gussy!" shouted Blake. "Sit down, old chap, and squash him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Yawwooh! Help, you duffahs! Help!"

Tom Merry rushed in and caught Pongo by the collar. He wrenched hard, and Pongo growled ferociously. Another wrench, and there was a tearing sound, and Pongo came away from Arthur Augustus—with his mouth full. The swell of St. Jim's staggered away.

"All serene, old chap, you're not bitten, you know," said Tom cheerily. "Pongo wouldn't really bite anybody."

"My twousahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.
"You can have the patch sewn in—"

"What?"
Arthur Augustus spun round and stared at Pongo. Tom Merry dropped the dog, but Pongo did not drop his prize. The expression on Arthur Augustus' face was extraordinary.

"Bai Jove! My—my—my twousahs! I am goin' to bwain that feahful beast!"

The swell of St. Jim's made a frantic jump for the poker, and another jump for Pongo.

But Pongo did not wait.
He vanished across the polished floor at top speed, still with a fragment of what a tailor would have called elegant and fashionable trousering, held in his jaws. D'Arcy rushed after him. The elusive Pongo dodged round an armoured figure in the hall, and Arthur Augustus delivered a swipe with the poker, which undoubtedly would have made Pongo sorry for himself if he had caught it. But it was the figure in armour that caught it, and there was a terrific crash and clang.

Crash!
"Oh! Bai Jove!"

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The armour came to the oak floor with a concussion that rang through Eastwood House, extensive as that building was.

Wilkinson, the butler, appeared as if by magic.
"Master Arthur, what—what—"

The Eastwood House butler gazed at D'Arcy in amazement. James, the footman, followed him in, equally astonished and alarmed. It was indeed a rather startling sight—Arthur Augustus, with a crimson face, brandishing the poker, and the armour of dead-and-gone Sir Fulke D'Arcy stretched on the floor. Pongo had vanished, and Wally was vanishing in chase of him.

"Master D'Arcy—" stuttered Wilkinson.
"Sir! Oh, sir!" gasped James.

D'Arcy dropped the poker, his noble countenance glowing redder than the embers in the hearth.

"That—that wotten dog, Wilkinson!" he gasped. "He has bitten me—at least, he has bitten my twousahs—"

Wilkinson was aware of that. Even in the dusky firelight, it was patent to all eyes that a section of D'Arcy's elegant trousers was gone.

Wilkinson coughed.
"Yes, sir! But, sir—"

"It is outrageous, it is howwid! I weally considah—"

"Yes, sir, but, sir—hadn't you better—hem—retire to your room, sir, and—change your—your garments, sir!" gasped the butler. "The—the ladies may come in, sir—"

"Oh cwumbs!"
Arthur Augustus comprehended, and forgot all about Pongo. He raced for the staircase and disappeared. A howl of laughter from the St. Jim's juniors followed him as he fled; and even upon the well-trained visages of Wilkinson and James there dawned something resembling a grin.

CHAPTER 2.

The Unknown!

"ROT!" said Reggie Manners.
"Fed-up, old chap!" said Levison minor.

"Look here—" began Wally of the Third hotly.
"Give it a miss!" said Reggie Manners. "It's possible to have too much of Pongo."

"Much too much!" agreed Frank Levison.
"If he's lost again," resumed Reggie. "Let him rip! The more that dog's lost the better I like him."

"It's thick, you know, Wally!" urged Frank. "We've had Pongo, Pongo, Pongo, all the time! Give us a rest from Pongo. We came home with you to help you to celebrate your pater's birthday—not to worry about Pongo. He's been lost once and found, and now he's lost again—"

"Let him keep lost!" said Manner minor.
"Let him!" assented Frank.

In the Third Form at St. Jim's the fags were accustomed to plain English. Manners minor and Levison minor were Wally's guests at Eastwood House. But they were fed-up with Pongo; and they said so with the frankness that was habitual in the St. Jim's Third.

There was, they agreed, too much Pongo.
The first time that redoubtable quadruped had been lost they had sympathised, and they had helped in the search for him.

But once was enough! Now that he was lost again they considered that it was time for him to be left in a lost state.

"It was all that ass Gussy's fault!" growled Wally. "He sat on the poor old chap, you know. Pongo didn't like it."

"Gussy couldn't have really liked it!" grinned Reggie.
"Bother Gussy! Pongo scudded out of the house, and I can guess where he's gone—where we found him last time," said Wally. "He has a den in the hollow oak in the deer-park."

"Let him stop there."
"It may snow again to-night," argued Wally. "It's jolly cold out. We've plenty of time to cut across there before dinner."

"Rats!"
"If you want me to punch your head, Manners minor, you've only to say rats again!" roared Wally.

"Rats!" said Reggie Manners, at once.
D'Arcy minor pushed back his cuffs.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Frank Levison, laughing. "Don't you two duffers begin to scrap. You didn't ask Reggie home to scrap with him, did you, Wally?"

Wally paused.
"I'll jolly well punch you as soon as we get back to St. Jim's, young Manners," he said.

"Make your will first, young D'Arcy!" retorted Manners minor.

Wally of the Third breathed hard.
"Well, you chaps stick indoors, and frowst over the fire, if

you like," he said. "I'm going out to fetch in poor old Pongo."

And Wally of the Third went for his overcoat. He tramped away from the lighted house, in the winter dusk, with a wrathful brow. But he was not a dozen yards from the house when there was a patter of footsteps behind him, and he turned his head to see his two comrades coming on at a run.

"We're coming, old bean," said Reggie amicably. "Keep your wool on!"

"Can't let you butt into lonely deer-parks all on your own," said Frank Levison.

"You're a young ass; but we'll come."

"Come on, then, and not so much jaw," said Wally.

The three fags of St. Jim's tramped on together.

A keen wind blew among the leafless trees of Eastwood Park, and the trio pulled up their coat-collars, and bent their heads to it. The whole country side was fast in the grip of winter. Snow lay in drifts round the old trunks, and the grass glittered with frost.

In the old deer-park, the loneliest quarter of the extensive Eastwood domain, the darkness was thick. Wally was glad enough of the company of his chums as he tramped under the ancient trees. There was no danger to be apprehended in the solitary place—so far as he knew, at all events—but it was dark, lonely, eerie after nightfall. The wind whailed among the old branches with a melancholy voice. Nothing would have induced the fags to admit that they felt nervous in the slightest degree; but they cast quick and uneasy glances round them as they tramped under the wind-shaken trees, a mile or more from any human habitation.

"I say, it's beastly dark here!" growled Manners minor, as he bumped into a trunk. "Did you bring a lantern or anything, Wally?"

"Did you?"

"No, ass!"

"Well, I didn't either, fathead!"

"How the thump are we going to find Pongo in the dark?" demanded Levison minor, picking himself up after a stumble over a trailing root.

"He will come when I call him," answered Wally. "I'm pretty certain he's in his old den."

"Blessed if I think we shall get there in this dashed darkness!" grunted Reggie Manners.

"I know the way, ass, with my eyes shut."

"I don't believe you know it with your eyes open, fathead!"

"Look here, young Manners—"

"Look here, young D'Arcy—"

"Oh, can it!" interrupted Frank. "You men are always ragging! Let's get it over and get back to the house. It's jolly cold."

"If you're afraid of the cold, Levison minor, why didn't you wrap yourself up in a blanket, like a Red Indian?" asked Wally sarcastically.

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I've fallen over twice!" growled Reggie.

"Clumsy!"

"Look here, Wally—"

"Bump!"

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!"

"Who's clumsy now?" chuckled Reggie, peering at the sprawling figure of D'Arcy minor in the gloom.

"I caught my foot in a blinking root!" hissed Wally.

"Clumsy!"

Wally of the Third breathed hard as he picked himself up. He had depended on his knowledge of the ways in the deer-park, in which he had played and roamed times without number since childhood. But as a matter of fact, the darkness was baffling even to a fellow who knew every turn and winding of the wood. Still, he was quite confident of finding his way to the towering old oak in the heart of the thickly-wooded domain—at the expense of a few falls and stumbles en route.

"I say, what's that?" whispered Reggie suddenly.

"What's what, fathead?"

"I heard something—"

"Nerves, you ass! Come on!"

"You cheeky young dummy!" hissed Manners minor, deeply incensed by the imputation of "nerves." "I tell you I heard something—like somebody squeezing in the bushes." "Rot!"



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy delivered a swipe with the poker, which undoubtedly would have made Pongo sorry for himself if he had caught it. But it was the figure in armour that caught it. Crash! "Oh, bai Jove!" The armour came to the floor with a resounding concussion. (See Chapter 1.)

"I say, I can hear it!" muttered Levison minor. "Shut up a minute, Wally, and listen!"

"Oh, bosh!" said Wally impatiently.

"Listen, you ass!"

Wally gave a grunt, but he listened. And then he started, for the sound of crackling bushes was quite plainly to be heard. Someone was pushing a way through the thick underwood at a little distance from the fags.

The three schoolboys felt their hearts beat faster. There was someone in the lonely deer-park as well as themselves. They stopped, and drew closer together.

"I—I say, it—was about here that that burglar chap was seen, you know," murmured Manners minor.

"That was days ago, ass, and he was bolting. He's a hundred miles away before this, with the stuff he stole from the house!" growled Wally. "Do you think he's come back to be collared?"

"He's never been arrested," said Reggie.

"Well, he wouldn't come back here."

"Of—of course he wouldn't!" muttered Frank Levison.

The three fags listened with painful intentness.

It was several days since the burglary at Eastwood House, an episode which had marred the birthday celebrations for which the St. Jim's juniors were gathered there.

The rascal, who was known to the police as the "Daudy," had escaped with a bag stacked with the famous gold-plate of Eastwood House, and had fled by way of the deer-park.

Tom Merry had been the last to see him, as he vanished over the high wall that separated the deer-park from the Easthorpe road.

That the cracksman had returned to the scene of his crime was extremely improbable; but the fags, as they stood listening to the rustling in the wood, could not help feeling uneasy. In the lighted house they would have smiled at the idea; in the lonely, shadowy deer-park the bare thought of coming upon a dangerous criminal was unnerving. Somebody was in the shadow of the old trees, stealing along cautiously, and it was not likely to be one of the keepers after dark and without a light or a dog.

Wally set his teeth.

"It's some dashed trespasser," he muttered. "Somebody who's got no right here, anyhow. We'll rush him and see who it is."

"I—I say—" faltered Reggie.

"Come on!"

Wally ran forward in the direction of the rustling sound.

He plunged recklessly through a mass of underwood, heavy with snow.

His comrades followed him.

The three fags crashed through the underwood, through which the unseen man had forced a way; and they heard a muffled exclamation as they did so. Farther on there was an open glade, into which the starlight fell. For a moment, on the open ground, they caught a glimpse of a running figure—a man in a thick overcoat. His back was towards them, and all they saw was his coat and cap. In a second or two he had vanished into the trees across the glade.

"Well, my only Aunt Jane!" ejaculated Wally.

He ran on.

"I—I say, chuck it, Wally!" panted Reggie Manners.

"Look here—"

"Stop!" shouted Wally, as he ran into the trees and again sighted the running figure.

The fags were close now to the big old oak which was their destination, and round the oak the other trees were thinner, and the starlight glimmered through the leafless branches.

The man in the overcoat ran on hard, his back to the St. Jim's fags.

Wally paused, and gathered up snow with both hands. He could see that he had no chance of running down the fugitive.

Rapidly he kneaded a snowball.

Whiz!

The snowball flew with unerring aim. It crashed on the back of the running man's head, and the sudden blow took the fugitive entirely by surprise. He stumbled in the darkness and fell, and his head struck against the trunk of a tree.

"Goal!" gasped Wally.

"We've got him now!" exclaimed Levison minor. "Come on!"

The three fags ran on hard. But the fallen man was on his feet again in a twinkling. They saw him press his hand to his face, and knew that his features must have suffered from the impact with the tree he had fallen against. But he ran on, heading for the thickest part of the wood, and disappeared from the sight of the fags.

"N. G.," said Wally. "We can't catch him now. I don't know that I want to specially, either. He's had a lesson about butting in where he's not wanted."

"I—I say, do you think it was that—that burglar come back?" gasped Reggie.

"Of course it wasn't, fathead!"

"Well, who was it, then?" demanded Reggie.

"Goodness knows!"

"Anyhow, here's the jolly old oak, and if Pongo's there, let's bag him and clear," said Levison minor.

The three fags approached the old oak. It was the ancient tree under which, a few nights before, Wally had witnessed the meeting between the "Dandy" and his confederate, on the night of the robbery at Eastwood House. Deep down in the ancient oak was a hole, and it was in that cavity that Pongo, when the wandering fit was on him, sometimes had made himself a den. Wally bent down and called:

"Pongo!"

There was a low whine in the darkness.

"Here he is!" said D'Arcy minor, with great satisfaction.

"I jolly well knew we should find him here."

"Bag him, and let's cut!" said Reggie, with a shiver.

"Blessed if I like this wind."

It was not only the wind that Reggie did not like. He was glancing over his shoulders with great uneasiness, thinking of the man who had vanished into the trees.

"Pongo!" called Wally. "Come out, you little rascal! Do you hear?"

Clink!

There was a movement in the darkness of the hollow under the old tree, and a sound like the clinking of metal. It made the fags start.

"What on earth's that?" asked Frank.

"I suppose the little beggar has taken something to his den," said Wally. "He's always bagging things and hiding them. He will bag anything from a silk hat to a saucepan-lid."

Pongo's little bright eyes appeared in the narrow opening in the hollow tree. Wally grasped him by his shaggy neck and jerked him out.

"Shove that collar on him, while I hold him, Frank." Wally had thoughtfully brought collar and chain in his pocket.

"Right-ho!"

Pongo whined and licked his master's hand. Perhaps he was repentant; or perhaps he considered it judicious to appear repentant. Pongo was a knowing dog.

"Are you going to wallop him?" asked Reggie.

"No!" snapped Wally.

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"You said you were going to about a dozen times."

"Well, I will next time he bunks," said Wally. "You can see he's sorry now, ain't you Pongo, old bean?"

Pongo whined, and Wally patted his head. On the frequent occasions when Pongo gave his master trouble Wally uttered the most terrific threats of what awaited Pongo when found. But those terrific threats never materialised into action—there always seemed to be some reason for letting Pongo off till next time.

"I say, let's see what he's got in his den," said Reggie.

"Couldn't reach it," said Wally. "It's narrow, and it goes deep."

"I'll try."

Reggie bent over the cavity in the trunk, and extended his arm into it. But his groping hand met only earth and roots and space—the hollow extended too far down for him to reach the extremity. He grunted and withdrew his arm.

"Only some rubbish, I suppose," he said. "Let's cut!"

And the three fags tramped out of the park, Wally of the Third leading Pongo on the chain—and Pongo trotting with his master with the air of being the meekest and most obedient dog in the world; notwithstanding which, Wally kept a sharp eye upon him to see that he did not suddenly slip his collar and belt!

CHAPTER 3.

Mysterious!

"JAMES!"

"Yes, sir! Thomas, sir!" said the footman, with a respectful cough.

Arthur Augustus had rung for James.

James was the Eastwood House footman whose especial duty it was among others—to attend to the requirements of Master Arthur when he was at home.

James attended to Gussy's requirements with great assiduity, and generally seemed to live, move, and have his being, within sound of D'Arcy's bell.

But for once James had not played up, so to speak.

D'Arcy had rung for James, but it was Thomas who appeared in answer to the ring.

The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyeglass upon Thomas inquiringly.

"I wang for James," he remarked.

"Yes, sir. James is absent, sir, having gone to the post-office at Easthorpe, sir," said Thomas. "I took the liberty, sir, of answering your ring, sir, in his place."

"Thank you vewy much, Thomas," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "Will you have the kindness to wequest my fiwends to come heah to speak to me—all of them, if they are indoors."

"Very good, sir."

Thomas vanished.

There was a chuckle from D'Arcy minor, who was sitting in an armchair before the fire in Arthur Augustus' room.

D'Arcy minor was taking his ease in his major's quarters, sprawling on the armchair, with a pair of rather muddy boots resting on another chair.

It was not an attitude of which the swell of St. Jim's could approve, and his glance told as much; but Wally of the Third was impervious to reproof.

He grinned cheerily at his major.

"Good old Gus!" he remarked.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Why the thump couldn't you walk along and tell the chaps you wanted to speak to them, instead of ringing for a blinking footman?" inquired Wally.

"I wegard the word blinkin' as slangy and vulgar, Wally. Pway do not use it in my pwesence."

"Go it, Gussy! Here beginneth the first lesson, what?"

"Wats! I am suah that James would have felt slighted if I had butted in and performed a dutay for him, as you suggest, Wally. James is vewy pleased to perform his duties. You are a young ass, Wally. If I had been awah that James was absent, howevah, I should not have wung. I should have asked you to wun along and tell the fellows to come heah."

"You could have asked," assented Wally; implying that his elegant major would have made the request in vain.

"Pway take your feet off that chair, Wally! You are makin' it quite muddy."

"I'm sure James will be pleased to rub the mud off," said Wally. "James is so pleased to perform his duties."

"It is inconsiderate, Wally, to assign unnecessary duties to a manservant, howevah willin' he may be to perform them."

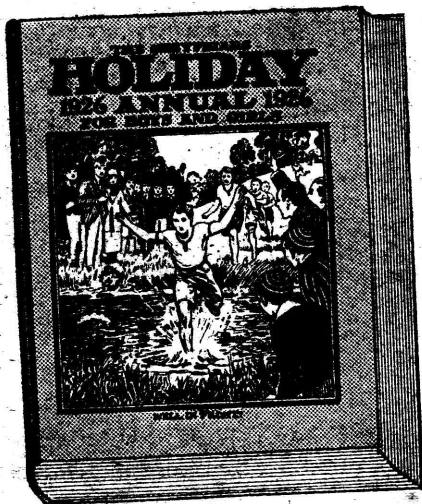
"Dear man! If he tramps upstairs every time you drop your necktie and want it picked up, it won't hurt him to dust a chair," said Wally cheerily. "I'm quite comfy as I am."

"I wegard you as an absolute young wuffian, Wally."

"Go hon!"

"Hallo, old bean, here we are!" said Tom Merry, coming

THERE'S NO TIME LIKE THE PRESENT—
AND THERE'S NO PRESENT LIKE



THE
HOLIDAY ANNUAL

There are only a few copies left of this wonder annual, and fellows interested in this announcement are simply advised to order their copies **AT ONCE**. If you want to give your brothers, sisters, or cousins a present, why not get them **THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL?** Better still, give yourself a present!

THE GREATEST SIX-SHILLING BARGAIN OFFERED!

into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's "den" with Manners and Lowther.

Blake and Herries and Digby followed the Terrible Three in.

"Anything on?" asked Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Give it a name," said Herries.

"Pway sit down, deah-boys. I must wequest you to excuse my minah—I am quite awah that you are shocked at him, but the young wuffian has learned fwrightfully bad mannahs in the Third Form, you know."

Wally winked at the St. Jim's juniors, without changing his comfortable though somewhat inelegant attitude.

"Don't mind, Gussy, you men," he said. "He will run on. It's his lower jaw that moves—and he can't stop it."

"I wequest you to be silent, Wally."

"I'm mum! Rattle on, old bean."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard.

"A vewy curious thing has occurred, you chaps," he said. "Wally has just told me about it, and I thought I would tell you fellows. It may have somethin' to do with the burglaw that took place heah a few days ago—though I admit that I do not see the connection. But it is vewy odd, you know. Tell the fellows about what happened in the deer-park, Wally."

Wally did not speak.

"Do you heah me, Wally?"

No answer.

"Bai Jove! Are you deaf, you young ass?"

Wally of the Third seemed to be deaf. If he heard, he heeded not.

"Go it, Wally," said Tom Merry encouragingly.

"Gussy's requested me to be silent," explained Wally. "As a dutiful young brother I'm carrying out his instructions."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I wequest you to tell these chaps at once what happened in the deer-park."

"You don't seem to know your own mind for two minutes together, old bean."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Shut up, then, and I'll go ahead," said Wally, ruthlessly interrupting his major. "Give your chin a rest, old man; it must be tired, anyhow."

"Get on with the washing, kid," said Blake.

Wally of the Third proceeded to relate the curious episode in the deer-park, during the search for Pongo.

The juniors listened with interest.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon them inquiringly when the fag had finished.

"What do you fellows think?" he asked.

"Well, it's jolly odd," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I don't see why anybody should have been rooting round in the deer-park after dark, or why he should bunk from these fags. He must have been after something that he couldn't own up to."

"Couldn't have been a keeper or anybody belonging to the estate, or he wouldn't have bolted," said Lowther.

"Wathah not!"

"Or a poacher?" said Digby.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"There is nothin' in the old deer-park to poach," he said.

"There are no deer there now—and nothin' else, except perhaps a few wabbits. But the fellow must have been aftah somethin'."

Manners looked very thoughtful.

"You didn't see the man's face, Wally?" he asked.

"No—only his back. I fancy his face was a bit damaged, though," grinned Wally. "He flopped over right against a tree when I caught him on the back of the head with a snowball. He put his paw to his face as if he was hurt. But he got clear all right."

"What about his build? Anything like the man who was here who called himself Lagden, and who turned out to be a cracksman—the Dandy, as Inspector Watkins calls him?"

Wally reflected for a moment and shook his head.

"No, I'm sure not; He was shorter and fatter."

"Oh!" said Manners.

"Of course, there is pwobably nothin' in it," said Arthur Augustus. "But it is vewy remarkable that anybody should be waitin' about in that lonely place in this fweezin' weathah, for nothin'." It was in the deer-park that the burglaw was almost captured, with the bag in his hand with the pater's gold plate in it. I can't imagine any reason why he should have come back, unless—

"Unless what?" asked Herries.

"He was fwrightfully wushed that night, you know, and he may have dwopped some of his plundah. We were all aftah him—James, the footman, you know, almost got his hands on him once, and Tom Mewwy saw him gettin' ovah the wall and nearly gwabbed him. In such a wush, he may have dwopped somethin' of value, and he may have had the awful cheek to come back and look for it."

"It's possible!" said Tom.

"You see, there's snow on the gwound, and if the wascal dwopped a gold pot or somethin', it would most likely be hidden fwom sight," said Arthur Augustus. "He had his bag cwammed with things he had bagged fwom the pater's safe. It is so vewy odd for a stwangah to be waitin' about

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the deer-park at night, that it seems to be possible it is somethin' of this sort."

"Only Wally thinks the man didn't look like the burglar, from what he saw of him," said Dig.

"Might be an accomplice," suggested Blake. "The Dandy wouldn't care to show up in this neighbourhood himself, I should think. But if he dropped some of the loot, and it's lying about in the snow, he might send a pal to look for it."

There was a general nodding of heads.

"That's likely enough," said Lowther.

"That's what I was thinking," said Wally. "That's why I told Gussy about it. I wonder if I ought to tell the pater? He doesn't let on; but he's awfully worried about losing the stuff. Some of it's heirlooms—gold tankards and things. Only the pater would very likely think I was making a mountain out of a molehill."

"If it's possible that some of the plunder is lying about in the park, under the snow, the place ought to be jolly well searched," said Tom Merry decidedly. "Of course, the Dandy may have dropped some of it—he only got away by the skin of his teeth. I didn't think of it before, but it's quite likely."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about making a search ourselves?" asked Tom. "There are plenty of us to go over the ground, and if there's anything there, we can find it—if not, we needn't bother anybody about it."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

"Vevy good," said Arthur Augustus. "We can take electric torches, you know, and have a good look wound, and twy again to-morrow. Shall we cleah out aftah dinnah and twy it on?"

"Let's!" said Blake. "It would be no end of a catch to get back some of the things."

Arthur Augustus rose.

"Then it's settled," he said. "We'll have a little wun this evenin', and see if there's anythin' in it, befoah bothewin' the pater about it."

D'Arcy touched the bell.

"What are you ringin' for now, fathead?" asked Wally of the Third.

"I shall weequah some thick boots, and a cap, and a vevy warm ovahcoat, Wally, if I am goin' out this evenin'. It is necessary to tell James to have them weady, isn't it, you young ass?"

Wally winked at Tom Merry & Co.

"You rang, sir!"

"Yaas, Thomas! I am sowwy to give you the twouble of comin' up," said Arthur Augustus graciously. "Has not James returned yet?"

"Yes, sir; but I am sorry to say that James has had an accident, sir," said Thomas.

"Bai Jove! I twust it is nothin' sewious, Thomas?"

"No, sir. He slipped on the ice in Easthope Lane, and cut his face a little, sir," said Thomas. "He had rather a severe blow, sir, on his face. If you will excuse him, sir, I will take on his duties this evening, sir."

"Vevy good, Thomas. Pway tell James that I sympathise with him vevy sincerely."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Tom Merry & Co. left D'Arcy's den—leaving him giving the respectful Thomas very particular instructions as to the garments he would need later that evening.

CHAPTER 4.

Caught in the Dark!

TOM MERRY & CO. gathered in D'Arcy's den in the evening. It was a very extensive den, as large as half a dozen studies at St. Jim's. Outside the windows was a balcony, from which it was easy to reach the ground; and it was by that outlet that the juniors intended to leave for their search in the deer-park. It was not quite certain whether Lord Eastwood would quite approve of the expedition at night; so it was a case of the least said and the soonest mended. If nothing came of the search, there was no need to mention the matter at all; while if—as was barely possible—something came of it, it would be a pleasant surprise for his lordship. The recovery of even a part of the loot would be, as Blake remarked, the most welcome sort of birthday present for D'Arcy's noble pater.

The St. Jim's juniors gathered round D'Arcy's fire for a chat before preparing for the expedition. They were chatting cheerily, when there was a discreet tap at the door, and James the footman presented himself.

"If you will excuse me, sir, I should like to speak to you, sir!" said James respectfully.

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"Certainly, James! Twot in," said Arthur Augustus.

James trotted in.

The swell of St. Jim's looked very sympathetic. There was a dark bruise on James' clean-shaven cheek, and his nose was a little swollen. He looked as if he had had a rather severe fall.

James was a young man, not over twenty-five, rather thick-set and muscular in build. He had a quiet and unobtrusive manner, and the juniors, so far as they had noticed him at all, thought him a very pleasant and obliging young man. So Tom Merry & Co. were all sympathetic about his little accident.

"You seem to have had wathah a severe knock, James," said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, sir. I slipped on the ice, and my face struck a stone in the lane, sir," said James. "It was a little painful, sir."

"I am vevy sowwy, James."

"Thank you, sir. You are always very kind, sir," said James. "If you have no objection, sir, I should like to go to my room for the evening to lie down, as my head feels a little dizzy, sir, from the shock. Thomas has kindly offered to take my place, sir—"

"That is all right, James," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall not want anythin' more to-night. Don't you think you had better see a medical man about your injury?"

"Oh, no, sir; it is really a trifle!" said James. "I am sure, sir, that I shall be quite fit for my duties in the morning if you would kindly dispense with my services for this evening, sir."

"Vevy well, James, pway go to bed at once, and I twust you will have a good night's west."

"Thank you, sir! Good-night, sir, and gentlemen!" said James.

"Good-night, James!"

"Good-night!" said the juniors cordially.

And the young man quietly retired, closing the door gently after him. Manners of the Shell glanced after him rather curiously as he went.

"A vevy nice young man, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus when the door had closed on the footman. "It is too bad that he has knocked his chivvy about like that, isn't it?"

"Hard cheese!" said Tom Merry.

"I was thinkin' of takin' James along with us, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "He is wathah a hefty chap, and would be useful if we came on some wuffian. But as he is injahed, of course, I could not ask him. Anyhow, there will be seven of us, Wally and his friends are not comin', and they would not be any use if they did."

A little later the St. Jim's juniors donned coats and mufflers and caps and thick boots, and quitted D'Arcy's room by way of the balcony.

It was a fine, clear night, sharply cold and with a little wind, but the sky was clear as steel and studded with glittering stars. Most of the juniors had electric torches in their pockets, but they did not need them for the walk to the deer-park, the starlight was ample. Each of the party had provided himself with a stick, chiefly for the purpose of raking over the snow under the old trees in search of hidden loot, but partly as weapons of defence if such should be needed. There was at least a chance that the lurking figure Wally & Co. had seen in the deer-park was that of the cracksmen, returning for some nefarious reason of his own, and a meeting with the "Dandy" in a lonely spot was likely to have an element of danger.

The St. Jim's juniors left the home park of Eastwood and followed a narrow, rutty lane, thick with frozen snow, to the more distant deer-park. They were soon under the shadow of the ancient trees, where in old days wild deer had wandered.

"It was somewhah near the hollow oak that Wally saw that wottah, whoevah he was," remarked Arthur Augustus. "That's wight in the middle of the wood. Come on!"

He led the way by a scarcely discernible path, upon which the starlight glimmered through a network of leafless branches and twigs.

"Hallo!" murmured Tom Merry. "Look there! Looks as if the johnnie is here again!"

"Bai Jove! It's a light!"

"My hat!"

Under the dark trees the juniors suddenly caught sight of a gleaming light.

It was evident that it proceeded from an electric torch—a beam of white, bright light that cut the darkness like a knife.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, gripping the heavy Malacca cane with which he had armed himself. "Bai Jove! The wottah must have come back, after all, you know! Don't turn on a light; let's close in on him and nail him, you fellows. Then we shall jolly soon see whethah he's the giddy cwacksman or not!"

"Let's!" agreed Tom Merry.

The juniors strained their eyes, but they could see nothing of the man who held the light.

The bright beam was playing on the trunks of the old trees and on brambles thick with frost as it slowly moved; evidently in search of something.

For what was the unknown man seeking?

It seemed scarcely possible that this mysterious search in the deer-park in the darkness of the winter night had no connection with the late burglary at Eastwood House.

The only possible explanation—so far as the juniors could see, at least—was that the Dandy, or some confederate of the rascal, was searching the deer-park for some article of value dropped by the thief in his hurried flight. It was difficult to imagine any other reason for the search. The deer-park was a solitary place, seldom trodden by any foot but that of a keeper, or by the woodmen who thinned the trees in the autumn. No one could be imagined to have dropped or lost any article there, as might have happened in the lanes or roads or in the home-park, where there was a right-of-way open to the public.

Tom Merry & Co. pushed on very cautiously.

saw only the man's back, but he realised that this was not the Dandy—the crackman whom he and the rest had chased in the wood a few nights before. It was a man of quite a different build, who ran swiftly, but much less actively than the Dandy and much less lightly.

"Oh, my hat!"

Tom caught his foot in a root and went stumbling, and his torch dropped to the ground and expired.

"This way!" came a shout. "This way, deah boys!"

Tom Merry scrambled up in the darkness.

As he did so something brushed against him, and the next moment a grip was fastened on him, and he was borne to the ground.

His heart thumped.

But he returned grip for grip, and struggled fiercely. His thought was that the fugitive had turned on him, and the sense of imminent danger nerved him to a fierce struggle.

He rolled over with his antagonist and got the upper hand. His knee was planted on a panting chest.

"This way!" he shouted. "Bring a light, you chaps!"

"Bai Jove! Oh cwumbs!"

That breathless exclamation came from beneath him.



St. Jim's Jingles!



No. 20. JACK BLAKE, of the Fourth.

YOU'VE often heard of York-
shire grit,
And Blake is Yorkshire.
The quality is famous;
every bit—
His deeds will never shame us.
He is a king without a crown,
The Fourth's intrepid leader,
Whose valiant deeds of high renown
Delight each ardent reader.

Before Tom Merry made his bow,
Blake held the top position;
He holds a humbler status now.
Though not without ambition.
Perhaps the day will dawn at length
When he'll be reinstated;
And then he'll go from strength to
strength,
With victory elated!

In Study No. 6 he lives,
And you may safely trust us
To laugh at all the "cheek" he
gives
To the renowned Augustus!
That noble youth is sore distressed
When inky showers start splashing;
"You've ruined, Blake, my Sunday
best!
You'll get a feahful thwashin'!"



**JACK BLAKE,
Leader of Study No. 6.**

Such trifling tiffs do not impair
The friendship warm and hearty
That thrives between the fellows
then—

A gay and cheery party.
The chumps of Study Number Six
Will always stand together
In every feud, in every fix,
Through fair and stormy weather.

Jack Blake is always to the fore
In strenuous footer tussles;
He knows the way to shoot and
score,

He never slacks, but hustles!
He is a Trojan in the fray,
A forward fleet and clever;
The "Saints" have often won the
day

Through Blake's superb endeavour.

True son of Yorkshire, you have
earned

Our warmest admiration;
And countless readers must have
yearned

To give congratulation
To one who always plays the game
In such a worthy manner;
Thousands would love to share your
fame,
And march beneath your banner!

NEXT WEEK:—HARRY MANNERS, the amateur photographer of St. Jim's.

After a few whispered words they separated, in order to approach the man with the light from different directions and hem him in against the old oak.

But, cautious as they were, there was a rustling and swaying in the thick wood as they advanced, and all of a sudden the light near the old oak vanished. The man had heard them.

Tom Merry was quite near the oak when the light was suddenly shut off. He realised that further caution was useless, and he turned on his own light and ran forward.

He heard a sound of hurried breathing.

Flashing his light round, he had a glimpse of a figure in an overcoat darting away among the trees.

"This way!" shouted Tom.

"After him!" bawled Blake, catching sight at the same moment of the running figure.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There came a crashing in the underwood. Tom Merry raced after the vanishing man, his light gleaming every now and then on the running figure as he glimpsed it. He

"Gussy!" he yelled.

"Gweat Scott! Is that you, Tom Mewwy?"

"You—you ass!" gasped Tom.

"Weally, you know—"

Tom Merry jumped up. He had made a capture; but as he had captured only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, he had no desire to keep him.

"You frabjous ass!" he exclaimed. "What did you collar me for? I thought it was that rotter turning on me."

"Bai Jove! I was undah the impwession that you were that wottah, Tom Mewwy!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Got him?" exclaimed Blake, rushing up with a gleaming light. "Why, what—what's this game?"

"That ass—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom burst into a laugh.

"Gussy and I caught one another," he said. "And I suppose the man's got clear!"

"What wotten luck!" said Arthur Augustus, as he

staggered to his feet. "It was weally wathah obtuse of you, Tom Mewwy."

"Fathead!"

"Weally, you know—"

"He's gone!" said Herries, coming up. "I wish I had my bulldog Towser here. Towser would have tracked him down in next to no time. Would you like me to send to St. Jim's for Towser, D'Arcy?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"He's gone!" said Manners. "I suppose it was the same chap that young Wally saw. Are we going after him, or are we going to hunt for the giddy loot?"

"We shall never find him now," said Tom. "Let's hunt for the loot—that's really what we came for."

"Pile in, then," said Blake.

It was clear that the man was no longer within the confines of the deer-park, and the St. Jim's juniors proceeded to make the search for which they had left Eastwood House.

It was not an easy search.

On the supposition that the Dandy, in his wild flight with the pursuers close at his heels, had dropped some of his plunder, the articles might have been dropped anywhere in the deer-park, and the domain was extensive. The trees and underwood grew thickly, and among them snow was packed, and in the ground there were many hollows and little ravines choked with snow and dead, withered leaves.

Tom Merry & Co. realised that they had set themselves a task that required rather days than hours for its completion.

But they set to work cheerily enough.

The party scattered in different directions, flashing their lights under the trees and into the frozen bushes, and poking into corners and recesses with their sticks.

For a good hour they kept it up, but nothing had been brought to light of greater value than twigs and stones.

Then they gathered again at the old oak.

"Any luck?" asked Tom Merry, looking round.

"Nix!" said Blake.

"Nothing doing!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, we couldn't expect anything, except by luck," said Tom. "It's too jolly big a place to be searched in an hour. But now we've seen that man searching, with our own giddy eyes, I think we've enough to go upon to tell your father about it, D'Arcy, and he can call in Inspector Watkins if he thinks fit. If Lord Eastwood thinks there's anything in it, he will set the keepers to search the place from end to end."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. tired and a little disappointed, set out to tramp back to Eastwood House.

CHAPTER 5.

The Man with the Camera!

"GOOD-MORNING, sir!"

"Bai Jove! Good-mornin'!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had never, so far as he knew, seen the individual who greeted him, but he answered his greeting very politely.

It was a bright and sunny morning, and the snow was melting in the thick hedges. Arthur Augustus was sauntering along the lane that bordered the deer-park, in company with Blake and Herries and Digby.

In the deer-park there was a good deal of movement going on.

Lord Eastwood had been acquainted with the incidents of the previous night, and, rather to the relief of the juniors, his lordship had taken the information with seriousness. They had rather feared that his lordship would pooch-pooch the matter, and perhaps think that the schoolboys had allowed their imaginations to run away with them a little.

Instead of which, D'Arcy's father had listened with grave intentness, and telephoned to Inspector Watkins at Easthorpe without delay.

Quite early in the morning the inspector and several constables were in the deer-park, joined by half a dozen keepers belonging to the estate, and the whole place was being carefully examined.

Both Lord Eastwood and the inspector considered it quite possible that the fleeing cracksman might have lost some of his loot in his hurried flight; and at all events, it was a suspicious circumstance that the deer-park was being searched at night by some person unknown under cover of darkness.

That the unknown searcher was a confederate of the Dandy seemed quite possible; anyhow, the matter was well worth looking into. Accordingly, the search was going on through the length and breadth of the old deer-park, and it was fairly certain that if the fleeing thief had dropped any of his plunder there it would be discovered during the day.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were joining in the search, as well as Wally & Co. of the Third. Arthur

Augustus was a little later to join up, and his friends of the Fourth had waited for him. They were about to turn into the deer-park from the narrow lane, when the stranger accosted Arthur Augustus with a cheery "Good-morning!"

He was a shabbily-dressed man, in an overcoat that had seen much service, with a general air of respectable poverty which caused Arthur Augustus to adopt his politest manner in speaking to him.

His nose was extremely red, perhaps with the cold, his eyebrows very thick and shaggy and grey, and a ragged moustache half-hid his mouth. Under his shabby arm he carried a large camera. A large pair of spectacles adorned his red nose.

"Takin' photogwaphs, what?" asked Arthur Augustus politely.

"Yes, sir," said the shabby gentleman. "If you young gentlemen would care to have your photographs taken, my charges are very reasonable."

"Bai Jove!"

"We're in rather a hurry," said Blake.

It was a sunny morning, but it was very cold, and the St. Jim's juniors certainly had no desire to stand about being photographed. Moreover, they were on their way to join the searchers in the deer-park.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "We've got an engagement, you know. Thank you vewy much, all the same."

The shabby gentleman looked disappointed, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's kind heart smote him.

"Aftah all, we can spare a few minutes," he said.

"You are very kind, sir," said the photographer. He unslung his camera at once. "I should charge you only five shillings for a group, cabinet size."

"Look here, we can't hang about," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"It's jolly cold standing about, you know," remarked Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Tell you what!" said Blake, with a grin. "You have your photograph taken in a group by yourself, Gussy, while we get on."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Dig.

"Jolly good idea!" concurred Herries. "Come on!"

"Vewy well, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I will come aftah you in a few minutes."

And the three juniors went on into the deer-park and disappeared while the photographer was arranging his camera.

Arthur Augustus remained where he was.

"This is a very beautiful countryside, sir," remarked the photographer. "You live about here, perhaps, sir?"

D'Arcy smiled.

"Yaas; I live at Eastwood House, yondah, when I am not at school," he answered.

"The big house?" asked the shabby gentleman, with an air of being greatly impressed. "I was told in the village that that is the residence of Lord Eastwood, a very great man in these parts, and very popular in the county."

"Yaas, wathah! He is my patah."

"Bless me! Then you must be Lord Conway?" said the shabby gentleman.

"Oh, no; old Conway is my eldah bwothah," said D'Arcy.

"He is not at home now. Are you weady?"

"Just a minute or two. I did not know that I was speaking to a son of his lordship, sir. I trust you will excuse the liberty I took in addressing you."

"My deah chap, why shouldn't you speak to me?" said Arthur Augustus good-naturedly. "It is all wight!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"I twust you are doin' good business with your camewah?" said Arthur Augustus.

The shabby gentleman shook his head.

"The fact is, sir, business is very bad," he said. "Perhaps I may mention that I am not, properly speaking, an itinerant photographer. I have an establishment, sir, at Winchester—it is possible that you have heard of Snooks' Artistic Photographic Studios?"

"Sowwy, no!"

"Probably not—probably not!" assented Mr. Snooks. "Owing to—hem—a somewhat pressing shortage of cash, I have taken up this line for the present; but generally speaking I am by no means an itinerant photographer."

"I quite undahstand," assented Arthur Augustus.

He deeply sympathised with the shabby gentleman, who had apparently had to turn his back on his Artistic Photographic Studio, and take up the less distinguished line of itinerant photographer.

"There, sir—ready! If you will stand quite still—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I need not ask you to smile, sir, as I generally do, your expression being naturally so very kind and pleasant," said Mr. Snooks.

"Bai Jove! You are vewy flattewin'."



Tom Merry rolled over with his antagonist and got the upper hand. His knee was planted on a panting chest. "This way!" shouted the St. Jim's junior. "Bring a light, you chaps!" "Bai Jove! Oh, cwumbs!" That breathless exclamation came from beneath Tom Merry. "Gussy!" he yelled. "Gweat Scott! Is that you, Tom Mewwy?" (See Chapter 4.)

"Not at all, sir! I am well aware that you have given me a turn, out of sheer kindness of heart, and that my work will be of no great value to a young gentleman in your position in life," said Mr. Snooks. "I am poor, sir, and have a somewhat hard row to hoe in my line of business, but I have not forgotten how to be grateful for kindness. There, sir—quite still for one moment."

Click!

"One moment again, sir—exactly—"

Click!

"Thank you very much, Master D'Arcy. That is quite all right."

"Bai Jove! You seem to know my name, Mr. Snooks."

Mr. Snooks smiled.

"As you are a son of Lord Eastwood, sir, I naturally concluded that you bore Lord Eastwood's family name, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! I nevah thought of that, Mr. Snooks," said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"I have heard in the village, sir, that a burglary took place at his lordship's house a few days ago," said Mr. Snooks.

"Yaas, that is cowwect."

"I trust that the villain has been caught, sir, and the goods recovered?"

"Neithah, as it happens, Mr. Snooks," said D'Arcy. "But the police are hot on the track of the wascal."

Mr. Snooks blinked at him over his black-rimmed spectacles.

"I hope they will catch him soon, sir. By the way, sir, if I am not trespassing too far on your great kindness—"

"Pway go on, Mr. Snooks!"

"As you are the son of the land-owner here, sir, perhaps you can tell me whether there would be any objection to my taking photographs in the locality," said Mr. Snooks. "I have an idea for a series of Nature photographs, to be entitled 'The Natural Beauties of Hampshire,' of which I think I might make a success. If it should turn out well, I think it might be a very good thing for me—I think, sir, that my landlord at Winchester might accept one set, as a partial set-off against rent owing for some time. But I should be very unwilling to disturb the privacy of any gentleman."

"My deah chap, I can answah for it that my patah would not object to your takin' any photogwaphs you like

on his estate," said Arthur Augustus. "I will mention it to him; but I assuah you that you can go ahead just as you like."

"Thank you, sir—thank you," said Mr. Snooks. "I am a stranger in these parts, but I have been told in the village that there is an ancient deer-park on Lord Eastwood's estate, containing some wonderfully picturesque scenery. If I could take a few snaps there, without intruding—"

"Certainly, Mr. Snooks. Perhaps you had bettah not do it to-day, howevah, as the deer-park is bein' searched at pwsent by a lot of people, and they would be wathah in your way, I should think."

Mr. Snooks gave quite a start.

"Did you say searched, sir?" he asked. "Is someone lost in the deer-park? Bless me!"

"Not at all; but we have wathah an ideah that some-thing' may have been dwopped there," said Arthur Augustus. "Pwobably the search will be ovah by to-night, and to-morrow you will have a cleah field."

"After your kindness to me, sir, I should be very happy to join in the search, if I could be of any use. What has been lost, sir—a watch, perhaps, or money?"

"Oh, no! We think that the burglah the othah night may have dwopped some of his plundah in gettin' away," explained Arthur Augustus. "So there's a crowd of men searchin' fwom end to end of the deer-park now. Pway don't take any twouble to help—there are lots at it now."

"Bless me!" said Mr. Snooks. "Lord Eastwood's keepers, I have no doubt; and doubtless the local police?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"I trust the search will be successful," said Mr. Snooks. "No doubt it will go on after nightfall, if no discovery is made during the day."

"I hardly think so," said Arthur Augustus. "They will go ovah ewevy foot of gwound by to-night, I should think. But I must be gettin' on, Mr. Snooks, as I am goin' to help. Good-mornin'!"

"The photograph will be sent on, sir," said Mr. Snooks. "The negative will be sent to my studio to be developed and printed. It will be finished, sir, in first-class style, and put through our special finishing process."

"Vewy good, Mr. Snooks."

"If you are not in a hurry for it, sir, shall we say a few days—"

"Vewy good!"

"It will reach you by post, sir."

"Quite so. Good-morning, Mr. Snooks!"

"Ahem! And no doubt you will send on the—ahem—the five shillings, sir—" murmured Mr. Snooks.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

He had quite forgotten that trifling item. His hand slid into his pocket at once.

"Bai Jove! Pwy excuse me, Mr. Snooks. I had quite ovahtooked that!" he exclaimed. "I will pay for the photograph now."

"You are very kind, sir. Shall I give you a receipt?"

"Pwy don't twouble, Good-mornin'!"

"Good-morning, sir! And thank you very much."

Arthur Augustus nodded kindly, and walked on, disappearing into the wood in the direction his comrades had taken.

Mr. Snooks, photographer, looked after him curiously. He rubbed his red nose thoughtfully.

"By gad!" he muttered under his breath. "Searching the deer-park— By gad! And I might have run right into the whole crew of them! By gad! I don't think anybody would recognise the Dandy in this rig; but— Phew!"

He whistled.

A policeman's helmet showed among the trees, and the constable glanced into the lane.

Mr. Snooks packed his camera under his arm, and rather hurriedly walked off in the direction of Easthorpe.

CHAPTER 6.

Manners Thinks it Out!

TOM MERRY & CO. had a busy day.

From early morn till dewy eve the searchers were "rooting" through the recesses of the deer-park.

Extensive as the place was, and full of remote corners and recesses, thick with snow, the search was so thorough that it was not likely that any spot remained unexamined. But when the wintry sun went down nothing had been discovered. Every bank and drift of snow had been raked over, every bush and bramble penetrated and searched, every hollow probed; and the result was disappointment.

There was still a possibility that some small article, dropped by the fleeing cracksmen, might lie in some nook, only to be discovered when the snow had thawed and gone. But so far as extensive and thorough searching could reveal, there was nothing to be found.

"Nothing in it, I'm afraid," Tom Merry remarked as the juniors walked back to Eastwood House in the winter dusk. "It was a chance, and worth going into; but there's nothing doing."

"Looks like it," agreed Lowther.

"Yaas, watah!" said Arthur Augustus. "But—"

"But what?"

"That wotah who was searchin' the park last night was searchin' for somethin'. If he had nothin' to do with the wobbow, what was his game?"

"I give that one up!" said Tom, with a smile. "Ask me another."

"What do you think, Manners?" asked Monty Lowther, noticing the thoughtful frown on the face of Manners of the Shell.

"I think we shall have to give up the idea that the Dandy dropped some of his loot, and that a confederate of his is here to search for it," said Manners. "The place has been routed over from end to end. Anything dropped there would have been found; it's a practical certainty."

"Then you don't think that man last night is a confederate of the giddy cracksmen?"

"He may or may not be," said Manners. "But, whoever and whatever he is, he wasn't looking for some odd thing or other dropped by chance by a running man. There's nothing of the kind to be found there. But—"

Manners paused.

"I've been thinking," he said; "but I haven't got it quite clear yet. The man last night was after something, and we want to know what he was after. Now it's fairly clear that the cracksmen never dropped anything from his bag. I wonder—"

"Well, what do you wonder, old bean?" asked Blake, with a grin.

"I wonder whether somebody else, as well as ourselves, had the idea that the cracksmen might have left something behind him in the deer-park?" said Manners quietly. "Somebody in this neighbourhood, I mean—not a confederate of the Dandy at all."

"Oh!" said Tom. "A new party in the game?"

"That's it."

"Bai Jove! I never thought of that, you know. There

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has been no end of talk about the burglary, and some chap in the village might have the idea of lookin' for valuables that might have been dwopped," remarked Arthur Augustus.

"In the village?" repeated Manners. "Yes, perhaps. Or one of the keepers on the estate, Gussy."

"Imposs, deah boy."

"Why impossible?"

"Because the man, whoever he was, bolted when we got aftah him, and a keepah wouldn't have had any reason for boltin', you know."

Manners smiled.

"No, I suppose not," he said.

"Watah not, you know."

Tom Merry gave his chum a rather curious look. He could see that there was more in Manners' thought than he had explained.

Manners did not pursue the subject, however; he relapsed into thoughtful silence as they walked on to Eastwood House.

After tea the St. Jim's fellows gathered by the log-fire in the hall, talking over the incidents of the day. Manners sat silent for a long time, and Tom and Lowther observed his thoughtful brow, and wondered what was passing in his mind. When Manners spoke at last, however, it was not on the subject of the search in the deer-park.

"Gussy, old man," he said.

"Yaas, deah boy?"

"How is your man James getting on?"

"James is all wight, Mannahs. He was helpin' in the search to-day, you know," said D'Arcy. "Didn't you notice him? He still has a bwise on his face, poor chap; but othahwise I think he is all wight."

"He seems a very obliging chap," said Manners.

"Oh, yaas!"

"I was thinking of asking him to go down to the post-office at Easthorpe, and inquire after a parcel for me," said Manners. "If you wouldn't mind sending him, Gussy—"

"I am suah James would be vewy pleased to go, Mannahs," answered Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's glanced round at Thomas, who was hovering in the hall. "Thomas, pwy be so kind as to wequest James to step heah."

"Very good, sir."

The young footman made his appearance in a couple of minutes.

The bruise on his cheek was still very noticeable, as well as the swelling on his nose. It was likely to be some days before James lost the traces of his little accident.

"James, will you have the goodness to go down to the post-office in the village to call for a parcel for Mr. Mannahs?" said D'Arcy.

"Certainly, sir."

There was no doubt that the footman was willing to go; in fact, Manners, whose keen eyes were upon him, noticed that his face quite brightened. Perhaps James was glad to get a little run, away from the duties of the servants' hall.

Manners gave the man a few directions concerning the parcel, and James respectfully took his departure.

"Films, I suppose," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "You've been giving your jolly old camera a rest lately, Manners."

"Yes," said Manners absently.

"There's another giddy photographer wandering round these parts as well as Manners," grinned Blake. "Gussy blued five bob this morning on a picture of his phiz. Did it break the machine, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

Arthur Augustus started as he remembered Mr. Snooks.

"Bai Jove. I told that chap Snooks that I would mention him to the patah," he exclaimed. "I had forgotten him, you know."

"Who on earth is Snooks?" asked Lowther.

"A photogwaphic chap who is makin' what he calls Nature photographs of this part of Hampshire," said Arthur Augustus. "I told him he could go aaround takin' photogwaphs if he liked, and I would mention it to my patah. He wanted to take some snaps in the deer-park; but I told him he had bettah leave that till to-morrow, in the circs. I think I will go and mention it to the patah now, as I told the chap I would; not that it mattahs, you know, vewy much, as the patah wouldn't mind, anyway."

And Arthur Augustus went in search of his noble pater. Herries and Digby roamed away into the billiards-room, to knock the balls about. Tom Merry tapped Manners on the shoulder, and the Shell fellow looked round from the fire.

Tom Merry laughed.

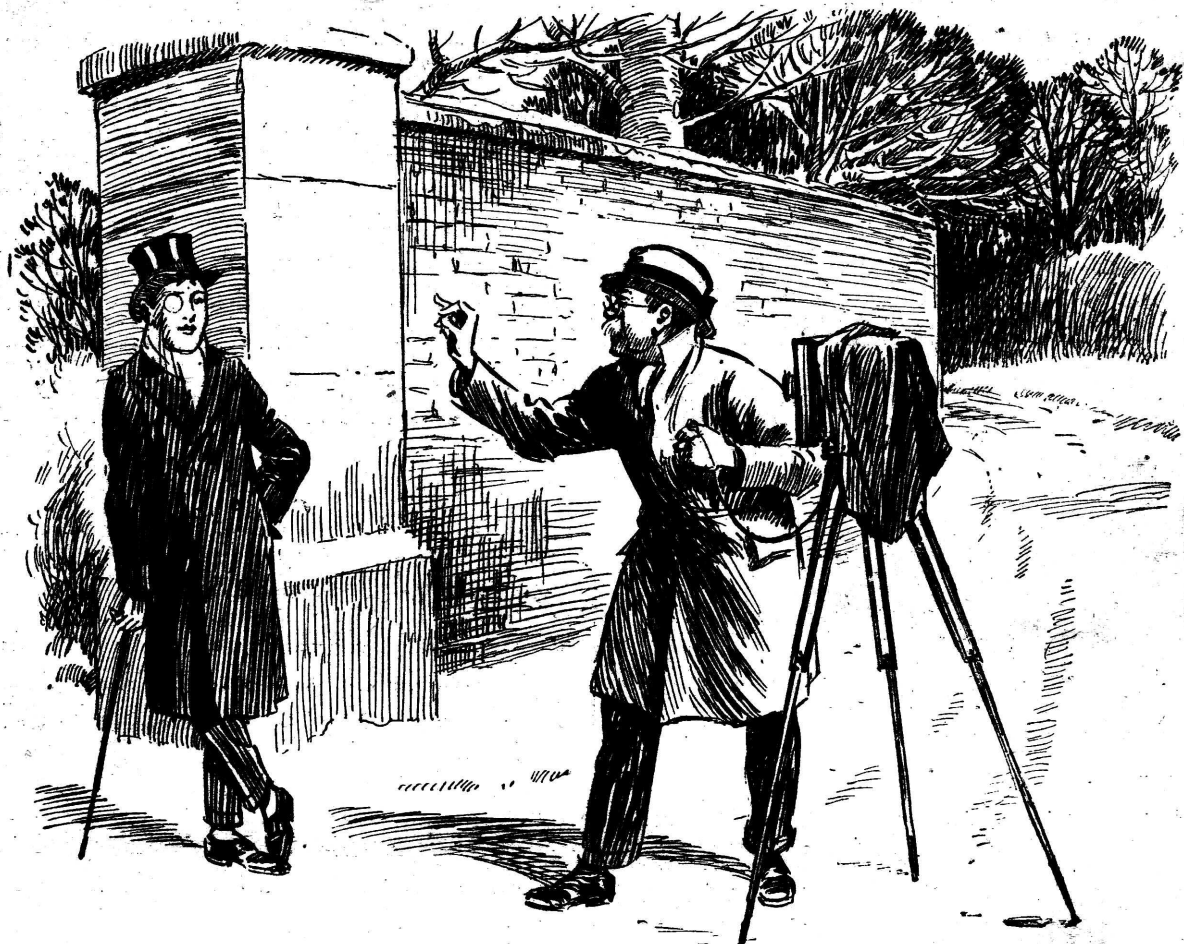
"Cough it up," he said.

"What?" asked Manners.

"You've been thinking something out, and you've got on to something, or you think you have," said Tom.

"With the accent on the 'think,'" remarked Jack Blake parenthetically.

"Well, it was Manners who spotted that rogue the Dandy when he was here, calling himself Cecil Lagden, and taking us all in," said Tom. "Manners is entitled to a hearing."



"There, sir—ready!" said the photographer. "If you stand quite still——" "Yaas, wathah!" said Gussy. "I need not ask you to smile, sir, as I generally do," went on the photographer. "Your expression being naturally so very kind and pleasant!" "Bai Jove! You are vewy flattewin!" said Gussy. (See chapter 5.)

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

"Good!" said Blake, with a grin. "Let's hear the Sherlock Holmes of the Shell! Go it, Manners, and we'll all play Dr. Watson; only tell us when to say 'Marvellous.' We mightn't know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fact is, I've been thinking out the matter," said Manners in his quiet way. "I may or may not have dropped on something; but now Gussy's gone, I may as well tell you fellows what's in my mind."

"Why now Gussy's gone?" asked Tom in astonishment. "I should think Gussy was the person chiefly interested."

"Quite so, if anything comes of it; but not till it's clear. I can't tell Gussy, without any proof, that I suspect a servant in his father's house."

"Wha-a-at?"

"That's how it stands," said Manners.

"But——" ejaculated Tom blankly.

"Oh, draw it mild, old man!" said Blake incredulously. "I say, if that's what you've got in your mind, it's just as well that you waited till Gussy was out of hearing. Gussy would be jolly well offended, I can tell you."

"He would," agreed Lowther.

"I know that," answered Manners composedly. "That's why I'm speaking to you fellows, and not to Gussy."

"But who, and which?" demanded Blake. "Not jolly old Wilkinson, the butler?"

"No, ass!"

"Not fat old Thomas——"

"James," said Manners.

"James!" said Tom Merry, with a start. "Why, you've just sent him down to the post-office to get a parcel for you."

"He won't get the parcel."

"Why not?"

"Because there isn't one there."

The three juniors stared blankly at Manners of the Shell.

"Look here, Manners, do you mean that you've sent a

footman down to the village for nothing; for an idiotic joke?" asked Lowther.

"No, fathead! I've sent him to give him a chance of rooting in the deer-park on his own, now that the search is over, and there's nobody there," said Manners quietly.

"My only hat!"

"Then you think——"

"I don't think, but I suspect that James, the footman, was the man we chased last night, and the man Wally chased earlier," said Manners.

"Great pip!"

CHAPTER 7.

Under Suspicion.

TOM MERRY & CO. stared at Manners.

They could scarcely believe that he was serious. But Manners' face was very grave.

Tom glanced round uneasily. But there was no one within hearing of the group of juniors by the log-fire.

"Look here, Manners," said Tom at last, "that's pretty thick, you know. Gussy thinks a lot of the man."

"I know."

"He seems a very decent, obliging sort of chap," said Lowther.

"Probably."

"It's rot!" said Blake. "Utter rot! If you want my opinion on the subject, there it is, for what it's worth."

"I don't know that I do, specially," remarked Manners sarcastically. "But I'm not talking out of my hat, and I'll give you my reasons, if you care to hear them."

"Oh, go it!" said Blake. "Rot, all the same."

"That's what you said when I spotted Lagden as a rogue," said Manners. "He turned out to be the Dandy, all the same, and a dangerous crackman."

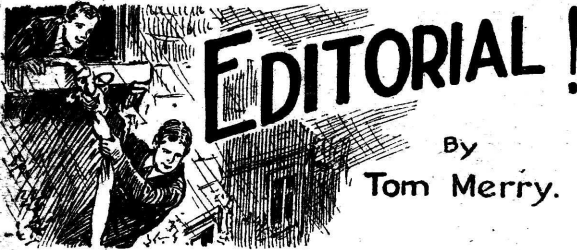
Blake had no reply ready for a moment, so he contented

(Continued on page 16.)

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THE St. Jim's News



By
Tom Merry.

IT was all very well for the old Cavalier poet to say:

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage."

If the old chappie had been confined in the punishment-room of St. Jim's—and he may have been, for all I know—he would have found that its stone walls made a jolly effective prison, and the iron bars outside the window a very effective cage. Even the most expert prison-breaker would have a job to escape from the punishment-room.

Escapes, however, are not unknown in the school's history. The iron bars have been unscrewed more than once, by fellows who have been thoughtful enough to smuggle a screwdriver into the punishment-room, and lucky enough not to be searched beforehand.

It was in this way that Delaney and Deverill made their famous escape in 1911. They were two Sixth Formers, and their history is one which Gerald Knox, the present black sheep of the Sixth, should study and ponder. It was the old, old story of breaking bounds at night, and visiting disreputable haunts in the village. Delaney was an Irish fellow, who had the gambling fever badly, and who would play cards by the hour, in the little back parlour of the Green Man. He played for high stakes, and invariably left the Green Man a good deal poorer than when he entered it. As for his chum Deverill, it was love of adventure and excitement, rather than anything else, which induced him to take part in these nightly escapades. For weeks, the two seniors embarked on their shady exploits without being detected; but Nemesis always overtakes her quarry sooner or later, and one night in December, just before breaking-up for Christmas, Delaney and Deverill emerged from the Green Man and walked right into the arms of Mr. Maxwell, a master of that period. The game was up, and the two seniors were sent to the punishment-room, under sentence of expulsion.

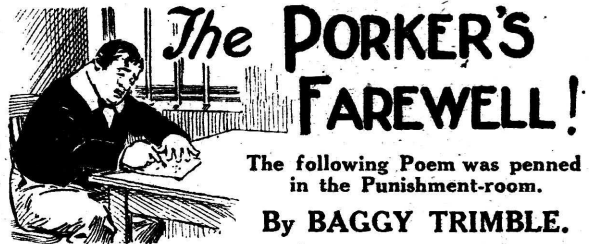
They must have expected something of the sort, for Delaney had a screwdriver in his possession. On the night of December 15th—a wild, blustering night—the condemned seniors carried out their escape. The window bars were unscrewed and removed; a ladder of sheets was improvised; and the reckless and foolhardy fellows made a perilous descent into the dark quadrangle. Then they vanished into the night, and St. Jim's saw them no more. Years afterwards, Delaney wrote to the Head, describing the escape in detail.

Such escapes, however, have been few and far between. In the majority of cases, prisoners confined in the punishment-room have had to remain there till the morning, when they have been publicly expelled.

We have not chosen a very cheerful subject this week; but we endeavour to show our readers every side of St. Jim's life, the grim as well as the gay. There is nothing very grim, however, in Jack Blake's article or Baggy Trimble's poem, which I am sure you will all enjoy.

TOM MERRY.

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The following Poem was penned
in the Punishment-room.

By BAGGY TRIMBLE.

IF you're waking, call me early, call me early, Taggles dear,
For to-morrow will be the saddest day of all the sad
New Year.
Of all the sad New Year, Taggy, the saddest, baddest
day,
For I shall be going away, Taggy—I shall be going
away!

I've been a very wayward lad since coming to this
college;
I've been a rascal and a cad—a fact I now acknow-
ledge.
And now I've done a dreadful deed. They bowled me
out to-day.
So I shall be going away, Taggy—I shall be going
away!

I stole into the cook's domain at twelve o'clock last
night.
I gorged until I got a pain—ate everything in sight!
I left my handkerchief behind; they found it there
to-day.
So I shall be going away, Taggy—I shall be going
away!

They hauled me up before the Head. "Have mercy,
sir!" I yelled.
But Dr. Holmes looked stern, and said: "You ought to
be expelled!"
Up in this cold detention-room, all night I've got to
stay.
Then I shall be going away, Taggy—I shall be going
away!

I've left my watch to Bernard Glyn—it's merely made
of metal.
I've left my debts to Fatty Wynn, for him to kindly
settle.
To you, dear Taggy, I bequeath my journalistic pay,
For I shall be going away, Taggy—I shall be going
away!

No, you needn't call me early in the morning, Taggy
dear,
For I have just received some news—it's tragic news,
I fear.
A public flogging in Big Hall is the price I've got to
pay,
So I sha'n't be going away, Taggy—I sha'n't be going
away!



BRIGHTER PUNISHMENT ROOMS!

Some startling suggestions for cheering the hours of captivity.

By JACK BLAKE.

rabbit-pie on a tray, with a jam roly-poly pudding to follow.

During the meal, a gramophone—specially kept in the punishment-room for the purpose—should play the latest dance music, also one or two appropriate songs for expelled schoolboys, such as, "Show Me the Way to Go Home!"

A wireless apparatus should also be installed in the punishment-room for the convenience of prisoners who may wish to know the latest news from all parts. There should also be a good library of light and bright fiction. What could be better, for instance, than several volumes of the "Holiday Annual," to beguile the tedium of imprisonment?

In order to avoid the prisoner passing a lonely night, his chosen chums should be permitted to keep him company. They could do this in shifts, each chum staying an hour.

With regard to breakfast, this should be a substantial repast—not the frugal bread-and-water which is at present provided. Ham and eggs, and fried sausages, and hot buttered rolls, should be brought up to the prisoner, and set tastefully before him.

These are just a few random suggestions for brightening our punishment-rooms. The Head is a kind and humane gentleman, and I feel sure he will give these suggestions his careful consideration. Why should a punishment-room

be a place of gloom and mental torment? Why should a fellow have to lay groaning all night on a bed of remorse? His last night at the school should be made as pleasant as possible for him, so that he may look back upon it, in after years, with delight.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who is looking over my shoulder as I pen this article, is not in sympathy with my scheme.

"Blake, you are a fyabjous duffah!" he declares. "If punishment-rooms were turned into places of luxury and entertainment, as you suggest, it would be vey bad for law an' ordah. You would have fellows debbewately gettin' into twouble, in ordah to enjoy the amenities of the punishment-room."

"Not if there was the sack to follow."

"They would wisk that. Anyway, Blake, I considah your pwoposals are uttayah widic. The Head would need to be clean off his wockah before he agweed to adopt them."

Whatever Gussy may think of my proposals, I consider they are top-hole. And I would carry my idea of brighter punishment-rooms a step further. Why not brighter expulsions?

Instead of an expelled fellow slinking down to the school gates, looking utterly miserable and scorned by the school, why not organise a brass band to play him triumphantly to the station? After all, the fellow is sacked. Instead of rubbing it in, by hissing and hooting, why not give him a jolly good send off?

Gussy, of course, will not hear of this. He regards it as "uttah wot." But then, Gussy will never be in any danger of expulsion.

Baggy Trimble, however, who seems pretty certain to get "marching orders" one of these days, is strongly in favour of my scheme—especially the suggestion of a banquet in the punishment-room, and a bumper breakfast on the fatal morning!

PRISON reform is in full swing. Our prisons are being made better and brighter—places fit for heroes to live in.

Those dark old days, when prisoners were cast into dismal, rat-infested dungeons, and abandoned to their fate, are happily over. The old Fleet Prison, and Old Newgate, could tell some grim stories; but the modern prison—although I haven't been there yet!—is supposed to be a home away from home.

This is all to the good. Now, what about brighter punishment-rooms?

When a fellow is about to be expelled from St. Jim's, why should he have to spend his last night at the old school in misery and loneliness? Send him to the punishment-room, by all means, but don't let him lay there, eating out his heart in the darkness. Cheer the poor chappie up, during the few hours of school-life which remain to him.

To begin with, the prisoner should be given a jolly good feed. Nothing like a banquet for banishing "the blues"! Let the school porter take him up a



NOBODY'S STUDY!

A Peep at the St. Jim's Punishment Room.

By ERIC KILDARE.

mouse scudding across the floor. One dark winter night, however, when I was passing the door of the Punishment Room, I seemed to hear groans coming from within. I will confess I was considerably startled, and it was with a shaking hand that I opened the door, and flashed my electric torch into the gloom of the apartment. There was nobody there, and the groans had ceased. I suppose my imagination had been playing me tricks, or perhaps the wind had been responsible for the weird noises I had heard. But I was jolly glad to get downstairs to the cheery warmth of my study, I can tell you!

On the walls of the Punishment Room numerous names and initials have been inscribed. I wonder what prompts a condemned scholar, senior or junior, on his last night at the school, to carve his name on the wall? You would think he would be glad to let his name and notoriety be forgotten, instead of kept alive by such an act. But the fact remains that the musty old walls of the Punishment Room are simply peppered with names.

Proctor major, who was expelled as far back as 1877, for repeatedly breaking bounds, must have whiled away the best part of his last night at St. Jim's by carving his name, for the letters were half an inch deep, and great care was taken in executing them.

A couple of years later, Proctor minor shared a similar fate to his brother, and he recorded the fact by carving his own name underneath that of his major.

But there are some honourable names on the walls of the Punishment Room, as well as dishonourable ones. The name of Bernard Barton, carved with great skill on the mantelpiece, awakens a thrill of pride in the breasts of the St. Jim's fellows. For Barton, expelled in 1907 for inciting his schoolfellows to rebellion, expiated his offence in the Great War, in which he fought and fell like a true hero.

I often wonder what becomes of fellows who are expelled. The majority, I am afraid, simply drift into oblivion. Others, with stout hearts and worthy calibre, endeavour to live down the past, and to do credit to the school which they formerly disgraced.

But those who are inclined to look upon expulsion as a romance, or a great adventure, or anything else which it is not, should be reminded that it is a shameful thing, bringing disgrace not only to the fellow who suffers it, but to his Alma Mater. There is nothing romantic in being "sacked," and the sensible, level-headed fellow will be careful to do nothing which may land him within the grim confines of Nobody's Study!

PONGO PLAYS UP!



(Continued
from page

13.)

himself with a sniff, which expressed his opinion of Manners' idea.

"Well, go it, Manners," said Tom.

"Let's hear it, anyhow," said Monty Lowther. "I really fancy you're barking up the wrong tree this time, old chap, though I admit you were in the right about the Dandy, and we were in the wrong."

"One swallow doesn't make a summer," said Blake. "It's all rot. But let's hear it, all the same."

"You remember Wally told us how he caught the man on the back of the head with a snowball, and he fell against a tree and cut his face?" said Manners.

"I remember," said Tom with a nod.

"James was out of doors at the time, and he came in with a cut face, and a story of having slipped in the lane and knocked his face on a stone."

"A coincidence," said Blake.

"Possibly, but possibly not," said Manners. "We were in D'Arcy's room when James asked to be excused for the rest of the evening. Perhaps he was lying down in his room, as was supposed. But it gave him a chance, at least, of getting out of the house unsuspected; and a little later, as you know, we were in the deer-park, and chased the unknown man there."

Tom Merry nodded.

"It's so," said Monty Lowther. "But it may be coincidence, and it's a bit flimsy, old man."

"I want to put it to the proof," said Manners quietly.

"James will have to go down to the post-office at Easthorpe now. He can take in the deer-park on his way back, if he likes. No reason why he should, unless there's something in my suspicion. I'm going to know—that means, I'm going to walk down to the deer-park now. You fellows can come with me, if you like. If we find Master James there rooting about with a light—"

He paused.

"That isn't all," he went on. "Let's go back to the night of the burglary. You were the last to see the Dandy when he cleared, Tom?"

"Yes," said Tom.

"He left his confederate here to be nailed, and bolted with the bag, with Lord Eastwood's property in it," went on Manners. "Some thousands of pounds worth of stuff, mostly in gold plate. The weight of it must have been pretty considerable."

"Must have been," assented Tom. "With that weight to carry, he had a lot of luck to get clear, with a crowd of us right at his heels."

"But did he carry it away with him?" asked Manners.

"Eh? I suppose he did!"

"Everybody supposes that he did," assented Manners. "But the question that's come into my mind, thinking it over, is this—did he? You saw him on top of the park wall when he was getting over, Tom?"

"I saw him in the moonlight."

"Did you see the bag in his hand then?"

"Well, no. I had only a glimpse of him for a second," said Tom. "He was gone in a twinkling."

"Quite," said Manners. "But the man had had a hard run, he had to get over a high wall, and he was carrying a bag weighing—I don't know how much, but not less than twenty or thirty pounds, I should think. Yet he vanished over that high wall in a twinkling. Doesn't that look as if he had dropped the bag behind him?"

Tom Merry smiled.

"We should jolly well have found it if he'd dropped it," he said. "It was big enough to be seen."

"Fathead! I mean, suppose he had hidden the bag in some safe place in the wood."

"He didn't have much time, we were close after him, and the keepers and servants hallooing on all sides. He

hadn't a minute to look for any safe hiding-place," said Tom.

"And the park has been gone over to-day almost with a microscope," said Blake. "Anything he had left behind must have been found—and nothing was found."

"The search to-day was for anything he might have dropped from the bag," said Manners. "But suppose he jammed the bag itself, say, into a tree, or somewhere or other like that?"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Think it over," said Manners. "He was almost at his last gasp. James, the footman, nearly touched him at one moment, as D'Arcy says. You were close behind him, Tom. He had a high wall to climb to escape, with enemies all round him. I can't help thinking that, if he had stuck to that heavy bag, he would never have got over the wall."

Tom Merry whistled.

"It's possible," he said.

"Might have chucked the bag over first," suggested Blake.

"Not so easy to chuck a heavy bag over a high wall," said Manners. "And it would have been seen."

"And heard," said Lowther.

"That's so," said Tom Merry. "I saw the wall clearly enough in the moonlight, when he clambered over it. Besides, I was after him like a shot, and he ran for it up the lane. If he had had to grope in the bushes on the other side for a fallen bag I should have dropped fairly on him. No, if he took the bag with him, he had it in his hands."

"But—" Blake shrugged his shoulders. "Do you mean to say, Manners, that the thief got clear without his plunder, and that the stuff is in the deer-park all the time?"

"I mean to say that it looks like it," said Manners coolly. "And in that case it is shoved right out of sight into some deep hiding-place—perhaps in a hollow tree, perhaps in a rabbit-burrow—the bag, and all that was in it. If he couldn't get clear with it, as I've figured it out, his idea would be to hide it, and come back later for it when the coast was clear. If that's the case, it's hidden pretty deep, or the search to-day would have turned it up."

"Jolly deep," said Blake with a grin.

"It's possible," said Tom again. "My hat! Wouldn't it be ripping to get the stuff back. Some birthday present for D'Arcy's pater, what? But look here, Manners, the man we chased wasn't the Dandy; he was quite a different build. I saw enough of him to see that—"

"I know that. I saw enough of him, too. He was shorter and more thick-set—more of James' build," said Manners coolly.

"Well, yes," said Tom, after a pause.

"James was in that chase, and was as near to the cracksman as anybody," continued Manners. "What I've thought of is this—that what has come into my head has come into somebody else's—"

"James' jolly old napper?" grinned Blake.

"James!" assented Manners, unheeding the grin. "I've no doubt he saw the Dandy clambering over the fence, as Tom did, and he may actually have noticed that the thief no longer had the bag with him. Or he may have thought it out afterwards, as I have, that the Dandy couldn't have got over the wall, in the time, loaded up with that heavy bag. Inspector Watkins hasn't thought of it, and that's natural enough, for he was not on the spot, and doesn't know how close pressed the Dandy was at the finish. If he had seen as much as you saw, Tom, I think he would have suspected that the Dandy had hidden the bag in the wood, intending to get back to it later, somehow."

"Hem!" murmured Tom.

"Well, that's how I've thought it out," said Manners. "I fancy James has been thinking it out on the same lines, and has come to the same conclusion—and is putting in for the stuff."

"Intending to return it to the owner?" asked Blake.

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid not. His bolting from us doesn't look as if he had a clear conscience—if he was the man we chased, of course. And to-day he has taken part in the search, without finding anything. I fancy that to-day he was jolly careful not to look in places where he thought the bag might be found, with so many witnesses about."

"But—" murmured Tom.

Manners rose from his chair.

"It fits together pretty well, in my mind," he said. "But it's a question of facts, not of theories. I'm going down to the deer-park now. You fellows coming?"

"Oh, we'll come!" said Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors went for their coats. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, returning to join his friends after his interview with his noble pater, met them.

"You fellows goin' out again?" he asked.

"Yes—another look at the deer-park," said Manners.

"Bai Jove!"

"Come along, Gussy," said Blake. "We're going to find something this time, if it's only a mare's nest."

"The fact is, dear boy, I was goin' to wead the newspapah to my Aunt Adelina."

"Go it, then!" said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Good old Gussy!"

And the four juniors left the house, while the dutiful Arthur Augustus proceeded to read to his Aunt Adelina.

CHAPTER 8.

Watched!

"HERE!" said Manners.

He stopped.

Blake pulled his coat collar a little closer, and shivered.

"Why here?" he asked. "It's jolly windy up the lane."

"This is where he will pass—if he comes."

"If!" murmured Blake.

In the dim starlight of the early winter evening, Jack Blake could be seen to smile.

But Tom Merry and Lowther did not smile.

Their minds were in great doubt; but they remembered that they had doubted Manners' discovery of the "Dandy's" real character, until the facts were revealed. Manners had been in the right then; and now his comrades were less inclined to understudy Doubting Thomas.

"Well, we shall soon see," murmured Tom.

"The sooner the better!" grunted Blake. "Lucky for Herries and Dig we didn't drag them out here with us. It's horrid cold!"

"Oh, never mind the cold," said Lowther. "All right if we beat the man we're after."

"If!" said Blake, again.

The four juniors had stopped in the narrow lane which bordered the deer-park, at a spot where a gate gave access. The gate was locked, but it was not difficult to climb; and, in fact, the juniors had once or twice entered the deer-park by clambering over it. The lane led directly up from the village of Easthorpe, and Manners had judged well, for anyone coming from that direction, with the intention of entering the deer-park, would naturally climb over the gate. There were other entrances, but they were at a distance. If James, instead of returning to Eastwood House by the main road, came round by the lane, he was bound to pass the spot where the juniors waited; and if he had the intention of penetrating into the park, this was the likeliest spot. Tom Merry & Co. found plenty of cover in the shadowy hedges; the drawback was that it was very cold and windy. But that could not be helped.

The juniors pulled their coats and mufflers closer, and waited as cheerfully as they could.

They were early on the spot, for it was doubtful whether James could have left the Easthorpe post-office yet, even if he was not delayed there. But too early was better than too late.

There was a heavy tramp in the muddy lane about ten minutes after the juniors had taken up their position in the shadowy hedge.

A light glimmered in the gloom.

"Only a bobby!" murmured Manners.

The Easthorpe constable tramped past without discerning the hidden figures behind the hedge.

His heavy footsteps died out of hearing in the distance; the glimmer of his lantern disappeared in the night.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Blake. "My feet are getting jolly cold!"

"Quiet!" whispered Manners.

"The bobby won't hear—he's gone!"

"Listen!"

"Somebody else coming!" murmured Blake. "Perhaps the village postman, this time."

"Quiet!" breathed Manners.

Blake made a grimace, but he was silent.

Faintly, but audibly in the night, footsteps could be heard coming from the direction of the distant village.

Manners' eyes gleamed as he peered through a gap in the hedge into the dimness of the starlit lane.

His impression was that there was something soft and stealthy in the coming tread; and it was in his mind that the newcomer had watched the constable from a distance, and allowed him to pass on and get clear before approaching the spot.

A figure loomed up.

It stopped at the park gate across the lane, and stood there, looking up and down the snowy, muddy road, and round about, with alert eyes.

Manners' heart beat harder.

At the distance, in the gloom, he could not recognise the figure, only that it was a man in an overcoat. The other three juniors peered at it keenly. There was something

decidedly suspicious in the looks of the shadowy man, halted there by the dark gate, watching and listening.

But Jack Blake suddenly gave a soft chuckle.

"That isn't James, old bean!"

"Quiet!"

"I've seen him before," grinned Blake.

"It's not James," whispered Tom Merry. "I can't make him out, but he's taller than the footman, Manners."

"I tell you I know him," grunted Blake. "It's the giddy photographer!"

"The—the what?"

"The tramping photographer—the Johnny who bagged Gussy this morning as a giddy victim, and took his photograph. Snooks, I think Gussy said his name was. Look, you can see the light on his specs, if you open your eyes, Manners. James doesn't wear specs."

Manners compressed his lips.

"You're sure of the man?" he muttered.

"Quite. It's Snooks, the photographer," chuckled Blake.

"Gussy gave him leave to root about the place. Perhaps he's going to take snaps by moonlight when the moon comes up. Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Lowther grinned.

Manners frowned.

There was a sudden movement on the part of the man standing by the lonely park gate, and they knew that he had heard Blake's chuckle. He came quickly across the lane.

His red nose and ragged moustache and black-rimmed spectacles showed up plainly in the starlight now. He bore not the remotest resemblance to James the footman.

There was no doubt that Manners was disappointed. He had considered the man's approach stealthy, his lurking by the lonely gate suspicious; and the man turned out to be nothing but the travelling photographer who had interviewed the Fourth-Formers that morning. Now that the man had heard them, it was useless to think of concealing their presence, and the juniors moved into the open gap in the hedge.

"Good-evening, Mr. Snooks!" said Blake blandly.

The photographer eyed him, over his spectacles, with keen, searching eyes that glistened strangely.

But his manner was very civil and deferential as he answered.

"Good-evening, sir! I think I have had the honour of meeting you before, sir! You were with Master D'Arcy this morning, sir, were you not, when he kindly gave me an order."

"That's so," said Blake.

"A very cold evening, gentlemen," said Mr. Snooks.

"Horrid!" agreed Blake.

"You're taking photographs of this neighbourhood, Mr. Snooks?" asked Manners. "I'm a bit of a photographer."

"Indeed, sir," said Mr. Snooks. "Only for pleasure, I presume. You are more fortunate than a professional, sir, if I may say so. Possibly, sir, you would allow me to put your name down for a set of the Nature photographs I am taking—the 'Beauties of Hampshire,' sir. I am charging only one guinea for the set of six."

"Oh!" murmured Manners.

"Please do not think that I am thrusting my goods upon you, sir," said Mr. Snooks deprecatingly. "I admit that I am in need of custom—business is not flourishing in my line, sir—but I should be happy to send you the set for your inspection, and you will decide at your leisure whether to accept them. The price of one guinea for a set of six carefully-finished Nature photographs is not excessive."

Blake winked at Tom Merry.

From Blake's point of view, the expedition was a frost, and its only likely result was that Manners would be landed with a guinea set of photographs that he did not want. Certainly that result was not worth the walk from Eastwood House in a wintry wind.

"Can I put your name down, sir?" asked Mr. Snooks, taking out a notebook and pencil in a businesslike way.

"Thanks, no," said Manners. "I can take all the photographs I want with my own camera; thanks all the same."

"Professional work, sir, has some little superiority, as a rule—a rather more artistic finish, perhaps," urged Mr. Snooks. "May I at least send you the set for your inspection, it being understood that you do not purchase them unless you so desire?"

"Thanks, no."

"Well, well," said Mr. Snooks, with a sigh, "I will not urge you, sir, though I am very anxious to do business. I have a landlord in Winchester, sir, who has a heart as hard as the nether millstone, when it comes to a question of rent for a shop. But that does not interest you, gentlemen. I am wrong to mention it."

"Oh, dash it all, let's take a set, and hang them up in the

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study at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "We'll whack it out."

"Let's!" said Lowther.

Mr. Snooks had put away his notebook, but it came out again quickly.

"Sir, I thank you!" he said. "May I have the pleasure of hearing your name, sir—and the address to which I shall send the photographs?"

"Oh, all right," said Manners. "Send them to me—Harry Manners, at St. Jim's, Sussex."

"Very good, sir; thank you sir!"

Mr. Snooks closed his notebook with a snap and looked considerably bucked.

"I think you will be pleased with the set! I really think so!" he said. "I am taking time and trouble about it. I am even now looking out favourable spots for taking my pictures."

"Don't let us delay you," said Manners, glancing up the lane. Manners was afraid every moment of seeing James appear in the distance.

"You are waiting for somebody here, sir?" asked Mr. Snooks.

"Yes," said Manners.

"Sort of a lark, you know," said Blake. "We're waiting for a Johnny to come along, and we don't want him to spot us, see?"

Mr. Snooks smiled.

"I see—I see. Boys will be boys," he said. "What you would call a rag, I suppose—a lark! Well, good-evening, gentlemen, and thank you for allowing me to send you my series of Nature photographs on approval! I think you will like my Beauties of Hampshire when you see them."

And the shabby gentleman raised his shabby hat and passed on and disappeared up the dusky lane.

CHAPTER 9.

Struck Down!

MANNERS stepped back into the cover of the hedge. His comrades followed him, Blake with a slight look of impatience.

Mr. Snooks had disappeared along the lane and his footfalls had died away. Only the moan of the wind in the leafless branches broke the stillness of the evening.

"Are we sticking it out?" asked Blake.

"I am," said Manners briefly. "You can please yourself." Blake grunted.

"It's all rot, you know!" he said.

The Shell fellow made no reply to that.

"We've nearly caught a bobby and quite caught a harmless photographer," grinned Blake. "I wonder what the next catch will be?"

"That talkative ass might have spoiled it all," muttered Manners. "If James had come along while we were speaking to him he would have given up his idea of getting into the deer-park this evening, of course."

"Dear man, James isn't coming along at all," said Blake. "James is going home by the road, like a sensible chap, and most likely he is back at Eastwood House by this time."

"We shall see!" answered Manners, unmoved.

The juniors waited again, and watched the lane.

It was cold, and seemed to be growing colder, and the vigil could not be called a pleasant one. But it was not likely to last much longer; if James, the footman, was coming at all, he could not be long now.

Manners was thinking only of James. He did not bestow a further thought upon the shabby, spectacled Mr. Snooks. That gentleman had quite impressed the juniors with the fact that he was a hard-up, pertinacious photographer—merely that and nothing more. The Shell fellows did not dream for a moment that they had ever seen Mr. Snooks face to face before, and certainly did not think of connecting him in their minds with the Dandy. He had accounted for his presence in the lonely lane that evening, and yet without the air of giving an explanation, and they gave the man no further thought. They little imagined that the man, having found the schoolboys waiting near the lonely gate, engaged upon a rag as he supposed, had abandoned his intention of entering the deer-park at that point, and had gone farther on to find an unobserved entrance.

While Tom Merry & Co. were waiting in the cover of the hedge the disguised cracksmen, at a safe distance, was climbing the high wall of the deer-park, little as they thought of it.

Manners had quite forgotten his existence as he watched the lane towards Easthorpe.

"Hallo, here comes somebody!" murmured Tom Merry at last.

"The postman this time, ten to one!" grinned Blake.

"Shurrup!"

A man in an overcoat came up the lane, and—as the photographer had done—he stopped at the gate of the deer-park. The juniors watched him through the hedge in silence.

They could make out the man's figure—shortish and thick-set—and it recalled the figure of the man they had chased the night before under the old trees. It was likely enough to be the same man, whether it was James, the footman, or not.

They watched him breathlessly.

He stopped near the old gate and looked up and down and across the lane, watchful and listening. As he looked across his face was fully turned to the juniors, and the starlight glimmered on it. They caught their breaths.

For it was the clean-shaven face of James, the footman, that they saw, with the well-remembered bruise on it.

Manners set his teeth hard. James, the footman, was here—coming back to Eastwood House by way of the winding lane, instead of following the direct high road. And he had stopped at the lonely gate, the easiest place for entering the deer-park. Was it his intention to enter there?

That question was soon answered.

James, the footman, satisfied that he was unobserved, turned to the gate and clambered quickly over and disappeared on the other side.

"Oh!" ejaculated Blake.

Blake was taken quite aback.

Manners smiled grimly.

"You fellows recognised him?" he asked.

"Yes, it was James right enough!" said Tom Merry.

"No doubt about that; I know his damaged boko," said Monty Lowther. "It was the Jimmy-bird, and no mistake! And he's gone into the deer-park."

"You were right, Manners, old man!" said Tom, with a deep breath. "James is the man we chased last night, and he's the chap Wally knocked over with the snowball. It's clear enough now."

"Is it?" said Blake. "After all, there's a short cut through the deer-park to get into the gardens at Eastwood House. James may be going home that way."

"Then why should he stop there and watch the road in that slinking way before getting over the gate?" asked Manners quietly.

Blake did not answer that question.

"It's clear enough," said Tom Merry. "James is the man, and he's after something—and there's only one thing he can be after. It's pretty clear that on the night we chased the cracksmen and James nearly got him he saw that the Dandy had left his bag behind, and knows that it's hidden in the deer-park somewhere. And, instead of letting on, he's going after the stuff himself. That's what it looks like."

"Well, it does look a bit like it," admitted Blake. "Are we going after him, you fellows?"

"Of course," said Manners.

Manners led the way across the lane, and the juniors climbed over the gate and dropped into the park.

James, the footman, had vanished into the gloom of the trees, and there was no sign or sound of him.

"Which way, Manners?" murmured Blake. "You're the giddy leader, you know. Lead on!"

Manners led on without a pause.

"I fancy I know where to look for him," he said. "He's been twice seen rooting about this park, and each time it was near the old oak where Wally found Pongo. That looks as if he's got an idea where the Dandy left his bag of loot—somewhere near the old oak. Anyway, let's get on there."

"And if we find him——"

"We shall see what he is up to," said Manners. "He was only spotted at the game last night; but no doubt he's been rooting in the park at every opportunity ever since the night of the burglary. He hasn't found the bag yet——"

"If it's there!" murmured Blake sceptically.

"It's pretty plain that James thinks it's there. He hasn't found it yet; but if he does find it now we shall collar him and it together. If not, we'll collar him and walk him back to Eastwood House and make him give an account of himself to Lord Eastwood. He may know enough to make the police able to find the loot if he's made to explain."

"Hark!" whispered Tom.

There was a sound in the silence of the old park. It was a rustle in the underwood, and it was followed by a sudden, fierce exclamation and the sound of a struggle.

"What the thump——" exclaimed Lowther, in amazement.

The juniors listened, utterly taken aback. At some distance from them in the darkness of the wood two men were struggling fiercely; they could hear the panting breath of the combatants and the crashing sound as they rolled over in a desperate struggle.

Then suddenly, terribly, there came a cry—a fearful cry that rang and echoed through the dim woods.



The man stopped near the gate and looked up and down and across the lane, watchful and listening. As he looked across his face was turned to the juniors and the starlight glimmered on it. It was the clean-shaven face of James, the footman. (See Chapter 9.)

"Good heavens!" panted Tom Merry, his face suddenly white. "What—what was that? Come on—come on!"

He dashed on through the trees.

Silence followed that fearful cry—the sounds of the struggle had ceased.

The four juniors flashed on the light of their electric torches; they were not thinking of concealment now. What had happened was an amazing mystery to them. But they knew that a murderous blow had been struck by some unknown hand, and the terrible cry of the injured man still rang in their startled ears.

Stumbling and tripping over roots and snow, the St. Jim's juniors dashed breathlessly on, flashing their lights before them as they ran.

The old oak in the heart of the wood loomed up before their eyes, ghostly in the flashing light of the torches. A dim figure stood close by the trunk, and they heard a muttered imprecation, and it vanished into the gloom of the trees before they had fairly sighted it.

The juniors scarcely heeded it.

For Tom Merry, as he ran, stumbled and halted, with a cry. He was stumbling over a man's body that lay stretched in the frozen grass.

"Stop!" he panted. "Here—"

The shadowy figure under the oak had disappeared. The St. Jim's juniors gathered about the fallen man; the light was turned on a still, white face that was streaked with blood.

It was James, the footman, and he was insensible—stunned by a terrible blow that had been struck as he struggled with his unknown adversary. His face looked up lifelessly at the juniors, the ghastly white more ghastly still against the crimson streaks of the blood that ran down from under the hair.

CHAPTER 10.

Mysterious!

"GOOD heavens!" breathed Tom Merry.

"It's James—"

"Stunned!" said Manners, bending over the senseless man. "Stunned; no worse than that, I believe! But who—what—"

He stared round in the shadows.

"I had a glimpse of another man here," said Lowther.

"He was close up under the oak, but he's gone—"

"I saw him," said Tom. "Just a shadow! It was the chap that struck James down, of course. But who—"

"Who?" said Manners quietly. "Who but the cracksmen—the Dandy? He was here for the plunder he left behind that night—and by a coincidence he was here when James arrived."

"Oh!"

"Must have been," said Lowther after a pause. "Nobody else would want to knock James on the head, I suppose. But that looks as if we're very near the spot where the Dandy left the stuff."

"I think we are."

The juniors looked round uneasily into the dark woods. The shadowy figure under the oak had fled from the advancing footsteps and flashing lights. But it was not a comfortable thought that the desperate cracksmen was at hand. If he was armed—and doubtless the ruffian was armed—he was likely enough to return if he discovered that the newcomers were only the schoolboys, and then—

"We've got to get help here for James," said Tom Merry quickly in a low voice. "We can't carry him the distance to the house; and he must be taken care of, whatever his game here may have been. You cut off to the house, Blake,

and get help—top speed, old man. We'll stick together, in case that scoundrel comes back."

Blake hesitated.

"If it's the Dandy, and he comes back, you'll want me," he said.

"We've got to have help," answered Tom. "Cut off and get help here as fast as you can while we look after James. Hook it, old man!"

Blake was reluctant to go, but it was evident that there was nothing else to be done. To carry the footman a mile or more through the darkness by slippery paths was impracticable, and he could scarcely be abandoned in the frozen wood. And the juniors were practically certain by this time that Manners' theory was well founded—that the hard-pressed Dandy had left his plunder in the wood on the night of the robbery, and that now he had come secretly back for it—and they were not prepared to leave the scoundrel a clear field. If he had already taken it from its hiding-place, and was gone with it, it could not be helped; but if it still remained where it had been hidden the Terrible Three were determined that the Dandy should not seize it without reckoning with them.

Jack Blake hurried away in the direction of Eastwood House, running as fast as the darkness and slippery snow allowed, and he disappeared in the gloom of the wood.

Manners was on his knees by the side of the insensible footman. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther, grasping their sticks in their right hands, the electric torches in their left, kept watch.

"He's had a jolly hard knock!" said Manners. "I can make a bandage with some handkerchiefs and a muffler—that's all we can do at present. He would have done better, after all, to tell Lord Eastwood all he knew—and help to get the loot back for its owner. He hasn't done himself much good, poor wretch."

"Honesty is the best policy," said Lowther. "But let's do all we can for him, even if he was intending to rob his master."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Merry.

"Leave him to me," said Manners. "You fellows keep an eye open for that scoundrel, in case he shows up again."

"You bet!"

Manners of the Shell proceeded to bind up the footman's injury. James was still unconscious, and did not move under his hands. Manners fixed his electric torch upon a low branch, to show him light, and the beam showed up the footman's ghastly face. It showed, at last, his eyelids twitching, and his lips quivering, and there came a low mumbling moan from the unconscious man.

"He's coming to," said Manners.

James' eyes opened.

He stared wildly at Manners of the Shell, and his wild glance wandered to Tom Merry and Lowther. He shuddered.

"You're safe now, my man," said Manners. "You're all right."

James' hand went feebly to his head.

"Keep still," said Manners. "We've sent for help—you'll be carried to Eastwood House, and a doctor will be sent for, as soon as help comes. Keep quiet now."

James groaned.

"Is he—is he gone?"

"The man who struck you down?"

"Yes, sir!" breathed James.

"He's gone!"

"Did he—did he—" James broke off with a groan. "Did you see whether—whether he had anything—a bag—" He broke off again.

Manners smiled grimly.

"We saw him only for a second," he answered. "We saw nothing of a bag. Was it the Dandy?"

"The Dandy? The cracksmen, sir! No."

Manners shook his head. He was assured that the footman's assailant was the Dandy, seeking his plunder in the deer-park.

"What was the man like, James?" asked Tom Merry. "You must have seen him, as you struggled with him."

"Yes, sir," muttered James. "He looked like a middle-aged man, in spectacles. He had a light, an I saw him before he shut it off. He sprang at me like a tiger, and we fought—and then he must have stunned me, I think!"

James groaned.

"He stunned you," said Manners. "Whatever he looked like, I'm pretty certain that it was the Dandy, and you interrupted him in looking for the plunder he left here on the night of the robbery."

James started violently. There was something like terror in his eyes as he looked at Manners.

"You—you knew!" he stammered.

"I guessed," said Manners quietly. "You may as well own up, James—we are here because we were watching you."

"Watching me!" stammered James.

"Yes; I sent you to the post-office to give you a chance of sneaking into the deer-park—and you did it," said Manners. "You came straight to this spot—you knew that the Dandy had left his loot somewhere about here. You've been searching in this glade—twice to our knowledge before to-night—and I dare say half a dozen times before that. You were close behind the Dandy the night he escaped with Lord Eastwood's gold plate—and you saw that he did not succeed in getting clear with the bag of plunder. Isn't that so?"

James gave a groan.

"Yes, sir, I own up," he said faintly. "I—I saw that much, on that night—I saw him clamber over the park wall, and he had got his bag with him then. I knew he must have hidden it here. I—I have been searching since, as you say, sir—I knew he had got rid of it somewhere about this glade, and I have searched here. But I never found it."

"And what did you intend to do with it if you found it?" asked Manners grimly.

The footman's white face flushed.

"I should have taken it back to Lord Eastwood, sir. There is a reward of £500 for the recovery of the gold plate, and it was my intention to claim it. That—that is why I kept secret what I knew, and—and why I ran when I was seen here, first by Master Wally and his friends, and then by you young gentlemen. I—I swear, sir, I meant no worse than that. I would not have robbed his lordship."

"The stuff might have been recovered before this, if you'd told Lord Eastwood what you knew," said Tom Merry.

"I—I know, sir!" muttered James. "But I swear that I—I was thinking of nothing more than the reward."

The juniors did not answer that. Whether it was the truth they had no means of judging. Whether James had planned only to find the lost property, and claim the reward, or whether he had fallen to the temptation to enrich himself at his master's expense—in either case he had failed, and had paid dearly for his surreptitious conduct.

"You came on the man here, and he attacked you?" asked Manners, after a pause.

"Yes, sir—a shabby man in spectacles—"

"What was he doing?"

"He was close up under the oak, sir. I did not see what he was doing. But I—I suppose he was after the cracksmen's plunder, sir. He attacked me like a tiger. He had something in his hand—I think he dropped it when he closed with me."

Tom Merry moved nearer to the old, gnarled oak, and flashed his light about the ground. In the frozen grass lay a long flexible cane, with an iron hook at the end of it, securely fastened on with a strong cord.

Tom picked it up in wonder.

"That belonged to the man, I suppose," he said. "What on earth could he have wanted it for?"

Manners looked at it.

"That was to reach something out of the reach of his hand," he said. "In the branches of the tree, perhaps, or in some deep gully. He had this hook in his pocket, and tied it on to the end of the stick. But where—"

"Look here," said Monty Lowther.

He picked up a leather bag at a little distance.

It was empty.

But the catch was still fastened; the side of the bag was yawning open in a wide gash, and the traces of a dog's teeth were clearly visible on the leather.

The Terrible Three gazed at it.

"That looks like the bag the cracksmen had on the night of the robbery," said Tom Merry. "It's about the same size, at all events. It was crammed with loot when he cleared with it. But where has it come from now? It was not here when we searched the park to-day."

"And where's what was in it?" asked Lowther.

Tom examined the bag closely. He was quite puzzled and mystified.

"A dog has been at this," he said. "You can see that the bag has been gnawed right through the side—perhaps Pongo came on it when he was lost in this wood. It beats me."

It was perplexing enough.

Up to a certain point, the juniors could picture what had happened. James the footman had evidently come on the unknown man—undoubtedly the Dandy in some disguise—at the very moment when the cracksmen was recovering the plunder he had hidden on the night of the robbery.

The hooked stick was a proof that the bag had been thrust into some deep recess, out of reach of an extended arm—which was no doubt the reason why the search in the park had failed to reveal it.

With that peculiar implement, the cracksmen had hooked up the leather bag from its hiding-place.

Had he found it empty as it now was? The side had been



The St. Jim's juniors gathered about the fallen man; the light was turned on a still white face that was streaked with blood. It was James, the footman, and he was insensible. "Good heavens!" breathed Tom Merry. (See Chapter 9.)

deeply torn by a dog's teeth—it was ripped right open. It seemed scarcely possible that it could have held anything with the side gaping wide open—and in that case, the contents must have streamed out as the cracksman dragged the bag with the hooked stick.

But where?

The flashing lights, turned in all directions, revealed no sign of gold plate—of a single article that had been stolen from the safe at Eastwood House.

Had the rascal had time to gather up the loot ere he fled? It seemed unlikely—and, indeed, the objects were so bulky, that he could scarcely have carried them off without a bag or a sack for the purpose.

"It beats me," said Tom Merry at last. "It looks as if a dog—Pongo, very likely—came on this bag wherever it was hidden—and ripped it up with his teeth—you know what a terror Pongo is for ripping things. If the bag was out of the man's reach—and if the things tumbled out of it—they may be still there—in some deep hole, perhaps—"

"It looks like it," said Manners. "The rotter was interrupted, and he can't have had time to get clear with the stuff, if it had to be hooked piece by piece out of a deep hole. It might take him all night."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"What a disappointment for the jolly old cracksman! He will have to come back next time with a fishing-net instead of a hooked stick."

The juniors laughed.

"Hallo! Here comes—"

Tom Merry & Co. spun round at the sound of footsteps. But it was only Jack Blake, and after him came Herries and Digby and D'Arcy, and Lord Eastwood and three or four menservants of Eastwood House, and Joyce, the keeper, Wally of the Third, and Manners minor and Frank Levison brought up the rear, with the cheery Pongo frisking round his master's legs.

"You fellows all wight?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"Right as rain!" said Tom Merry cheerily.

"That rotter hasn't turned up again, then?" asked Blake.

"No."

"Bai Jove! Keep that beastly dog away from a fellow's leg, Wally!" howled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"Wally, you young wuffian—"

"Pongo! Pongo!"

"Bai Jove, you know, I am weally fed-up with that feahful mongwel, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally considah, you know, that the howwid bwute ought to be ddowned, you know. He has not the slightest respect for a fellow's twousahs."

"My dear boys," said Lord Eastwood, "Blake has told me, on the way here, what has happened. Thomas, Williams, take up James at once, and help him to the house."

James was carried away through the trees, and then Lord Eastwood listened to what the Terrible Three had to tell him, and examined curiously the gauged bag and the hooked stick.

"These must be handed over to the police at once," he said. "Come—"

"Hold on!" said Wally of the Third.

CHAPTER 11.

Good Old Pongo!

LORD EASTWOOD gave his youngest son a severe glance.

But Wally of the Third was not abashed.

His cheeky face was very cheery in expression. For some reason, Wally seemed to be considerably "bucked." He smiled at his father.

"It's all right, dad," he said. "I've got something to say before we clear off from here."

"Walter!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Don't you begin, Gus," implored Wally. "Life's too short, old man. Give your chin a rest. Father, will you send Joyce to fetch an axe?"

"An axe!" repeated Lord Eastwood. "For what reason, Walter?"

Wally had taken the hooked stick in his hand. He tapped the gnarled trunk of the ancient oak with it.

"To cut into this trunk," he said.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"There's a hollow in the trunk, dad," said Wally cheerily, "and I jolly well believe that the gold pots and things are at the bottom of it!"

Lord Eastwood started.

"Walter! Why should you think so?"

Wally of the Third grinned.

"Listen!" he said.

He grasped the stick and thrust it the full length of his arm into the cavity in the old oak.

From the unseen depths of the cavity there came a distinct clink of metal as Wally raked with the stick.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Lord Eastwood.

"Bai Jove!"

Reggie Manners gave a yell.

"That's it! In Pongo's den all the time! Oh, my only Aunt Sempronia!"

"Why, that's what we heard when we found Pongo last night!" exclaimed Frank Levison, in great excitement. "You thought Pongo had been taking some rubbish to his den, Wally?"

D'Arcy minor chuckled.

"Yes, old ass. But now I know the giddy loot was hidden about here, I think something else—see?"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation. His eyes were gleaming with excitement now.

"It's jolly likely!" he exclaimed. "That rotter hooked up the bag from under the hollow tree, and what had been in it was left there, owing to old Pongo gnawing the bag."

"Pongo!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove!"

"Good old Pongo!" chuckled Blake.

Lord Eastwood looked puzzled.

"I do not quite understand, Walter," he said. "Have you any reason to suppose that your dog has been in that hollow?"

"Just a few, dad," grinned Wally. "That's Pongo's den when he's away from home—that's where we found him last night. Gussy sat on him and he bolted, and we came here to look for him. And we heard something clink when the old chap moved, and I thought it was some rubbish he had gathered up—he takes all sorts of things to his den, you know. But now—"

"It's pretty certain, sir," said Manners. "It was clear that the Dandy shoved his bag of loot into some deep place, and came here to-night with this hooked stick to get it out. He got out the bag—and nothing more, because Pongo had been at work on it. We shall find the plunder at the bottom of that hole."

"Look!" shouted Wally.

The scamp of the Third was groping in the deep cavity with the hooked stick. He drew it out, and there was a gleam of gold in the light of the electric torches. The hook had caught on the handle of a massive gold tankard and drawn it up.

"That is your property, sir," said Manners.

Lord Eastwood drew a deep breath.

"Yes. There is no further doubt. Joyce, fetch an axe at once—as quickly as you can."

"Yes, my lord."

The keeper hurried away.

While he was gone Wally fished industriously in the deep, narrow hollow that extended far under the old oak. Three

or four more objects came to light and were laid on the grass. And, although the other objects offered no hold for the hooked stick, and could not be pulled up, it was clear that they were there. The cracksman's loot had been found!

Joyce came hurrying back, and the party stood clear while he wielded the axe on the roots of the old oak.

The splinters flew fast, and the cavity in the old wood was rapidly widened.

The juniors stood looking on with deep interest, and Pongo frisked and barked unchecked. Pongo was a privileged dog now. Pongo had had a chief part in the tracing of the cracksman's loot, and even Arthur Augustus had no word of chiding for the mongrel, little respect as Pongo paid to a fellow's trousers.

Joyce laid down the axe at last. The old wood had been hacked away round the narrow cavity, leaving a wide opening.

The rest was easy. One by one the articles were reached and handed out, gleaming and shining in the light—one by one, till every one was there, the whole lot of the loot that had been missing since the night of the robbery at Eastwood House.

Lord Eastwood's face wore an expression of great satisfaction.

"Everything has been recovered now," he said. "I owe this chiefly to your guests, Arthur, and not least, I think, to Walter's dog. Let us return to the house."

And a very cheery party set out for Eastwood House, and ere long the cracksman's plunder was secure in Lord Eastwood's safe again.

Tom Merry & Co. were in high feather that evening.

Tom and Lowther held the opinion that Manners of the Shell was chiefly responsible for the recovery of the cracksman's loot; while Wally of the Third maintained that it was chiefly Pongo's doing.

The only fly in the ointment, as Blake expressed it, was that the cracksman himself had got away.

From the description given by James of the man he had struggled with—and certain circumstances remembered by the Terrible Three—it became fairly clear that Mr. Snooks, the photographer, was a man who was very much wanted, and Inspector Watkins of Easthorpe was very anxious to get into touch with Mr. Snooks.

But Mr. Snooks was no longer to be found.

Arthur Augustus never received the photograph for which he had paid five shillings, and Manners never saw anything of that series of photographs entitled the "Beauties of Hampshire." Inquiries at Winchester failed to reveal any such establishment as Snooks' Artistic Photographic Studios. In a word, it was clear that Mr. Snooks, the photographer, was no other than the Dandy, in a cunning disguise, who had returned to seek for the loot he had been forced to abandon on the night of the robbery, and who had very nearly succeeded in his object. By a curious chain of circumstances—in which James, the footman, Manners of the Shell, and Pongo had played their parts—the cracksman had been disappointed, and the Eastwood plate had returned to where it belonged. Undoubtedly the cracksman knew as much. It was possible, indeed, that he had lurked in the wood and witnessed the recovery of the treasure from the hollow beneath the old oak. He had fled, and he was not seen again in the neighbourhood of Eastwood House.

But the St. Jim's juniors gave him little thought.

"Let the wottah go," said Arthur Augustus. "The police will have him 'soona' or 'latah, anyhow. I have been thinkin', deah boys, that the Head ought to let us have an extra week heah, as it turns out so vevy fortunate that we were heah at all, you know; but I suppose it is no use askin' the Head—what?"

"Probably not!" chuckled Blake.

"By the way, have you fellows seen my hat? I laid it down a minute ago."

"I saw you," said Tom Merry, laughing. "I think Pongo saw you, too."

"What! Wilkinson, have you seen my hat?"

"Yes, sir. It is out on the terrace, sir. Master Walter's dog is eating it, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy dashed to the rescue of his hat. It did not look very much like a hat when he recovered it, and it was very fortunate for Pongo that he was, for the present, a privileged dog.

THE END.

(There will be another splendid long complete story of your old favourites, Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "THE ST. JIM'S TREASURE QUEST!" by Martin Clifford. As next week's GEM will be a bumper one, make sure you order it WELL IN ADVANCE!)

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NOT FORGOTTEN!
And Dick is a fellow of his word!

Young Dick Hastie has climbed from the bottom of the ladder to the top. Now he's at the top, Dick remembers that he swore to give his arch-enemy Ben Travers a hiding.



A LEADER OF THE LEAGUE!

By SYDNEY HORLER.

The concluding chapters of this magnificent football story,

made, Burleigh, I'll not give you into the charge of the police at the next station," he said.

The former centre-half was only too eager to obtain his freedom on such terms. He wrote rapidly at Hastie's dictation, and signed the statement as required.

"Now clear out! If I see you again it will mean a term of imprisonment for you!" were Dick's final words.

As Tunney had done before him, Burleigh slunk away.

The Newcomer!

BACK, back, until finally Dick's assailant made a choking noise between his hands.

"Who are you, you hound?" inquired Hastie. "Wait until we're out of this confounded tunnel!"

The words seemed to frighten the other, and, wriggling clear, he bolted away. But in the darkness every step was a hazard; instead of finding the open door, he bumped his head against the window of the compartment.

An oath gave him away. Dick was able to recognise the voice.

"Burleigh!" he muttered. "I might have known it!"

At this moment the compartment became flooded with light.

Dick's guess had been correct. The man stretched on the seat in front of him, looking with terror-stricken eyes, was the former centre-half of Springdale Albion. His desperate attempt had failed; and he knew that he could not expect any mercy from the youth who had overcome him. All the fight had left him. Now that the drink with which he had primed himself for this deed had lost its effect, he was revealed as a whimpering, shivering coward.

Dick made no comment for some moments. He was trying to sum the man up; trying to understand what motive Burleigh could have had in that attempted murder.

At length he said:

"This is the second time I have been attacked, Burleigh. The first time, I understand, it was at the instigation of Samuel Simister. This time, unless I am very much mistaken, Benjamin Travers inspired the thought. Is that right, you cur?"

Burleigh whimpered.

"I was hard up," he said; "and Travers offered me fifty quid to get you out of the country."

Standing before the door, Hastie produced a fountain-pen and a piece of paper.

"On condition that you sign the statement you have just

Middleham was the home of Lulgate United, a First Division team, that certainly had a very great conceit of itself. Many honours had come to Lulgate in the course of time, and these had been deservedly won, but the general impression in the English football world was that Lulgate were a bit above themselves. Still, they were a side of high renown. In wealth, club status and playing strength they represented the best that the Midlands could produce, and therefore it was only fitting that this important match should be played on their really magnificent ground.

Carrying his bag, Dick Hastie walked into the dressing-room allotted to the players representing the Possibles at two o'clock the following afternoon. As was only natural, he had a quivering of the nerves. This match meant a great deal to him. It meant that he was either to justify his comrades' good opinion of his play, or to fail them in the hour of trial. It was a tremendous test which awaited him after but a few weeks in first-class football. Every man down to play in the match that afternoon was a highly skilled specialist, a master craftsman in his own position. He himself would be playing against England's right-half, a man who had six International caps to his credit, and was one of the football wonders of the age. Entering alone the dressing-room which hummed with talk, it was not surprising that for a moment he felt himself to be almost overwhelmed.

But this feeling did not last long. The brief attack of nerves passed; a stiffening came. What roused his spirit to fighting pitch was the realisation that in honouring him that day the English International Selection Committee had really honoured the club he represented. It had been many a long day since a player from Springdale Albion had received such a guerdon. Scarcely a newspaper in the land but what had commented upon this fact. He was carrying the honour of a team which had risen Phoenix-like from the ashes of its old self, and the thought was as stimulating as a pat on the back.

Pushing the door open, he entered the room. Entered, to be stared at by a number of quizzing eyes. Most of the Possibles had already started to change when Dick entered the room. Many of these men knew each other fairly

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

It has been an uphill fight for Dick Hastie, son of the absconding solicitor, Robert Hastie, but the brilliant young footballer has acquitted himself well. By sheer grit he has won his way to the front in Springdale footer, and, to cap his triumph, he has been selected to play in the forthcoming International trial. But Benjamin Travers—one-time managing-director of the Springdale Albion, who has sworn to get even with the lad who has unmasked his rascality—engages a bully named Burleigh to kidnap Hastie on the eve of the great trial which is to be staged at Middleham.

Seated in an empty carriage, Dick is so absorbed in his thoughts that he does not notice a malicious face peering at him from the corridor. But barely has the train plunged into a long tunnel when the light unaccountably falls, and Burleigh springs upon him. In a moment the two are at grips, and Dick, exerting himself to the uttermost, catches his assailant by the throat!

(Now read on.)

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intimately, having met on and off the football field on several occasions. The majority of them were First Division men—Big Leaguers. Dick felt that they were regarding him as though he had strayed by mistake into the room, and the first question directed at him supported this idea.

"Want anything?" asked a man, pulling on a royal blue jersey.

The reply came crisply:

"My name's Hastie," said Dick, and in these words he gave the reply to all those questioning stares.

"Hastie?" The questioner seemed puzzled. "Hastie? Who do you play for when you're at home?"

The words nettled Dick, and his answer came swiftly:

"Springdale Albion," he said.

The man winked at his companions.

"Must be one of those Boy Scout teams," he said. And the room howled with laughter.

Too late, Dick realised that they had been purposely baiting him. He resolved now to take no further notice of any sneers and to leave unanswered any questions. Going to a corner, he leisurely took off his overcoat and started to change.

Seeing the newcomer so occupied, the others left him alone.

Dick, on his part, had plenty to think about. Being of a somewhat impressionable nature, he drank in all the details behind the scenes which accompany every big match. He noticed men, whom he took to be prominent football officials, greeting each other, he listened to scraps of talk between newspaper reporters and players all around him. He noted all the smallest details about his colleagues, even to the way they tied their bootlaces—and then sat down waiting for the signal. At last this came, the referee poking his head around the door and saying:

"All out, boys!"

Dick sprang up. Now the time had come! Now he would show these fellows that he belonged to a team worthy of being represented there that day.

As he left the dressing-room he heard the first mighty outburst of the expectant football crowd.

The Proof.

THE first thing Dick had to do upon entering the field was to take his place in the Possibles' team for the benefit of the Press photographers.

The latter were all eagerly inquiring "Which is Hastie?" and many of them made special "shots" of the youngest player on view that day.

Hastie had no mind for any of these trappings and frills, however. His eyes were fixed on the centre of the field, and his whole thought was for the start of the game.

As he lined up in his usual position of inside-left, the stealthy attack of nerves returned. For one thing, the size of the crowd was awesome. He had never seen such a dense mass of humanity as thronged the great popular bank opposite the grandstand, which also was filled to overflowing.

Watching him, the centre-forward, a player with a kindly expression on his somewhat grim face, leaned across.

"First time out in a big game, kid?" he asked. "Never mind; directly the ball starts rolling you'll forget you're nervous! Keep close to me. I'll do what I can for you!"

Barely was there time for Dick to reply to this encouragement before the whistle blew and the game had started.

What Dick Hastie did in that trial match became written in the records, and there is no need for a lengthy description here. Suffice it to say that with the first flick of his boot he proved himself to that tremendous football gathering to be a player of really outstanding skill. Indeed, before the match had been many minutes in progress, the crowd were asking questions about the slimly-built Possibles' inside-left.

In ball control, deft manœuvring, masterly body swerve, and in intelligent anticipation of the run of the game, the youngest player on the field stood out as the most arresting figure. Twice during the first five minutes he initiated an attack. He had for his partner that day Evans, a human whippet, who responded gallantly to every call his inside man made upon him. Twice Dick sent Evans away in masterly style, and twice, as a result of the attack which was set up, the Probables' goal had a very narrow escape. In the first instance, the Possibles' inside-right volleyed the ball a bare six inches over the bar, and in the second attempt the Probables' goalkeeper was forced to concede a corner.

This was cleared, but the quality of Hastie, about whom everybody was now talking, had been proved. Here, said the critics in the Press-box, was an England player in the making, and every subsequent move that Hastie made was watched with the deepest interest.

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The personal triumph which Dick proceeded to build up during the first half increased as the minutes went by. Of all the players on the field he, because of his youth, was the most enthusiastic; and, being enthusiastic, he never relaxed, for, in addition to the natural ambition to do well, he never allowed himself to forget that he was playing as the representative that day of Springdale Albion. Subconsciously he was back in the old Albion dressing-room being fussed over by Andy Anderson, and looked at with approval by David Martin. He could not let those good friends of his down.

After the first time he touched the ball he realised the truth of what his centre-forward had told him. Once the game had started, he forgot his nerves; he had no time for nerves, there was so much work to be done.

And one additional fact gave him tremendous confidence. He had not known it before, but he found that, unlike many other famous club players, he had the right temperament for a big occasion. The volleying cheers of the crowd stimulated, but they did not bewilder him. Something else he found, too. That was that in higher company the better became his game. The subtle skill that his comrades and opponents showed brought out the best that was in him. It was a wonderful revelation to Hastie to realise how good a footballer he really was.

Naturally he made mistakes—what player does not?—but these were not allowed to count by the critics. Within twenty minutes the crowd were shouting his name, and within that same space of time the reporters had noted the fact that a new football star had been born.

What does it matter who won the game? For those who have a mania for figures and records, let it be said that the Possibles ran out victors by four goals to three.

What really counts for the purpose of this story, is that Dick Hastie scored two of the Possibles' goals, and had a foot in each of the others.

He left the field to uproarious cheers, conscious that he had done far better than he could have anticipated.

Arriving home that night, Dick found another telegram awaiting him.

"Be with you within a week. Tell Sybil.—All love,
"DAD."

Looking at the message again, Dick discovered that it had been wireless from the s.s. Trevonia, then steaming in mid-Atlantic.

Home within a week! He could not rest in his rooms, but had to report the good news immediately to David Martin.

The latter received him more warmly than usual.

"Now that your father is coming back, Dick," he said, "we shall have to hunt up the mystery about his disappearance. Perhaps he will be reluctant to tell us himself; but—"

"When I find the man who did dad that dirty turn I'm going to give him the hiding of his life!" interrupted the footballer. "I can't help thinking that Benjamin Travers and Samuel Simister had some hand in father's leaving the town. What it was of course I don't know; but wait until I do know!"

In just under a week's time Dick was to learn the full circumstances of his father's curious action.

Another telegram came, and Dick was at the station to meet the father he had never expected to see again.

Leaning out of a carriage window was Robert Hastie.

"Dick!" he cried. And then: "My boy! My dear boy!" Dick Hastie took one swift glance at the man who had addressed him, and then fairly pulled him out of the carriage.

"Dad!" he said in reply. "Good old dad! I knew everything would come right at last!"

Human emotion is too sacred a thing to be paraded before the many-eyed public, and David Martin, who had accompanied his young friend to the station, rose to the occasion by putting father and son into a taxicab and telling the driver to take them to his own address.

"I wish you had let me know exactly when you arrived at Liverpool, dad," said Dick. "I should dearly liked to have met the boat."

Robert Hastie smiled slowly. He had looked a haggard man until greeted by his son, but now a faint flush was in his cheeks and an onlooker would have said that it would not be long before he would be his old self again.

"My dear boy," he now said, "it was a whim of mine to return to Springdale as quietly as I left it. I wanted to come back as silently as I had gone away."

This was a somewhat perplexing remark for Dick to hear, and he did not make any comment at the moment. Sufficient



"Want anything?" asked a man, pulling on a royal blue jersey, as Dick walked into the dressing-room. The reply came crisply: "My name's Hastie!" said Dick. "Hastie?" The questioner seemed puzzled. "Who do you play for?" "Springdale Albion!" The man winked at his companions. "Must be one of those Boy Scout teams," he said. (See page 24.)

for him was the fact that his father had returned to him. His dad would make his own explanation in due time, no doubt.

After dinner that night Robert Hastie told his story.

"The two worst enemies that any man could have I found in this town," he said. "Their names were Samuel Simister and Benjamin Travers." Pausing for a moment, during which David Martin and Dick exchanged significant glances, the wanderer resumed: "The biggest scoundrel was Travers. By means into which I need not enter now, this man obtained a hold over me. I had done a foolish thing, but I had done it for the best. It was something to do with my profession, and if the Law Society had only got to know I should have been a ruined man. Although I don't wish to enter into full details now, I trust that both you, my boy, and you, Martin, my very dear friend, will have sufficient faith to know that I am speaking the truth; and that, although this unprofessional conduct of mine might have landed me in very deep trouble, yet what I did I did according to the bidding of my heart at the time. Had I not done so a certain man, who to the best of my belief is now striving to live down his past, would have been rotting in gaol.

"Some time ago I incurred the animosity of Samuel Simister in a police-court case, and through Simister I got to know Travers. This man, who is a human vulture, batted on the knowledge that I had a secret. He did his best to ruin me—and almost succeeded."

"But the money, Robert?" inquired David Martin.

Robert Hastie smiled steadily.

"I never stole that money, Martin, although technically I handled what really was not mine. The truth was, and I have no shame in telling you now, that I had been speculating, with the idea of making my boy Dick's future secure; but things went wrong. Temporarily, I lost my head, and I used money which did not belong to me. But, thank God," the speaker went on fervently, "Providence was watching over my poor efforts, and the very shares which I thought would mean my ruin proved my salvation!

"My reason in leaving Springdale so quickly was to go to Canada to ascertain the truth about some mines. The shares in this mine directly I bought them had fallen to practically nothing. Once I arrived on the spot, however, the prospects in this newly-formed company improved miraculously. And now I am tired. Let it suffice for to-night that, as you know, all the money which I had 'borrowed' has been paid back, and that I am thankful to say I can now look my fellow men straight in the face."

Dick Keeps His Promise!

ONCE again Benjamin Travers was alone with his thoughts, consequently he was in a vile mood. A hastily-written letter just received from Burleigh had informed him that the centre-forward's attack on Dick Hastie had failed.

"The blundering fool!" commented Travers. He did not trouble about having been the means of Burleigh leaving the country. He did not waste a moment in reflecting that he might have caused the former centre-forward to stand a trial for murder. He merely remembered that his own plans had gone astray; for that was the nature of the beast.

Suddenly the telephone rang. He lurched towards it and took off the receiver.

"What?" he screamed, at the end of another minute. "You must be talking through your hat, Sam! How can the fellow be back in Springdale? He wouldn't dare!"

Scarcely had he hung the receiver up before there was a loud ringing at the door.

A moment later a youth whom he had every reason to fear rushed into the room.

"I've come to keep a promise—and to make a settlement, Travers!" commenced Dick Hastie. "My father has just told me the reason he was forced to leave Springdale some time ago. I don't think any more words are necessary between us, except that you can prepare to receive the hiding of your life!"

Benjamin Travers, his face white with fear, was about to call for help when, with a quick stride forward, the visitor smashed his clenched fist against the quivering jaw of the older man. Travers went down in a heap—and remained down.

"Get up!" ordered Dick.

But Benjamin Travers knew better than to obey the order. On hands and knees, he endeavoured to reach the door and escape that way; but in this he was foiled, for, reaching down, Dick caught him by the collar and pulled him to his feet.

"It's rather contemptible to take it out of such a coward as you, Travers; but you deserve it, and you're going to get it!"

Once more Benjamin Travers crashed to the floor, and this time there was no sign of consciousness. The blow Dick had launched at him was of such a terrific nature that,

landing on the jaw, it had knocked all life out of the renegade ex-chairman of Springdale Albion.

His mission done, Dick walked to the door, flung it open, and left the house.

The ground of Springdale Albion was packed almost to suffocation. A tense atmosphere hung round the enclosure. This was the day of days. Some months had passed since the events narrated in the previous pages, and now the first Saturday in May had been reached. It was a momentous afternoon. Upon the result of the game with Daventry United depended whether Springdale Albion, the team that had risen from the depths of despair, should gain promotion to the Second Division of the League.

Whilst there was a feeling of quiet confidence in the Springdale team, it was recognised that a stiff task confronted the side. Daventry, whilst having no chance of gaining promotion themselves, had made a boast that they would see that Springdale Albion was frustrated. A team of stern defenders, the opposition was to be feared.

Straight from the kick-off the Albion centre-forward lunged out well to the right, and here the home inside-right, trapping the ball with cunning skill, started a raid straight away. He made wonderful progress until, with three men blocking the way, he turned in his tracks and slung the ball back into the centre. With a wonderful leap, Dick Hastie got to the ball and nodded it to his partner.

Bob Layton was waiting. Without any hesitation, he shot straight and true for goal. The Daventry custodian, leaping to the right, was just in time to turn that danger-laden ball over the bar.

Amid a tense silence the corner-kick was taken. The ball, truly placed, hovered over the Daventry goal-mouth, before falling plump into the midst of a number of struggling players. The struggle was fierce until, with a great punch, the visiting goalkeeper cleared his lines, and the left-back

frustrated the hopes of the home team for the time being by kicking into touch.

But Springdale would not be denied. From the throw-in, the outside-right secured again, and like a meteor flashed down the touch-line. Harassed by Harvey, the Daventry left-back, he was not able to swerve in and centre; but, gaily mocking the burly defender, who looked big enough to eat him, he sped on. Keeness was the keynote of this young player's work. Never faltering, he reached the goal line at the instant that the ball seemed to be going out of play, and swung his right foot.

It was a marvellous centre. The ball came over as squarely as though it had been shot from a gun, and almost as fiercely.

Right across the goalmouth it hurtled, to find a resting-place at the foot of the home centre-forward, who had raced up to meet the centre. Getting it under instant subjection, this player foiled one opponent, and then passed to his inside-left.

"Dick!" now rose the cry from all parts of the ground. Hastie, the extremely popular captain of the home team, had already scored twenty-five goals that season, proving himself to be the possessor of a wonderful left foot. All hopes were on him as he sped forward. Bartley, the Daventry centre-half, plunged to meet him, but Hastie, with a quick swerve, was "away." Then, seeing the goalmouth blocked, he slipped the ball to the waiting Layton.

Layton responded immediately with an accurate centre, and again there was a fierce scrimmage in the Daventry goal-mouth before the visiting custodian, catching the ball deftly, punted to the side line.

But this pressure was bound to tell. Ten minutes from the start a third raid was made by the Albion. This time it was Bob Layton who brought danger. Trapping the ball on the line, whilst the Daventry right-half was appealing for outside, he sped down the wing, tricking two opponents with consummate ease, and then, before being heavily charged off the ball by the right-back, he swept it across to the waiting Hastie.

As the ball came to him Dick Hastie raised his foot as though he meant to trap it, but he never touched the sphere. This manoeuvre was for the discomfiture of the waiting half-back, who immediately turned to the right to get in the way of the shot which he thought was imminent.

The trick worked beautifully. Foiled, the centre-half was not able to turn quickly enough to dispossess the Springdale centre-forward who, espying daylight between the Daventry goalkeeper and the far goalpost, crashed in one of his favourite drives.

It was superb marksmanship. This player had been coached by Dick for many weeks in the art of hitting the ball, and the result was seen in the splendid shot which volleyed into the net at such pace that the visiting goalkeeper could only stand helpless the while.

Pandemonium followed. The Springdale supporters had been treated to a brilliant exhibition by their favourites, and they were grateful accordingly. This first goal was a rare tonic to the team that intended to be in the Second Division the following season.

But, stunned and shocked as they were, Daventry set about their business in grim fashion. They hurled themselves at their opponents with an earnestness that bordered on the reckless. Yet, because they knew the referee, and knew that he would have no nonsense, they kept within the bounds of fair play.

It was mesmeric football. On the one hand the spectators saw a brilliant team and on the other they witnessed a rare, dogged defence striving might and main to bring to naught the flashes of genius that the home front line, under the generalship of Dick Hastie, frequently showed.

Craft was bound to suffer under the smashing tactics of the visitors. Yet there was no lack of thrilling episodes. For instance, the crowd cheered their heads off when they witnessed Bob Layton, after weaving a way past all opposition, find himself with only the goalkeeper to beat.

In that moment the veteran winger frankly lost his head, for the first time perhaps in his famous career. With three of his comrades in the front line, waiting for a pass which must have meant a certain second goal, he shot blindly and wildly himself. The ball hit the bent knees of the goalkeeper who, in a desperate attempt to save his charge, had left his lair, and rebounded thirty yards up the field. Bob Layton came to himself as though he had been in a dream, and his expression of chagrin was so expressive that the crowd, instead of groaning, were bound to smile.

With fierce thrust and parry, the game proceeded. And Springdale did not do all the pressing. Three times in rapid succession, Gopher only kept his charge intact by masterly custodianship. Gopher had done all that Layton had prophesied he would since joining the club some months before.

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Half-time saw no further addition to the score, but the crowd were content, for that one goal their favourites had scored was beyond price. If only they could keep Daventry out during the second half!

Springdale were the first out after the interval, and in the joy of seeing what they believed were already a promoted side, the crowd greeted them with volcanic cheers.

Their opponents looked grim and determined when, a moment later, they also took the field. Then came the re-start, with every eye fixed on the ball, every heart filled now with hope and now with bitter dismay as the game swept from one end of the pitch to the other.

Five minutes from the commencement of the second half the vast crowd was swaying violently from side to side.



"Get up!" ordered Dick. But Benjamin Travers knew better than to obey the order. On hands and knees he endeavoured to reach the door, but Dick reached down and caught him by the collar. "It's rather contemptible to take it out of such a coward as you, Travers," he said, "but you deserve it and you're going to get it!" (See page 25.)

During this period Daventry, somewhat to the general surprise, had set up an attack so fierce in its intensity that the hearts of the home supporters almost sank into their boots.

Daventry were playing now like a team possessed; so brilliant were their efforts that their own directors confessed themselves amazed.

The visiting outside-right scintillated. Once again he stormed a passage down the touchline, and sent over a beautiful centre.

"Right!" shouted Gopher.

But the home left-back could not have heard. Either that, or he was so excited that he did not pay any attention.

Disaster quickly followed. Instead of watching the defender head away, as the left-back evidently intended, the crowd in the wildest dismay saw the ball strike the side of Huntley's head and pass from thence into the net.

One all!

This was an awful disappointment; but, clapping his hands, Hastie rallied his forces. The Springdale team responded to his command, and lined up for the kick-off, looking like men who were determined not to allow Fate to affect them.

Well as they had played up till now, this unexpected reverse had the effect of whipping the home team into a fresh frenzy of exertion. Time after time the home forward line swept down the field, the ball passing from man to man with nerve-tingling precision. And always in these raids the foremost leader was the young skipper, Dick Hastie. He might have been a coachman nursing four spirited bays, so wonderfully did each of his comrades respond to his promptings. Yet, for all the craft and brilliance that Springdale showed, the all-essential goal was

long in coming. And the Albion had to beat Daventry that day or they would not achieve their ambition.

They did everything but score. The crossbar shivered, the uprights were hit with smashing shots, and the man between the Daventry goalposts seemed inspired. He had luck, but he had brilliance as well; three times within five minutes he saved point-blank drives that seemed certain goals. Even the home crowd, desperately disappointed as they were, could not save themselves from applauding.

But in the meantime valuable time was speeding. There was now only five minutes to go, and still the score was 1-1. Neither side could be said to have any advantage, for most of the exchanges were now being fought out in mid-field, so resolute was the defence of each team.

Yet, presently, amid a fresh riot of tumultuous cheers, the young figure of the home centre-half came threading a way through his opponents. He passed at the correct moment, and the Springdale inside-right swept the ball out to his winger, who described a series of feints, thus drawing the defence, before putting the ball inside again.

From the inside-right to the centre-forward, and from the centre-forward to Dick Hastie, the ball sped. Dick described a complete circle round the harassing half-back, and then Bob Layton had his chance. How the cheers volleyed and thundered as the veteran winger started off on that momentous run! The agony of suspense as the ball, accurately kicked, descended into the goalmouth once more!

Hastie, with the mind of a strategist, had kept aloof from that melee. He expected he would be more useful outside the scrimmage than in it, so, keen-eyed and cool, he waited five yards from the throbbing battle.

He saw a Daventry back attempt to clear, but the ball skidded off his boot and came out to the left.

Now was his chance! Rushing forward, he met the ball as it descended, and the impact of boot against leather could be heard all over the ground.

Dick made that kick on the inspiration of the moment. He did not even look where the goal was. The position of the netted space was imprinted upon his mind.

There was magic in that shot, for, by some miraculous means, the ball passed clean through the scrimmage, and, deceiving the Daventry goalkeeper, sped on to shake the netting with a quiver that sent the huge multitude jumping for joy.

Through the genius of their captain, the player who had led them from despair into triumph, the Springdale Albion had achieved the goal of their ambition.

They had won promotion!

The Toast!

THE dinner which the officials of the Springdale Albion Football Club arranged in celebration of the team gaining promotion was largely attended. Not only was everyone in Springdale who considered himself a sportsman present, but both the Football Association and the League authorities had sent representatives. Amongst these was Mr. George Garrity.

The latter, in proposing the toast of the Springdale F. C., made a speech which was cheered to the echo. This, in part, is what he said:

"Gentlemen.—This is a proud night, not only for you, but for myself. (Cheers). It is an especially proud night for me, because in a measure I feel that I have played some small part in the triumph which you are celebrating this evening.

I take my mind back to the early days of the past football season, and I find myself sitting in the grand-stand of your ground. Beside me is a man, no longer with us. I will not mention his name, because it might evoke painful memories, although practically all of you know whom I mean.

"A football match is in progress. Amongst the players is a mere lad. Yes, gentlemen, a mere lad; but I had scarcely seen him touch the ball before I recognised that here was a great player in the making. Need I tell you, gentlemen, that that lad was your present captain and the player who has been chiefly instrumental in your gaining such a substantial success as we are celebrating this evening? (Cheers).

"After watching Dick Hastie (cheers) play I returned to the then chairman of the Springdale Albion Club, and I said, 'Sign that lad!' My advice was not acted upon, but retribution was in store for the men who were dragging Springdale Albion into ruin; and I cannot help recalling the significance of the fact that in other ways, apart from his prowess on the football field, Dick Hastie has been the means of bringing the Albion out of what a previous speaker has correctly described as despair into triumph.

"Springdale needed Hastie. (Cheers). It needed him to show you what could be done with the team that had become a disgrace and a by-word. It was Hastie's presence in the town that induced my dear old friend, Mr. Martin, (cheers) to take up the reins of office and to start on that career of football management which has been so signally successful. (Cheers).

"That is why, gentlemen, in proposing the toast of your splendid club this evening, I ask you to couple with it the name of your captain, Dick Hastie. (Uproarious cheers). Hastie, although so young, I might truthfully describe as a leader of the League, for he has led his men not only on the field, but off it. He has turned a team that once contained many foul players into a side that, wherever it goes, is now respected and honoured for its tactics on the field.

"Gentlemen, I would ask you to be understanding and drink with me the toast of Springdale Albion F. C. coupled with the name of Richard Hastie, 'a leader of the League!'"

The toast was enthusiastically honoured, and before the glasses had been set down the strains of that sound old English lyric, "For he's a jolly good fellow!" thundered through the room.

THE END.

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