

"A ROGUE'S REWARD!"

MARTIN CLIFFORD'S LATEST AND
GREATEST SCHOOL STORY—INSIDE.

THE GEM

2^d

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



EXPULSED!

'GOOD RIDDANCE TO BAD RUBBISH!' THAT'S WHAT EVERY ONE—

A ROGUE'S REWARD!

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



Tormented, haunted by remorse, the sweets of revenge turned to ashes in his mouth—that's all the reward Aubrey Racke gets for his plotting!

Tom Merry's two chums, Harry Manners and Monty Lowther of the Shell, were standing on either side of him, with eager interest on their faces. It was evident to Racke, from Tom's words, that the letter the captain of the Shell had just received was from George Figgins, the late leader of the New House juniors.

A thin smile appeared for a moment on Racke's face—an unpleasant, twisted smile.

He strolled towards the three. He had come downstairs to see if there was a letter for himself. He was expecting one from his father, with a remittance—his father being a War profiteer who kept his son supplied with an ostentatious amount of pocket-money.

But, for some reason or other, the letter from Figgins had taken all Racke's interest for the moment.

"You've heard from Figgins?" he inquired, the thin smile still twisting the corners of his lips.

Tom Merry glanced up from the letter he was reading and nodded.

"Yes," he said curtly.

Tom Merry & Co. did not like Aubrey Racke. He was far too dingy an individual for their taste. And they knew that the black sheep of the Shell had been pleased rather than sorry over the recent departure of George Figgins from St. Jim's.

Figgins had had to leave when he had failed to win the Armitage Scholarship. His father had suffered a severe financial loss, which had made it impossible for him to keep his son at St. Jim's as a paying pupil. Figgins' desperate attempt to win the Armitage Scholarship, which would have enabled him to remain at the school, having ended in failure, he had had to go

CHAPTER 1.

News of Baggy!

"YES, it's from Figgy!"

Aubrey Racke, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, had strolled downstairs into the Hall in time to hear those words, spoken by Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell.

The evening post had just arrived, and Racke, as he came down the stairs, saw that Tom Merry was standing by the letter-rack with an open letter in his hand.

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—SAYS WHEN RACKE OF THE SHELL IS EXPELLED!



All the decent fellows at St. Jim's had been very cut up over Figgy's departure. He had been one of the best-liked fellows at the school, tremendously popular even with his rivals of the School House. His leaving had left a big gap that nothing could replace.

There was an odd look on Rake's face as he watched Tom read the letter, written in Figgy's familiar handwriting. Tom's brow was clouded, and so were the faces of his two chums.

"Poor old Figgy!" muttered Manners.

"It was rotten, his not collaring the Armitage," grunted Monty Lowther.

A queer, flickering gleam came into Rake's eyes at the words. The Terrible Three were taking no notice of him. But he stayed where he was, hoping for news of George Figgy.

Tom glanced up from the letter.

"Figgy sends his best wishes to all the chaps," he told his chums quietly. "He's going to a new school next week—a local day school that's not so expensive as St. Jim's, a small place—"

"Oh, rotten!" growled Manners.

"Beastly luck!" agreed Tom Merry gloomily.

Rake burst into a sneering laugh.

"I should think a Council school is more in Figgy's line these days!" he exclaimed. "He's a blessed pauper now, I believe."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"There's nothing disgraceful in being poor, you cad!" he said contemptuously. "And there's nothing wrong with a Council school, anyway! I'd sooner be poor and go to a Council school than be a cad at St. Jim's, or any other Public school!"

Rake went scarlet.

"Meaning that I'm a cad!" he snarled.

"Exactly!" snapped Tom.

Rake's fists clenched. But Tom Merry was the finest boxer in the Lower School, and it would have needed a braver fellow than Rake to tackle him. With a muttered word he swung on his heel and turned away.

His eyes fell on the letter-rack.

There was a registered letter from his father there, and another letter as well. The black sheep of the Shell picked them up. The second letter was addressed to him in an unfamiliar handwriting.

Whom it was from he had no idea. The postmark, Southcastle, meant nothing to him—in fact, it only served to puzzle him. Southcastle was the name of the big seaport situated on the nearest point of the coast to St. Jim's.

The Terrible Three were moving off towards the stairs as Rake stood staring down with a puzzled frown at the unexpected letter.

"Who's this from?" he muttered.

Before opening it, however, he tore open the envelope of his father's letter. Two five-pound notes were enclosed, and Rake nodded with satisfaction as he stuffed them into his pocket without bothering to read his father's accompanying note. He rather wished that Tom Merry & Co. had not gone, but had been there to see the money. For Aubrey Rake could never realise that his display of wealth utterly failed to impress the Terrible Three.

He ripped open the second letter. As he drew out the written sheet, and his eyes fell on the signature, a startled exclamation sprang to his lips.

He glanced round hastily. But the Hall was empty.

"Gallon!" he breathed. "What the dickens—"

There was a step on the stairs. The figure of Gore, of the Shell, appeared.

Rake hastily stuffed the letter from Southcastle into his pocket.

Gore strolled towards him and nodded.

"Hallo, Rake! What's up?"

"Nothing!" snapped Rake.

"You look a bit rum," retorted Gore shortly, staring at him. "I say," he added, "there's no news of that fat ass Baggy that you know of?"

"Why ask me?" snarled Rake. "How should I know?"

"All right!" Gore stared at him curiously. "I only asked you! What's the matter with you?"

He chuckled.

"Looks to me as if Baggy's done a bolt, you know," he went on thoughtfully. "Queer, isn't it? Fancy Baggy disappearing like that! Of course, it was the evening his uncle visited him, as you know; seems as if his blessed uncle may have given him a fat tip—several quid, or so—and that old Baggy thought he'd clear off and have a good time on the money. What do you think?"

"I dare say you're right," nodded Rake.

The problem of the disappearance of Baggy Trimble of the Fourth had been mystifying St. Jim's for two days.

All that was known was that Baggy's uncle—a millionaire recently arrived in England from Canada, who had been keeping Baggy well supplied with pocket-money for some time before—had visited St. Jim's; and Baggy had driven off with him on his uncle's departure, supposedly as far as Rylcombe or Wayland.

And Baggy had never returned!

Excitement over Baggy's strange disappearance was still keen. But as yet none of the juniors, at any rate, could do more than guess at the reason.

"It's jolly queer, anyway," said Gore. He shrugged his burly shoulders. "Well, who cares about a fat ass like Baggy?"

He was about to stroll on, when Wally D'Arcy of the Third appeared on the stairs. Wally was running, and his face was full of excitement.

He was evidently on his way to the fags' quarters, as if to spread there some exciting news. But at sight of the two Shell fellows he paused at the foot of the stairs, breathless.

D'Arcy minor did not like either Racke or Gore. But apparently he was fairly bursting with news.

"I say!" he gasped. "What do you think?"

"What's up with you, kid?" growled Gore.

"About Baggy—" cried Wally excitedly.

"What?" broke in Racke sharply. He strode quickly forward and grasped the fag by the shoulder. "What's this? About Baggy?"

"Hands off, blow you!" sniffed Wally, jerking himself free of Racke's hand. Then his face broke into an excited grin. "I've just been in Kildare's study—"

"Well?" cried Racke impatiently.

Wally was fag to Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's.

"I'm telling you, aren't I?" snorted Wally. "I was in Kildare's study, clearing away the tea-things, when he and Darrell were talking about Baggy! And Kildare told Darrell that he'd just heard from the Head that Baggy's uncle who visited him on Wednesday wasn't his uncle at all!"

A queer gleam came into Racke's eyes. From Gore broke a startled exclamation.

"What the dickens—"

"The Head's written to Baggy's pater, of course, about his clearing off, and told his pater about his uncle—the chap that was supposed to be his uncle! And Baggy's pater says that Baggy hasn't got an Uncle Fred, and that the chap was a blessed fraud!"

"My only hat!" breathed Gore.

"What do you think of that?" demanded Wally. "Goodness knows why Baggy pretended the chap was his uncle, and why the chap pretended he was, and everything! Isn't it rum? It jolly well looks as if that chap who came here, and Baggy said was his uncle, has got something to do with Baggy's disappearance, doesn't it?"

And Wally scuttled away towards the fags'-room to spread the exciting news.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Gore.

Racke did not speak. Rather a startled look had come into his face. He turned away without a word, and vanished up the stairs. Gore stared after him.

"What's up with Racke?" he asked himself, with a puzzled frown.

It had struck Gore very strongly that there had been something odd in Racke's manner during the discussion of Baggy Trimble's disappearance—just as it had struck Tom Merry, a minute or two before that there had been something a little odd in Racke's expression during the talk concerning George Figgins.

And had they only known it, there was a very good reason why Racke should have looked queer on both those occasions!

As he entered his study in the Shell passage and closed the door behind him, there was a look on the face of Aubrey Racke of uneasy guilt.

Figgins and Baggy Trimble! Aubrey Racke knew more about their affairs than anyone else at St. Jim's.

With the exception of his crony, Gerald Croke, Racke alone knew that George Figgins should, by rights, still have been at St. Jim's—the true winner of the Armitage Scholarship. In Croke alone had Racke confided the vicious scheme he had hatched with regard to Figgins and the Armitage Scholarship—a scheme that he had carried through with unscrupulous daring and complete success.

Knowing how hard Figgins had worked in order to win the Armitage, and fearing he would be the winner, Racke—who had hated Figgins, and had been longing for a chance to serve him an ill turn—had succeeded in gaining access to Figgins' exam papers before they had been marked, and had stolen seven sheets. The Head, in marking the papers, had imagined that Figgins had not attempted to answer the missing questions; and consequently Figgins' total of marks

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had been the lowest of the three entrants for the coveted scholarship.

Dick Brown, of the New House, had been adjudged the winner—and Racke had gloated, knowing that but for his action in stealing those seven sheets from Figgins' exam papers, the leader of the New House would have been the winner!

And accordingly George Figgins had had to leave St. Jim's.

Racke's secret triumph had been complete!

But there had been a very nasty shock waiting for Racke in his hour of triumph. Baggy Trimble, the Paul Pry of the Fourth, had happened to discover Racke's rascally secret. With the stolen exam papers in his possession, Baggy had started a very profitable campaign of blackmail, threatening the black sheep of the Shell with exposure unless he kept him liberally supplied with money.

Racke had made desperate attempts to find where Baggy had hidden the fateful papers, but without success. Had he been able to find them, and to destroy them, he could have laughed at Baggy's threats. But while they were in existence he dared not refuse Baggy's insatiable demands, and the Falstaff of the Fourth had been bleeding Racke white!

The fact that the supposed uncle who had visited Baggy on the previous Wednesday afternoon was an impostor, was no news to Racke. He had arranged that visit himself!

His idea had been to throw dust in the eyes of the juniors who had grown suspicious regarding Baggy's sudden rush of wealth. Racke had been seen giving Baggy money, and the black sheep of the Shell was as little anxious as Baggy himself that the true facts of the latter's supply of cash should be known.

Terrified lest awkward questions should be asked, Racke had arranged that a man should visit Baggy and pretend to be a wealthy uncle, so that the juniors would suppose that this rich uncle was the source of Baggy's supplies.

The scheme had worked well enough. But Baggy's strange disappearance immediately following the visit of his bogus uncle had been as mystifying to Racke as to anyone.

And now, it seemed, the truth was out. Soon all St. Jim's would know that the man who had visited Baggy, professing to be his uncle, had been nothing but an impostor!

"Hang the luck!"

Racke's face was uneasy as he crossed towards the window and stared out into the darkening quad.

He cared nothing for Baggy Trimble; he did not really mind if some harm had befallen him. But he was terrified lest his own connection in that affair might somehow come out, and lead, perhaps, to discovery of his villainy with regard to Figgins' Armitage papers.

His hand went to his pocket, and he took out the letter with the Southcastle postmark.

He stared down at it uneasily.

The signature was plain, even in the dim light of the study. "J. Gallon."

The man whom Racke had paid to pretend to be Baggy Trimble's uncle at St. Jim's!

What had the man written about? Even now Racke found himself oddly reluctant to read that letter and learn what it contained.

He knew little of Gallon, except that he was a sea captain, and not a very savoury individual. That Captain Gallon had something to do with Baggy's disappearance, Racke felt convinced. But what?

The black sheep of the Shell crossed to the door and turned the key in the lock. He crossed to the fireplace, where a small fire was burning. In the light of the glowing coals he opened the scrawled, rather dirty sheet and began to read.

As he read, a startled gasp escaped him.

"Good Heavens!"

He read the letter through a second time; then he stared almost dazedly into the flames. His eyes were bright with dismay and alarm. He crushed the letter in his hand.

"Good gad!"

He knew now the truth of Baggy's disappearance from St. Jim's.

Gallon, believing, thanks to Baggy's own boasting talk, that his temporary "nephew" had very rich relations, had kidnapped Baggy Trimble with the intention of extracting a ransom for his release.

Baggy was a prisoner aboard the s.s. Harvester, Gallon's tramp steamer, at Southcastle.

CHAPTER 2.

Racke Alters His Mind!

"LOOK out!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"My hat! Stand clear!"

Blake & Co., of the Fourth, had returned from a shopping expedition to Rylcombe, and had been approach-

ing the school gates, when a cyclist had come speeding out of the quad.

It was Racke, and he seemed to be in a hurry!

In the dusk he had failed to notice Blake & Co., and was flying straight towards them, pedalling hard.

Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth, gave a startled yell, and jumped hastily aside. So did Herries and Digby.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, was less quick to do so.

"Oh! Bai Jove! I—"

Arthur Augustus started to jump aside like the others; but he jumped too late!

Crash!

"Yawooooop!"

There was a yell from Arthur Augustus that would have awakened the Seven Sleepers, as the front wheel of Racke's machine struck him amidships, so to speak.

There was another wild yell from Aubrey Racke as he went flying over the handlebars and clasped Arthur Augustus lovingly round the neck. There was another crash as the pair of them went down in a heap with the cycle on top of them.

"Oh!" gasped Racke.

"Wow! Gweat Scott! Yoooooop!"

The swell of St. Jim's had been looking very elegant and spick-and-span a moment before. But the road was decidedly muddy, and now he looked anything but a thing of beauty and a joy for ever!

"Oh! Gwoooooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus dazedly.

His hat was lying in a puddle, his clothes were plentifully splashed with mud, and one leg was weirdly entwined with the overturned bicycle. He was utterly winded. Racke, seated more or less comfortably on top of him, had escaped damage, however.

"B-bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus. "Dwagimoff, somebody!"

Blake, Herries, and Dig were shrieking with laughter. They could not help it. The sight of their chum's muddy countenance was too much for them.

They fairly roared.

Racke scrambled breathlessly to his feet and glared savagely at Arthur Augustus.

"You silly fool!" he rasped. "What did you want to get in my way for?"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus dazedly adjusted his celebrated monocle in his aristocratic eye and surveyed Racke with feelings almost too deep for words.

"You—you fwabjous ass!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "You sillay lunatic! You—you uttah boundah—"

"Rats!" snarled Racke, picking up his bicycle. "It was all your own silly fault, you dummy!"

Arthur Augustus rose painfully to his feet. His countenance, as he surveyed the mud upon his clothes, was a picture.

"Look what you have done to my clobber!" he gasped. "Oh, bai Jove! My twousahs are wuined!"

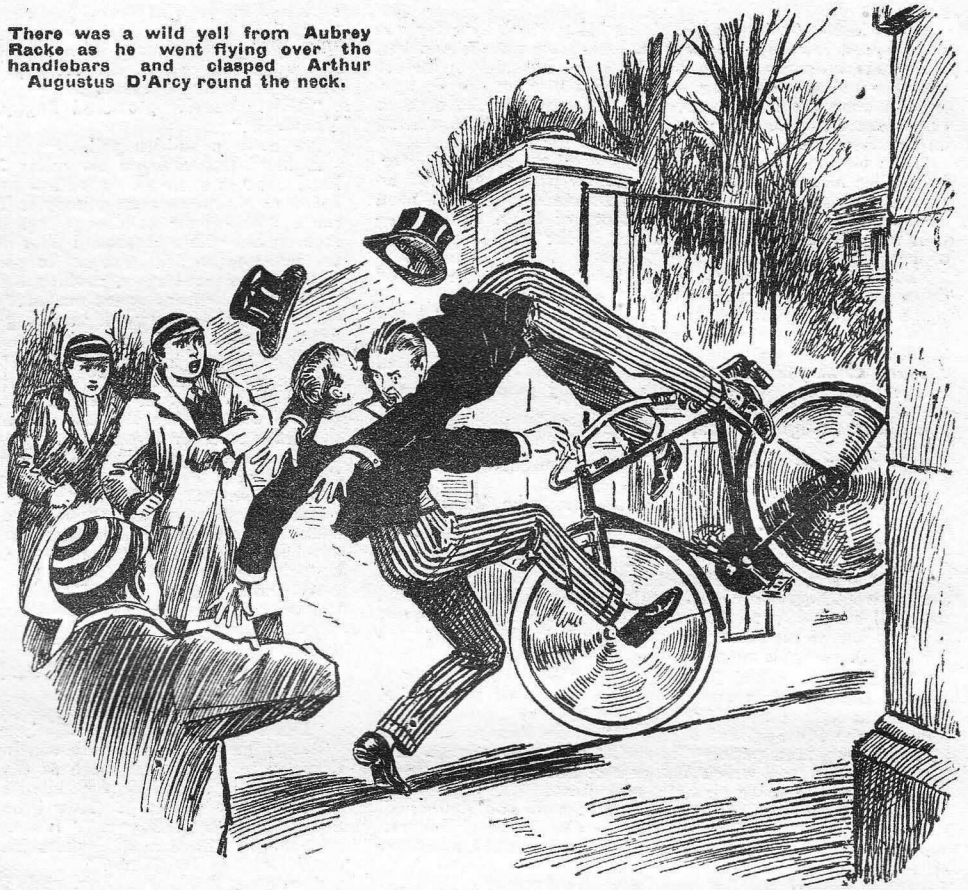
Racke was evidently in a hurry, and he did not seem anxious to argue further. He made a movement to jump on to his cycle. But Arthur Augustus, bursting with wrath, seized him by the arm.

"I considah—"

"Hands off!"

"I considah it my dutay to administah a feahful

There was a wild yell from Aubrey Racke as he went flying over the handlebars and clasped Arthur Augustus round the neck.



thwashin' heah and now!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "I wefuse to be knocked down by your wotten bicycle—"

"A bit late to refuse, isn't it, Gussy?" chuckled Blake. Herries and Dig chuckled.

"It is nothin' to cackle at, you gwinnin' asses!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "I— Oh! Bai Jove! Come back, you wottah!"

Racke had leapt into the saddle, and was pedalling off into the gloom, leaving Arthur Augustus gazing after him with speechless wrath.

Blake, Herries, and Digby might have stopped him—for they, too, would have liked to tell Racke what they thought of him—had they not been still helpless with laughter.

"Bai Jove! He's gone!" gasped Arthur Augustus blankly.

"Ha, ha, ha! You look a giddy picture!" chuckled Digby.

Arthur Augustus surveyed his grinning chums with a look so icy that it might well have frozen the air around him.

He seemed about to speak, but thought better of it. Perhaps he could think of no words fittingly to express his wrath. With his aristocratic nose high in the air, and his trousers thick with mud, the swell of St. Jim's stalked into the quad without another word.

And on the road to Rylcombe, Racke pedalled on at a furious rate.

He was making a desperate attempt to catch the last post at the little post-office there, with a letter to Captain Gallon, of the Harvester.

He slowed down a little to glance at his watch.

"Yes, I can do it all right," he told himself.

In the letter he had received from Baggy Trimble's captor that evening, Gallon had explained that Baggy now denied having a millionaire uncle at all. But this was a statement which the rascally captain refused to believe—naturally enough, after all that Baggy had told him before. Accordingly, Gallon had written to Racke asking him to get hold of the address of Baggy's millionaire uncle, so that the captain could communicate direct with him regarding Baggy's proposed ransom.

Gallon, in writing to Racke, had known well enough that the black sheep of the Shell would never dare to inform the authorities of the letter's contents, for that would have revealed Racke's own connection with Gallon.

Besides, the rascally captain had summed-up Racke very

well—knew him to be an unscrupulous individual like himself.

In his letter, Gallon had explained that the Harvester was sailing in a few days' time for the Mediterranean, and had stated his intention, if no ransom were forthcoming before the ship sailed, of taking Baggy with him on the voyage. By the time the ship returned to England, in the opinion of its captain, Baggy's wealthy relations would be willing enough after their long anxiety to pay his price!

What Gallon would say when he received Racke's letter, informing him that it was true enough that Baggy had no rich relations—that his talk of a millionaire uncle had been all so much swank, without an atom of truth behind it—that was a question that had caused Racke a certain amount of sardonic humour.

The lights of Rylcombe came into view. Racke slowed down as he pedalled into the old-fashioned street.

He jumped off his machine and propped it against the kerb outside the post-office, and crossed the pavement to the letter-box in the wall.

Then, as he took out the letter addressed to the captain of the Harvester, Aubrey Racke suddenly paused, with the envelope already held to the slit.

A queer, thoughtful look, a cunning gleam, had come into his eyes.

"My hat!" he breathed. "I hadn't thought of that!"

He lowered the letter, staring down at it.

The thought had come to him—supposing he did not post that letter after all?

Suppose he did not answer Captain Gallon's inquiry? If he did not, the Harvester would sail from England with Baggy still a prisoner on board it, without a doubt. Captain Gallon would certainly not dare to release him. He would wait till his return to England, more than a month later at least, when he would again make an attempt to get into touch with Baggy's supposed millionaire relation.

"My hat!" breathed Racke again. "Why not?"

With Baggy safely away from St. Jim's all that while, Racke was telling himself that he would have ample time to discover the hiding-place of the sheets he had stolen from Figgins' Armitage paper—the sheets which had fallen into Baggy's hands, and which Baggy had hidden somewhere at St. Jim's, to hold over his head as a threat!

And with those fateful sheets once found and destroyed, Racke could laugh at Baggy's further attempts at blackmail when the Paul Fry of the Fourth returned to St. Jim's after his enforced voyage.

Racke's eyes gleamed strangely at the thought.

He had suffered the torments of blackmail long enough. Now was his chance to cut Baggy's claws!

With a soft laugh, he slowly tore the letter into small pieces and crammed them into his pocket. He walked back to his cycle, jumped on, and pedalled off in the direction of St. Jim's.

His heart was beating a little quicker, and there was a guilty look upon his face as he rode into the quad a little later and put his bike away in the shed.

He had taken a daring, ruthless step, and he knew it.

He crossed to the School House and hurried up to his study. Crooke was not there, to his relief, and he strode to the fireplace and stirred the coals into a blaze.

Into the dancing flames he dropped Captain Gallon's letter, and with it the torn-up answer that he had so nearly posted.

There was a thin, twisted smile on the face of Aubrey Racke as he watched the two letters burn together.

CHAPTER 3.

On Board the Harvester!

GULP!

It was Baggy Trimble who gulped.

Baggy was not feeling well.

The Harvester was two days out from Southcastle, bound for Alexandria. She was rolling heavily in the big seas of the Bay of Biscay, and Baggy Trimble, peeling potatoes in the cook's galley, for about the first time in his life felt not only that he did not want anything to eat, but that he would never want anything to eat again as long as he lived.

"Grooooooh!"

Baggy moaned as the ship plunged even more heavily than usual. He gave a sickly gulp.

"Oh lor!" gasped Baggy, his face greener than a cabbage.

Baggy was not a good sailor.

Through the open door of the galley he could see the grey wastes of water, tumbling and rolling in a manner that even to watch made Baggy gulp hastily.

"Ow!" groaned Baggy. "Groooooh! Mum-mum-mmmmm! I wish I was at St. Jim's!"

But St. Jim's was far away, and it would be a long while before Baggy was likely to see it again!

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"Why wouldn't that brute Gallon believe I haven't got a blessed millionaire uncle?" Baggy asked himself peevishly. "I've told him often enough!"

He peered round the corner of the galley. He could see the starboard end of the bridge, with the muscular figure of Gallon standing there.

"Yah! Beast!" glowered Baggy. "I jolly well— Oh! Yarooooop!"

He gave a sudden yell.

A hand had grasped his collar from behind, jerking his head back into the galley with a heave that turned Baggy's green countenance almost purple. The cook had entered by the opposite door of the galley, to find his new assistant looking out of the starboard door instead of getting on with the potatoes he had been set to peel.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy, rubbing his neck painfully. "Yow!"

"Why ain't them spuds peeled?" roared the cook—a fat, red-faced individual with anything but a friendly manner.

"Get on with 'em! See?"

Baggy gasped, and got on with them.

Back at St. Jim's, Baggy would have imagined that he would have enjoyed being a cook's assistant anywhere. But he was finding that he was not enjoying that job on the Harvester, by any means.

Before sea-sickness had overcome him, Baggy had made the best of a bad job by helping himself plentifully to the food in the galley. He felt then that his captivity would not be so bad after all, with so much food about! But the cook had discovered him tucking into the stew, and had administered such a box on the ear that Baggy's head had tingled for hours afterwards.

And now, as if to add insult to injury, he was feeling that the very sight of food nauseated him!

Baggy proceeded with the peeling of the potatoes with a groan.

"What are you growling about?" roared the cook in a ferocious voice.

"Oh dear! I—I—"

"Don't talk! Get on with them spuds!"

Baggy gasped, and hastily continued peeling the potatoes that lay in the big tin bath at his feet.

He gulped as the ship plunged sickeningly.

"Groooooh! Oh lor! How ever am I to get out of this mess?" wondered Baggy. "It's awful! I wish I'd never pretended to have a millionaire uncle! I wonder what the chaps think at St. Jim's?"

The cook left the galley, and Baggy was left alone at his task.

Across the metal deck outside, the great waves could be seen plunging before the wind that licked foam from their crests. Now and then bursts of spray were blown in at the door of the galley. There were heavy clouds to westward, and it looked like "dirty weather" if ever it did. Even Baggy realised that, as the Harvester rolled on heavily, with dense black smoke billowing from her smoke-stack.

Heavy boots rang out on the deck. A moment later a powerfully-built man was standing in the doorway of the galley, glaring down at Baggy.

It was Captain Gallon, a blackened briar clenched between his teeth.

He was a tough-looking individual, with a weather-beaten face and a jaw that would have caused most men to hesitate before quarrelling with him. Though he had looked passable enough as Baggy's supposed Colonial uncle at St. Jim's, in his seafaring kit he looked what he was—a hard-bitten scoundrel ready for almost any unscrupulous deed that would in any way benefit himself.

"Well, you fat little swab?" roared Captain Gallon in a voice that fairly echoed round the galley. "Have you called to mind where that millionaire uncle of yours lives? Eh?"

Baggy jumped almost out of his skin as that voice rang out beside him.

"Ow!" He blinked up at the big sea-captain very nervously. "Oh, really, you know! I—I've told you I haven't really got a millionaire uncle—"

"And I don't believe you, you little lubber!" thundered Captain Gallon. "Well, I guess you'll be ready to tell me one of these days! There's a long voyage ahead of us yet."

"Oh dear! I—I haven't got a millionaire uncle in the family, honest!" squeaked Baggy.

"Chuck it!" roared Captain Gallon. "If you tell me that lie again, I'll give you a dozen with the rope's-end!"

"Ow!"

Baggy's face went a shade greener yet. He did not venture to speak, and with a muttered imprecation, the big scoundrel strode away over the heaving deck back towards the bridge.

"Oh, crumbs!" moaned Baggy. "Why won't he believe me? This is awful!"

The ship plunged and rolled, and Baggy wished again,

from the bottom of his fat heart, that he was safely in the Fourth Form room at St. Jim's.

But it was quite evident to Baggy that he had a very long furrow to plough before he would see Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co., and all the other familiar faces at St. Jim's again.

CHAPTER 4.

Lost!

NIGHT had come, wild and stormy. In his narrow bunk in the fo'c'sle, Baggy Trimble lay staring into the darkness.

His sea-sickness had left him; but his face was blanched as he listened to the roar of the waves against the steel plates by his head, and felt the reeling ship quiver and shudder with every blow of the great waves that pounded her.

The wind was howling over the decks of the Harvester as she laboured on through the storm. The sky was black with clouds, but now and then vivid lightning lit up sea and sky, revealing the wild turmoil of racing, foam-capped waters. The thunder rolled and muttered.

Crash!

A giant wave had smashed over the plunging forepeak, and Baggy could hear the water streaming over the iron deck above him. The ship seemed to reel from the blow like a living thing.

Baggy shut his eyes. He could hear the breathing of the sleeping seamen in the other bunks, and wondered how they could possibly manage to keep asleep in such circumstances. To Baggy, it sounded as though the whole sea and sky were roaring and echoing with the tumult of the storm.

Crash!

The Harvester reeled, sliding down the trough of a mountainous wave with a twisting roll, as another huge mass of water struck her with giant force. The dull throbbing of the engines quickened to a wild vibration as the propellers were lifted clear of the water. Then once more the fo'c'sle began to lift—higher, higher, higher, as if it were mounting almost to the clouds. With a sickening lurch it fell again, down and down.

Baggy groaned.

The storm was growing worse, he felt sure. The howling of the wind was louder now, the thunder more ominous. The Harvester seemed to plunge more and more violently, as she fought her way on, dogged and sullen, through the great black masses of water that swept upon her out of the dark.

One or two of the seamen were awake now.

Captain Gallon had a rough crew on board his ship. Baggy felt that any one of them could have eaten him alive! Whether they knew that he had been shipped against his will, he did not know, and he had not dared to confide in any of them.

A giant wave could be heard thundering across the forward well-deck—tons of boiling, foaming water.

"By Jimmy!" Baggy heard one of the wakened men mutter. "Listen to it! We're in for a bad spell—"

"If the old tub opens her pates," growled another, "I shan't be surprised. She's rotten all through! How the cap'n keeps her afloat at all beats me."

"You're right, Charlie," answered a rough voice. "It's the paint that's held the bloomin' Harvester together for years!"

Baggy, listening wide-eyed, gasped.

A deafening peal of thunder crashed out above the roar of wind and waves. It was followed by a sickening blow from a vast wave that seemed determined to swallow the whole fore part of the ship. The Harvester staggered and rolled, almost on to her beam ends, it seemed to Baggy. He clutched the side of his bunk and clung desperately, only just saving himself from being pitched out.

"Oh!" whimpered Baggy, in utter terror. "Oh—"

The door of the fo'c'sle was flung open violently. A sheet of flying spray hissed in.

"Turn out, you swabs!" thundered the voice of the first mate, only dimly heard above the roar of the storm. "The hatch on No. 1 hold is smashed in—"

The rest of his words were swept away on the wind.

A black mass of water came pouring in through the open door. The mate vanished.

Baggy heard the seamen tumbling out of their bunks, cursing. One by one they vanished out into the raging darkness.

In his swaying bunk Baggy Trimble of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's lay staring wildly into the dark, his heart cold with fear.

It was towards dawn that the Harvester, wallowing amid the waves like an injured sea-monster, one propeller gone

and her holds smashed open, began to settle down by the head—sullen, defeated.

The storm was at its height—a mad inferno of raging waters and shrieking wind.

The dreaded bay was claiming another victim. When she had sailed out of Southcastle, southward bound, the Harvester had entered upon her last voyage.

Some of the boats had been carried away—others were smashed and useless. Only the drawn revolver in his hand had enabled Captain Gallon, grimly determined to stick to his ship as long as possible, to prevent his crew from taking to the boats long ago—though in such a sea it seemed doubtful enough whether the lifeboats would live to see the dawn.

But even Gallon saw that it was hopeless at last. The ship was doomed. Her plates had opened, and she was leaking like a sieve. Soon the end would come.

The crew were all gathered behind the wheelhouse, their lifebelts fastened round them. Baggy Trimble, half fainting, had collapsed on to an empty lifebelt chest, whimpering.

The first mate seized Gallon by the arm.

"She's going!" he shouted savagely. "Curse you! Are we all to go down with her?"

"Hands off, you dog!" snarled Gallon; and sent the mate staggering with a smashing blow of his fist. "You dare to lay your paws on me?"

He glared round at the sullen faces of his men—a powerful, commanding figure, his legs thrust wide in their big seaboots as he balanced himself easily against the rolling of the doomed ship.

"Take to the boats!" he cried savagely. "You may as well be drowned that way as another!"

Even as he spoke the ship lurched over to a steeper list.

The men were rushing to the boats. Gallon climbed down to the door of the wireless-room and flung it open. The operator was still at work, flinging far and wide through the shrieking air that grim message of the sea—"S.O.S."—"S.O.S."

"Come on, Smith!" shouted Gallon grimly. "We're going! And you're the only man amongst them!"

He staggered as a great wave lifted the ship sideways and rolled on into the stormy darkness. Gallon clutched at the lintel of the door and laughed harshly.

Scoundrel though he was, at such a time as this all his best qualities had come out—he was, at any rate, a man!

Above the wireless-room, by the deserted wheelhouse, Baggy Trimble of the Fourth cowered, trembling.

He had ceased even to whimper now.

And his thoughts, oddly enough, were far away, hundreds of miles away, in the Fourth Form dormitory at St. Jim's. He pictured Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Levison and Cardew and the others—all quietly sleeping.

A groan escaped him.

Over the eastern rim of the sea dawn was coming, dim and grey. Soon the sun would appear.

But when at last the sun rose, dazzling and golden, above the horizon, lighting up the raging waste of waters, of the ship that had borne Baggy Trimble of the Fourth away from Southcastle after his mysterious disappearance from St. Jim's, there was now no sign.

The Harvester had gone, vanished beneath the great waves that were sweeping by like mountains in the early morning light.

CHAPTER 5.

A Staggering Shock!

SPLASH! Plonk!

"Oh deah!"

It was a raindrop that had splashed, with a plonk, on to the immaculate shining topper of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And it was, needless to say, Arthur Augustus who had given that exclamation of dismay in consequence.

"Starting to rain!" remarked Blake cheerfully, turning up his collar.

"Bai Jove! Yaas!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's in great consternation. "Whatevah shall we do, deah boys?"

Blake, Herries, and Digby chuckled.

The four of them were returning from Spalding Hall, the school for girls near Wayland, where Ethel Cleveland, Doris Levison, and Lady Peggy Brooke, the juniors' girl chums, were pupils. They were passing through Rylcombe village on their way back to St. Jim's, at about tea-time, when that first raindrop had chosen Arthur Augustus' gleaming topper for a target.

Blake, Herries, and Dig did not mind a little rain. They turned up their coat-collars and tramped on cheerily. But Arthur Augustus halted, a picture of dismay.

"I say, deah boys, it's beginnin' to wain——"

"We know that!" grinned Blake.

"A bit of rain never hurt anybody yet," chuckled Digby.

"So come on, Gus, you ass!" urged Herries.

But Arthur Augustus did not come on.

He was looking very, very smart indeed that afternoon—even smarter than usual, if such a thing were possible. He had spent at least an hour in dressing before setting off for the visit to Ethel & Co. at Spalding Hall. And he certainly did not intend to let the rain mar his sartorial perfection.

"Wats! I wefuse to walk in the wain! I have my best clobber to considah——"

"Blow your best clobber!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake——"

"Come on, for goodness' sake!"

"I wefuse to come on! I intend to take sheltah! I—— Oh! Bai Jove! Oh cwumbs!"

For suddenly the rain had started coming down in real earnest! It fairly flooded down, and in a moment Arthur Augustus was in a fair way of being drenched.

With a gasp and a yell he turned and bolted for the nearest shelter offered—the doorway of Mrs. Murphy's little tuckshop. Blake, Herries, and Dig followed him hastily.

The sheets of stinging rain were a little more than even they cared to face!

In the tuckshop doorway Arthur Augustus removed the topper and surveyed its drenched appearance with utter consternation.

"Gweat Scott! My toppah is wuined! If you dummys had agweed to takin' sheltah at once——"

"For goodness' sake chuck gassing!" groaned Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies! I paid a gweat deal of money to my hattah for this toppah——"

"You mean to say you bought that at a hatter's?" ejaculated Blake, in pretended astonishment. "I thought you got it at the secondhand-clothes' shop in Wayland!"

Arthur Augustus turned almost purple. He surveyed Blake with feelings too deep for words. The suggestion that his glorious topper had been purchased at a second-hand shop left him speechless.

The rain was streaming down with an insistency that showed it had set in for a spell. Blake glanced at Herries and Digby.

"Better buzz inside and have some tea, eh?"

"Good wheeze!" nodded Dig.

Blake pushed open the door, and the chums of the Fourth entered the cosy little tuckshop and seated themselves at a table. Mrs. Murphy came bustling up, and Blake ordered tea and cakes, while Arthur Augustus continued to bemoan the fate of his cherished topper.

"Oh, do chuck jawing about your rotten tile!" sighed Digby.

"Look heah——"

"It'll be all right when it's dried!" grinned Blake.

"Bai Jove! Do you weally imagine I could possibly evah weah a toppah that has been soaked with wain and then dwied?" gasped Arthur Augustus, quite shocked. "It would be uttably out of the question!"

"Have it your own way!" sighed Blake, and he picked up a newspaper that was lying on one of the chairs, and began to glance at it.

As he did so the door was pushed open by a hurrying figure. Someone else entered the shop, evidently in order to shelter from the driving rain.

It was Aubrey Racke.

Racke glanced at the chums of Study No. 6, not in a very friendly way, and took his seat at one of the other little tables.

"Hallo, Racke!" grinned Herries. "Back from the Green Man?"

That Aubrey Racke sometimes visited the dingy establishment known as the Green Man was well known. But Racke did not like Herries alluding to that supposedly secret fact. He glared, and turned his back to the chums of the Fourth.

Mrs. Murphy brought the tea, and Blake & Co. tackled the good things with a will, while Racke gave his order.

Outside the rain seemed to be falling even more heavily. Digby whistled.

"My hat! Look at it! What beastly weather!"

"Rotten!" grunted Herries.

"Feahful!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "My toppah——"

"Well, we're not the only people who've been having rotten weather," said Blake, glancing up from his newspaper. "It says here that there have been gales and things all over the place. The cross-Channel boats haven't been able to carry on, through storms in the Channel. And a British ship's foundered in the Bay of Biscay."

"Rotten!" said Herries. "What ship?"

Blake glanced down at his paper again.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,145.

"The Harvester——"

There was a sudden breathless exclamation from the table where Racke was sitting. Blake broke off, staring at Racke in astonishment.

Racke had turned a face towards him that was deathly white.

"The Harvester?" echoed Racke, in a voice oddly unlike his own.

"Yes," nodded Blake, staring at him. "What on earth——"

Racke sprang to his feet, gripping the back of his chair with a hand that had gone white to the knuckles.

His breath seemed to be coming with strange difficulty. His eyes burned with a queer light.

"Good heavens!" Blake & Co. heard him breathe.

With a couple of quick strides he hurried to Blake's side and grasped the leader of the Fourth by the shoulder.

"What does it say?" he stammered. "Tell me——quick——"

Blake shot an amazed glance at his chums. Then he stared again at Racke.

"Great Scott, Racke!" he ejaculated. "You don't mean you know somebody who was on board?"

"What does it say?" demanded Racke tensely, not answering the question.

Blake glanced down at the paragraph, and began, after another stare at Racke's white face, to read it aloud:

"The s.s. Harvester, a British steamer of five thousand tons, is feared lost with all hands.

"During the great gale that has been raging for some days in the North Atlantic, an SOS call was picked up in the small hours of Thursday night by several vessels, stating that the Harvester was in need of immediate assistance. From the wireless messages it appeared that one propeller of the distressed vessel had been carried away, and that the ship was in a sinking condition. When other vessels succeeded in reaching the spot indicated, however, there was no sign of the ship in question.

"Owing to the tremendous seas, it was some time after the wireless calls for assistance had ceased that the vessels answering the call were able to arrive on the scene.

"The s.s. Vesper, of Liverpool, has reported seeing floating wreckage near the spot where the ill-fated vessel is feared to have gone down. Little hope is entertained of there being any survivors."

As Blake finished reading, Racke snatched the paper from his hand and feverishly read the paragraph for himself. He dropped the paper to the floor, staring out of the window at the pouring rain with unseeing eyes.

"Good heavens!" he muttered again.

He licked his lips. They seemed suddenly to have gone dry.

"Wacke, deah boy——"

"What the dickens——"

"Racke!" Blake jumped to his feet and took hold of Racke's arm, shaking him out of the daze that seemed to have seized him. "What's the matter? Did you know someone on board the Harvester?"

Racke looked at him queerly.

"No!" he muttered thickly.

"Then why on earth——"

"I—I made a mistake." Racke pulled himself together with an evident effort. He forced a mirthless smile. "I—I was thinking I did know someone on board that ship. A—a chap I know who—who's a wireless operator. But I remember now—it was another ship he was on, a—ship with a similar name. I remember now—it wasn't the Harvester at all."

"Oh, good!" muttered Herries.

Blake & Co. did not like Aubrey Racke; but they were relieved to be told that Racke, after all, had not had a friend on board the lost vessel.

"I was thinking that was the ship, but it wasn't, of course," went on Racke a little feverishly, as if anxious to convince them. "But it gave me a bit of a turn for a moment, of course. Quite a turn. Silly of me."

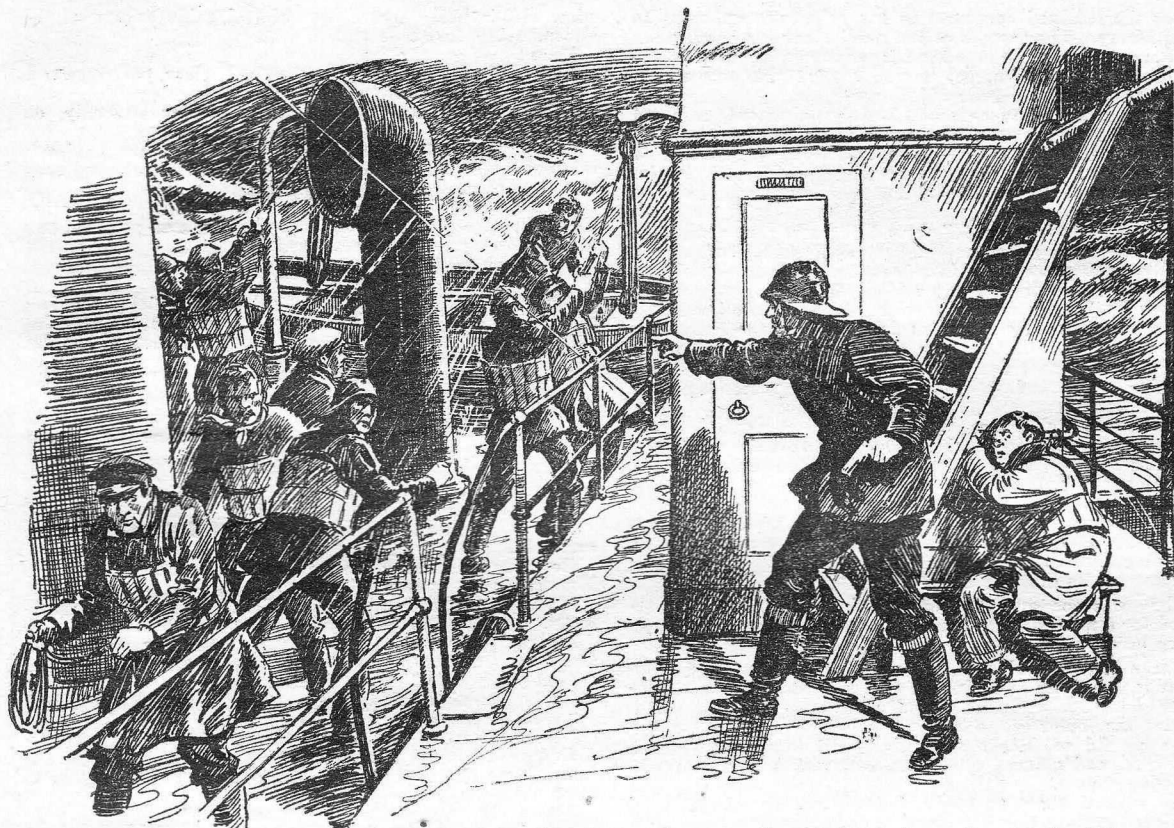
He turned abruptly to his table.

He did not stay long in the tuckshop after that, but drank a cup of tea quickly, leaving the food untouched, and after paying the bill hurried out.

The rain was driving into his face with stinging force as he moved off quickly down the street in the direction of St. Jim's.

But he seemed no longer to care for the rain, though it was swiftly soaking his greatcoat through.

His face was white, his eyes burned strangely. At the corner he bumped into another pedestrian, and hurried on without an apology; he did not even avoid the deep puddles that had flooded the uneven pavement in places. Evidently he was utterly oblivious of the world around him.



"Take to the boats!" cried Captain Gallon savagely. Even as he spoke, the ship lurched over to a heavier list.

Not till he was passing the little post-office did he seem aware of all his surroundings. Then, as his eyes chanced to fall on the letter-box in the wall of the building, he stopped dead, staring at it in a strange way.

That letter-box that so nearly took the letter he had written to Captain Gallon, and which he had destroyed unposted! The letter that would have saved Baggy Trimble from being taken away on board the lost Harvester.

Racke passed a trembling hand across his eyes. "My fault!" he muttered. "It was my fault. I sent him to his death—"

"How could I know?" he panted, half aloud. "How could I know I was sending him to—to—"

He could not repeat the word. With a groan, he dragged his eyes away from the letter-slit. He shuddered.

There was a look of haunting horror in the eyes of Aubrey Racke as he stumbled on through the wind and rain towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6. Something Wrong!

"WHAT'S the matter with Racke?"

It was Tom Merry who asked the question.

Tom had entered Study No. 10 in the Shell passage to find his two chums busy with their prep. It was four days later—the following Tuesday evening.

"Racke?" queried Harry Manners, glancing up from the Latin exercise he was busy with. "Now you mention it, he has been looking a bit rummy the last day or two."

"Rummy?" echoed Tom, dropping into a chair by the fire. "He's looked more than rummy. He's looked as though he's a blessed ghost half the time! And when I ran into him in the quad just now, he looked so jolly ill I asked him if he was groggy."

"What did he say?" inquired Monty Lowther, with interest.

"Told me to go to the dickens, or something," answered Tom, with a shrug.

"Dear old Racke always is such a nice polite chap," grinned Lowther.

"Have you noticed how Linton's been dropping on him in Form?" put in Manners thoughtfully. "He never jolly well attends now! No wonder he gets dropped on. And his prep's been only half done, the last day or two. He'll be getting it in the neck properly if he's not jolly careful!"

"Looks to me as if the chap's got something on his mind," said Tom Merry, frowning.

"Something on his mind? Racke?" Monty Lowther chuckled. "I should think he always has! With his rotten, dingy habits, I should think he's bound to live in perpetual blessed funk at being found out over something or other."

"Well, that's true!" assented Tom, rather grimly.

He shrugged and changed the subject.

"I met Kildare on the stairs," he went on. "I asked him if there was any news of Baggy. He said there isn't, so far as he knows."

"It's quite likely the Head knows something by now, but isn't telling," suggested Manners.

Tom nodded.

"That's quite likely. If Baggy has done a bunk, the Head wouldn't spread the details, of course. But it's jolly queer! That chap who was here pretending to be Baggy's uncle—he must have had something to do with it. Baggy knew it wasn't really his uncle, of course. He must have arranged that visit for some extraordinary reason known only to himself—"

"It's a giddy mystery if ever there was one!" broke in Monty Lowther. "It beats the band!"

"Yes, rather!" Manners nodded. "You know, although Baggy was such a fat outsider in lots of ways, I can't help but feel sorry he's gone. 'Cos it looks as if he's gone for good now! He may have been a blessed porpoise, and our grub's a lot safer now—but old Baggy caused a good deal of fun one way and another, didn't he?"

"Yes," agreed Tom. "I'm sorry he's gone, too. But p'r'aps he'll come back."

Manners shook his head dubiously, and bent over his Latin again.

Tom Merry took a pencil and paper from his pocket.

"There's the Grammar School match to-morrow," he observed. "We've got to field a pretty hot team to beat Gordon Gay & Co. this time, too. I hear they're in great form."

Manners looked up again quickly, with a hopeful look in his face.

As a rule, Manners was not a member of the junior eleven. But now and then when his form warranted it, he was included in the team if there was a vacancy for some reason.

"Who're you playing in poor old Figgy's place?" he asked as carelessly as he was able.

But the subdued eagerness in his voice was apparent to Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell shook his head. "Sorry, Harry. I'm afraid I shan't want you." He frowned. "It's rotten, not having Figgy! He was one of our very best men. Poor old Figgy!"

Manners, trying to conceal his disappointment, resumed his work. Tom began to jot down a list of names.

"I think I'll give Figgy's place to Clive," he remarked a minute later. "Clive's been playing good footer lately. He got our only goal in the last match against the New House."

"Yes, Clive's jolly good," agreed Manners generously.

"If only we'd got poor old Figgins!" said Tom, rather glumly, as he wrote down Clive's name. "Well, it's no good crying over spilt milk!" he added abruptly, rising to his feet. "I'll just go down and stick this list on the board."

Tom left the study and went downstairs to the Hall.

As he crossed towards the notice-board to pin up the eleven for the next day's match, he noticed a silent figure standing in the shadows by the top of the steps leading down into the quad.

It was Aubrey Racke.

Racke was standing with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his head sunk forward a little on his chest, staring broodingly into the darkness of the quad.

Tom paused, watching him.

Racke was evidently quite oblivious of the presence of anyone in the Hall behind him. He stood there motionless, a brooding figure.

What was he thinking about?

That was the question that puzzled Tom Merry as he stood for a moment with his eyes fixed curiously on the black sheep of the Shell.

Racke had something on his mind, he felt convinced. But what it was, Tom told himself with sudden impatience, was none of his business. He moved up to the green board and pinned the footer list to it.

As he did so, Racke suddenly heard him. He started violently, and glanced quickly round, with a face that was startlingly pale.

He seemed about to speak, but did not do so. With a muttered exclamation he turned and strode away, vanishing up the stairs.

CHAPTER 7.

An Odd Discovery!

"Oh, well shot!"

"Hard luck, Gussy!"

"Saved, there!"

A storm of shouts rang out on Little Side, as a stinging shot from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sent in from a difficult angle, almost beat the goalkeeper. But the Grammarian goalie, with a desperate leap, had just managed to intercept the flying leather, and had sent it soaring up the field with a splendid drop-kick.

The match between St. Jim's and Gordon Gay's team from Rylcombe Grammar School was in full swing.

During half an hour of really fine football, with most of the play in mid-field, the spectators had been worked up to an almost feverish pitch of excitement.

A spectacular attack by the St. Jim's forwards, ending in Gussy's fine, though fruitless, kick for goal, had brought a burst of applause. Now, as the ball was swept back to mid-field, and Gordon Gay was seen to have possession, the St. Jim's supporters went suddenly silent, and the Grammar School spectators broke out afresh.

"Go it, Gay!"

"On the ball, old hoss!"

"Grammar School for ever!"

Gordon Gay, racing up the field with the ball at his toes, eluded Ernest Levison with a pretty exhibition of footwork, and sped on towards the home team's goal, his fellow forwards strung out in a perfect line on either side of him.

Reginald Talbot, of St. Jim's, at right-back, rushed to tackle him. But Gordon Gay flashed the ball across to Frank Monk a moment before Talbot, with a powerful charge, bowled him over in the mud.

The leader of the Grammarians scrambled up, breathless and muddy, just in time to see Monk shoot for goal.

Fatty Wynn, the portly St. Jim's custodian, was ready, however. He fisted the ball out smartly as it came sailing towards him, and there was a gasp of relief from the St. Jim's supporters.

Talbot got possession, but was robbed by Wootton major, who promptly sent a crashing shot leaping towards the goal again. But again Fatty Wynn was a tower of strength. He caught the slippery leather against his broad chest, and with a nimbleness that would have amazed a stranger, in

view of his bulky figure, he skipped aside as one of the Grammarian forwards rushed him.

Thud!

Fatty Wynn had kicked the ball clear, out towards Levison, at right-half.

"Come on, Saints!" yelled Wally D'Arcy excitedly, on the touchline.

"Go it, Ernie!" gasped Frank Levison, Ernest Levison's minor, as Levison of the Fourth trapped the ball and sped away with it.

With shining eyes Levison minor watched his brother elude the tackle of a muddy Grammarian and pass the ball to Tom Merry, at centre-forward.

"Come on, Saints!"

"Play up, ye giddy cripples!"

Already Tom Merry was well down the field, the ball dancing at his toes. He was tackled, but he sent his opponent over in the mud with a hefty shoulder-to-shoulder charge and sped on.

"Good old Tom!" breathed Manners, watching from the touch-line in company with Bernard Glyn and Clifton Dane.

Tom slipped the ball across to Monty Lowther, at inside-right, and Lowther got rid of the leather to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, on the wing.

Looking anything but his usual immaculate self in his mud-stained footer togs, the swell of St. Jim's raced down the edge of the field like the wind.

"Shoot, Gussy!" howled Wally D'Arcy, dancing excitedly.

He turned a shining face to Frankie Levison and Reggie Manners, who were with him.

"Watch my major score, you kids!" he grinned breathlessly. "Go it, Gus! Shoot— Oh! Oh, blow!"

Arthur Augustus had been sent flying by a stalwart Grammarian, who now had possession of the ball.

"Rotten!" said Frankie Levison briefly.

Wally glared at him.

"What's that, young Levison?"

"Rotten," repeated Levison minor, with a sniff. "Why didn't your blessed major pass to Lowther before he was knocked over? If he can't stand up he ought to pass to some chap who can—"

"Who says my major can't stand up?"

"Well, look at him!"

"Look here, young Levison—"

"Rats! Oh, look! Oh, go it, Ernie!" Frankie gasped, as Ernest Levison was seen to have the ball again. "Now, you watch, my major! Good old Ernie! Just watch him! I— Oh, my hat!"

Frankie Levison gave a gasp of dismay as his wonderful major was sent spinning by a charge from Gordon Gay. Levison major went down in the mud, and Frankie met Wally's look with a set face.

"Rotten!" said Wally.

Frankie breathed hard.

"If you ask me, that was a foul charge, anyway!" he growled defiantly.

"Rats!" grinned Wally. "With Kildare 'reffing,' fouls are always spotted. Anyway, Gordon Gay wouldn't foul. The trouble is your blessed major can't stand on his pins for more than two minutes at a time—"

"Look here, you idiot—"

"Look here, you chump—"

But at that moment a grim attack by the Grammarian forwards on the St. Jim's goal drew all the fags' attention.

Fatty Wynn had a very hot two minutes, but at last the ball was returned to the St. Jim's forwards, and after a brief mid-field tussle Tom Merry got away again.

The St. Jim's forward line swept down on the Grammarian goal with an irresistible determination, the ball flashing from one to another in a way that utterly baffled the visitors' defence.

"They look like scoring this time," muttered Clifton Dane.

"Go it, Saints!"

But the Grammarian goalkeeper was waiting, tense and ready.

As the ball leapt towards him from Tom Merry's foot he sprang out and collected it neatly. There was a groan of disappointment from the St. Jim's supporters.

With a tremendous kick the goalkeeper got rid of the ball. But as he kicked it his foot slipped in the mud, and it was a wild shot that sent the ball flying high over the touchline, spinning in the wind.

Crash!

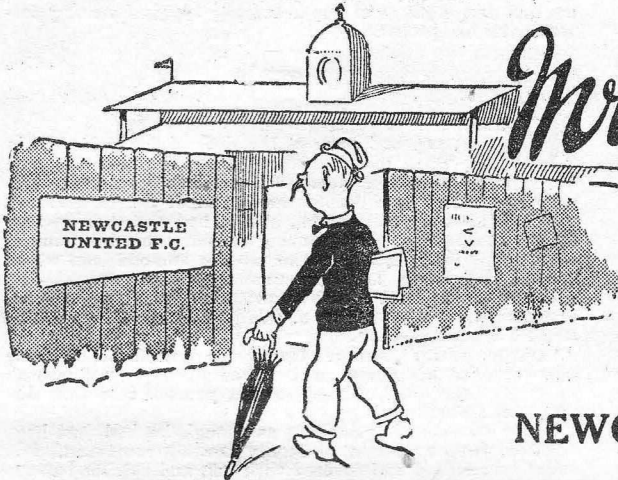
The ball had landed in the branches of one of the old elms and stuck there.

Grinning faces stared up at it. It was plain that the ball had lodged very securely in the tree, above the spectators' heads. Kildare, the referee, shrugged as he stared up at it.

"That won't come down till it's fetched," he remarked. "Manners, run into the pav and get another match ball—quick!"

(Continued on page 12.)

FOOTBALL INFORMATION FROM THE INSIDE:



Mr. Parker POPS IN TO SEE NEWCASTLE UNITED.

Following his nose, Mr. "Nosey" Parker enters the portals of Newcastle United, and he's not there more than a few minutes before he has got all the information possible from this famous northern club!

That "Never-Say-Die" Spirit!

WHAT is the matter with Newcastle United? That is a question which has been asked by many people during the present season, so it was only natural that I should be sent right away to Newcastle to find out for myself. Now, it isn't an easy job to start finding the answer to such a question, and I had an idea that my nose would be in danger if I began poking it about very obviously with a view to finding out what was the matter. So I had to do it all very unobtrusively—that word being one which I have heard used occasionally, and which I trust I have now used in the right place.

Things have not been going well with Newcastle United this season—there's no question about that. We expect to see the side somewhere near the top of the Division, and we expect to see them playing the highest class of football. Instead of which some of the glory seems to have departed, and it is clear that the team will have to "buck up" in the closing months of the season if the anxiety of the officials is to be eased before the end of the campaign.

What memories are conjured up by a visit to St. James' Park—which is the title of the arena on which Newcastle United play. We remember a team which was so good in pre-War days, that they went to the final tie five times in seven seasons, and won the championship as well around the same period. They had wonder-players in those days.

When I arrived at St. James' Park to chatter with all the "Magpies" there, I thought the best thing to do was to look up some of the oldest 'inhabitants'—those who knew the Newcastle team at its best and were still associated with it. I had my first shock when I called upon the secretary, who is also the manager, Mr. Frank Watt. I had an idea that I should find him down in the dumps but he was just as cheery as ever. His huge moustache—it is the champion among moustaches—wasn't drooping in the slightest.

"Don't look so sad when you come to talk to me about my team," he said, "because we don't think there is any necessity to be unduly depressed. Most football clubs fall on bad times, and one of the troubles of Newcastle is that we are always judged by our high standard of other days. We think we shall get back to that high standard because we have never departed from our avowed motto—'The best only is good enough for us.'"

Two-Thirds Scots!

THE next "oldest inhabitant" I looked up connected with the club was Jimmy McPherson, the trainer. I don't know how many years Jimmy has been associated with Newcastle and I didn't ask him. But he is just as young as ever at heart, and he remains one of the real characters among trainers. He is always willing to have his leg pulled, and I could fill all this page with stories of the jokes which have been played by the players at Jimmy's expense. But he likes them to play these jokes, because he realises that they are keeping cheery.

I recall once how the players worked up a big joke against Jimmy. They were coming back from a match in a char-a-banc when it was suddenly pointed out to the trainer that one of the players had been left behind. Jimmy got very worried, but there was nothing to be done for the moment. Immediately the "remnants" of the team arrived at their destination, however, Jimmy set the wires going in search of the missing player. Presently he turned up, apparently in a fearful rage. It was pouring with rain and the player looked wet through. He told a pathetic story of having had to walk from the station because the char-a-banc had gone without him. It was some days later that McPherson discovered that the player had not been left behind at all: that he had duly travelled in the char-a-banc, but had been "smuggled" into a corner by his colleagues who could not resist the temptation to pull the trainer's leg.

One of the troubles with Newcastle at the present time is that there is "no luck about the hoose." That's as near as I can get to the Scottish way of saying it, and when you are at Newcastle you have to say things in the Scottish way, because about two-thirds of the team come from the land of cakes.

Newcastle had some very bad luck right at the beginning of the season when Andy Cunningham, who came to Newcastle from Glasgow Rangers last year, had to go into a nursing home for an operation for appendicitis and, of course, has been out of the team for some months.

The Long and the Short of it!

YOUNG Hutchinson, a new centre-forward, has lost all his faith in horseshoes as mascots. When he came from Dundee, recently the inhabitants packed him up with lucky horseshoes, which they said would bring him a sack of goals—not coals—at Newcastle. Well, Hutchinson duly took the horseshoes to St. James' Park, but he had

scarcely arrived there when he received a serious injury. He told me I could have the horseshoes at bargain prices.

One of the difficulties in talking with these Newcastle men—and which I discovered before I had been there very long—is that those who should be Scottish are English, and one or two of those who should be English are Scottish. Take Albert McInroy, the goalkeeper, for instance. I thought some talk about haggis would be quite in order with him, but the reply he gave me was in a decided Lancashire accent. That is the county in which he was born, and where he lived until Sunderland made him an

offer to go and keep goal for them. Albert made the short journey to Newcastle not long ago.

Then Alf Maitland should certainly be English. He's one of the full-backs and has actually played for the English League. Yet he isn't English at all, having been born in Scotland and lived at Leith until he was two years of age. There was quite a lot of sobbing among the English selectors when they discovered that they had made a mistake in thinking Maitland was qualified to play for England.

Of course, Robert Thompson is Scottish, and played for Scotland before he was twenty-one years of age. And from the same country comes Tom McDonald. The fall in the fortunes of Newcastle may be partly due to the fact that Tom either mislaid or lost a lucky penny which he once picked up on a playing-pitch in the course of a First Division match.

Newcastle were losing when McDonald round the penny, but they eventually won the game so Tom thought this was luck. He had the penny mounted, after holding it in his hand for the rest of the game. "I should have kept it in my hand all the time," he said, "instead of putting it into my pocket."

The characters of the Newcastle side are Jack Hill and Hughie Gallacher—the long and the short of it. Jack is a great animal lover with a special fondness for horses and dogs. He can also play cricket more than a bit, but declares that instead of the rule-makers of the summer game allowing for bigger wickets they should allow men to have bigger bats. When Jack is at the wicket with an ordinary sized bat in his hand, he looks like Frank Woolley—and the bat looks much too small for him.

A Little Luck—and All's Well!

HUGHIE is the dandy little centre-forward who has some Irish blood in his veins, seemingly and with the Scotsman's love for ye royal and ancient game of golf Tommy Urwin is the scholar of the side being a great reader. He doesn't smoke and doesn't drink anything stronger than coffee. On the wing there is another Tommy playing—an outside left named Lang, and Jack Hill is quite confident that he will eventually be the successor to Aian Morton as Scotland's outside left. Weaver has just arrived from Hull, and with goals in his first two matches as a half-back, threatens to bring them luck. And that is what Newcastle want more than anything—some good luck. Nossey."

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A Rogue's Reward !

(Continued from page 10.)

Manners hurried off, and Kildare glanced at the group of fags standing near.

"One of you kids shin up and get that ball down, will you?"

"Right-ho, Kildare!" grinned Wally. "I'll get it!"

Manners soon reappeared with another ball, and play was resumed. Wally D'Arcy, already scrambling up the big tree, found that he had a fine view of the play, and did not hurry himself particularly on his errand.

"Come on, Gussy!" he gasped eagerly, as he saw his major racing down the field with the ball towards the visitors' goal. "Come on, Gus! Play up, old boss! Shoot—oh, shoot, you idiot! Look out! Oh, well played! Now—shoot! Sho-o-o-o-ot! Oh, got it! Goal! Good old Gussy! Hurrah!"

In his excitement Wally almost fell from the branch to which he was holding as the rufel Grammarian goalkeeper picked the ball out of the back of the net, where it had come to rest from a splendid shot by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

St. Jim's were in the lead.

With that comforting certainty Wally turned his attention again to the task of retrieving the ball from the branches of the elm.

He climbed nimbly towards it. From below the shouts of the spectators could be heard as play was resumed.

At the foot of the tree a group of fags were watching Wally with great interest. Wally, within reach of the suspended ball at last, looked down at them.

"Catch, you kids!"

He stretched up an arm, giving the ball a push. It bounced out of its resting-place in the fork of two small branches, and fell to earth. There was a cheer from the fags, and Wally began to climb down again.

"What the dickens—"

Wally had come to the main fork of the tree on his way down when a sudden exclamation escaped him.

He had noticed on his way up that there was a deep hole in the trunk just there. But he had not noticed that there was anything in it.

He saw now that in the hole, as though it had been carefully hidden there, was a rusty tin—an old toffee-tin, it seemed to be.

How a big toffee-tin could come to be there was a mystery. It certainly could not have come there by accident. "Funny!" muttered Wally.

He lifted the tin out of the dark cavity, and forced off the lid, staring in. An exclamation of astonishment escaped him.

The tin contained some neatly-folded sheets of foolscap, covered in a writing that seemed vaguely familiar to Wally.

They seemed to be the sheets of some exam paper, and they were numbered from twenty-two to twenty-eight.

Eager shouts from the spectators round the touchline rang out lustily beneath Wally of the Third as he examined in great surprise the seven sheets of foolscap. An exciting tussle was in progress round the St. Jim's goal.

But for the moment Wally had lost interest in the big match.

"What the dickens—" he repeated under his breath.

Then suddenly his face lit up.

"My hat! Of course! I thought it was familiar. This is old Figgins' writing!"

Again he examined the sheets in bewilderment.

"How on earth did they get stuck up here?" he muttered.

"It's jolly rum! What on earth would Figgins want to stick these papers in a giddy tin and hide it up here for?"

Wally frowned, deep in thought.

And then from below there came a tremendous yell.

"Goal!"

"Oh, well played!"

"Good old Gay!"

Wally stared across at the footer field, and to his dismay, he saw Fatty Wynn taking the ball out of the St. Jim's goal-net. The Grammar School had equalised!

"Oh, rotten!" growled Wally disconsolately.

He shoved the mysterious papers into his pocket, and hurriedly descended to earth, intent only upon joining his voice in the yells of encouragement which, according to the fag fraternity at any rate, were absolutely essential to the success of their team.

Two minutes later Wally was yelling himself hoarse once

more, in the centre of the group of Third-Formers—with the mysterious sheets of paper bearing Figgins' writing forgotten in his pocket.

CHAPTER 8. Mysterious !

"COME in!"

A tap had come at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage, where Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were gathered before starting their prep that evening, to discuss the Grammar School match.

It had been a great match, and it had ended in victory for St. Jim's—Tom Merry having scored within ten minutes of the final whistle, to give his team a two-one lead which Gordon Gay & Co. had been unable to wipe out.

In answer to Tom Merry's invitation, the door opened, and the dishevelled figure of Wally D'Arcy of the Third stepped into the study.

"Gweat Scott!" Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed his minor in horrified dismay. "Whatevah have you been doin', Wallay, to get yourself into that disgraceful state?"

Wally was certainly looking as though he had just been removed from a dustbin, as Monty Lowther remarked. His collar was dented and covered with ink, and half his buttons seemed to be missing. His hair was wildly dishevelled, and one sock was hanging round his ankle.

But he grinned cheerily as he closed the door behind him. "It's all right," he said cheerfully. "I've just been having a bit of an argument with young Levison."

Arthur Augustus sniffed, with strong disapproval.

"Weally, Wallay! Your appeahwance is an uttah disgwace! I am howwified—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Bai Jove! Look heah, Wallay—"

"Br-r-r!"

"Wallay, I insist upon you speakin' with more wespsect to me, as your majah!" snorted Arthur Augustus. "I feel almost compelled to administah a feahful thwashin' as it is! Anyway, how many times have I told you not to be always scwappin' with the other fags?"

"Rats! I—"

"A scwap all about nothin', too, I feel suah," said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "What was the mattah?"

"Well, you see, young Levison said you couldn't play footer for nuts—"

"W-what?" gasped the swell of St. Jim's, with a jump.

"He said you were a hopeless duffer on the footer field, only fit to play marbles—"

"B-bai Jove!"

"And that the sight of you trying to play footer was worth three circuses and an afternoon at the pictures," finished Wally carelessly.

Arthur Augustus gasped. When he spoke, it was in a voice that quivered with indignation.

"B-bai Jove! Young Levison weally said that? The howwid little boundah! Wallay, I hope you administahed a feahful hidin' to him!" panted the swell of St. Jim's.

"What?" ejaculated Wally. "I thought you said I ought not to scrap?"

"Ahem! Not ordinawily, of course," stammered Arthur Augustus. "But I—I—you see, this is wathah a diffewent mattah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake, Herries, Digby, and the Terrible Three roared. The swell of St. Jim's surveyed them stiffly.

"Weally, you cacklin' asses—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Gussy, you're priceless!" chuckled Tom Merry. He turned to the Third-Former. "Well, kid? What do you want?"

"I wanted to see you," answered Wally. "About something rather rummy—"

"Why, what is it, kid?" asked Tom curiously.

"It's this!"

And Wally took from his pocket the sheets of paper he had found hidden in the tin in the hole of the old elm on Little Side.

"What are these?" exclaimed Tom in bewilderment, as he took the sheets from Wally, as the fag held them out to him. Then he gave an exclamation. "My hat! Figgy's writing!"

The others were staring at Wally in equal surprise. But at Tom's words they glanced at him quickly.

"Figgins' writing?" echoed Blake in astonishment.

Wally nodded.

"That's right. I thought it was Figgins' fist. I found them hidden in that tree where the footer got caught, you know. I shinned up after it, and found a tin in a hole in the trunk. Those were inside it. I thought it was a bit rummy, and I thought I'd show 'em to you."

Tom was examining the sheets of foolscap intently. A queer look had come into his face.

"There's something queer here," he said abruptly.
 "You think there is, then?" cried Wally, in an eager tone. "But—"

"These sheets are part of an exam paper, you chaps," went on Tom, with a deep frown. "I can't understand it. The only exam Figgy can have been in for is the Armitage, isn't it? There haven't been any Form exams yet this term in the Fourth, have there?"

"No," said Herries. "But—"
 "The ink's pretty fresh on these papers," added Tom. "Figgy must have written them recently. And judging from the questions, I should say they're the Armitage Scholarship questions for a cert!"

"But hang it all—" began Manners.
 "I'm not pretending to explain it!" Tom passed the papers round for inspection. "Figgins wouldn't have written out these answers to some of the Armitage questions after the exam was over—and then go and hide them in a tree! It's the rummiest thing I've struck for a long while!"
 "My hat, yes!" agreed Blake. "But these can't be part of Figgy's actual exam papers!"

"Blessed if I can make it out at all!" ejaculated Digby.
 "It's feahfully wum!" nodded Arthur Augustus.
 Tom Merry dropped a hand on Wally's shoulder.
 "You did quite right to show these to us, young 'un. There's something queer here, if you ask me!"

Blake handed the sheets of paper back to him. Tom glanced round at his chums.

"I think Railton ought to see these," he said quietly.
 "Heah, heah!"
 "In fact, I'll take them along to him now."
 "Good wheeze," nodded Manners. "I can't understand what it means, but it looks so queer that Railton or the Head ought to see them."

Tom nodded, and crossed to the door, carrying the mysterious papers. Wally followed him out into the passage.
 "You'd better come along, too, young 'un," said the captain of the Shell. "Tidy yourself up a bit first, though!"
 "Right-ho!" grinned Wally, and raced away to the bathrooms.

It did not take Wally long to make himself presentable, and he caught up with Tom Merry as the captain of the Shell was entering the Housemaster's study, in reply to a summons from within.

"Well, Merry?" Mr. Railton was seated by the fire, and he glanced up as Tom strode into the room with Wally at his heels. "Hallo, D'Arcy minor! You too?"

Something in Wally's excited face, and Tom Merry's countenance, told the popular young Housemaster that their visit was in connection with something important. He laid down the book he had been reading.

"What is it?" he asked.
 Tom Merry explained. Mr. Railton took the papers from him without a word, and examined them with a very thoughtful frown. He was clearly intensely puzzled. Then his bewilderment changed to sudden, startled astonishment.

"Can it be possible?" he breathed.
 He jumped to his feet.
 "D'Arcy, you say that you found these hidden in a tin in a tree?"

"Yes, sir! On Little Side this afternoon—"
 "As if someone had deliberately hidden them there?"
 "It jolly well looked like it, sir!"
 "What do you think it means, sir?" put in Tom Merry quickly.

Mr. Railton's face set in grim lines.
 "My suspicion is such an amazing one, so almost incredible, that I think I will keep it to myself for a while," he answered quietly. "But I want you two boys to come with me at once to the headmaster."

"M-my hat!" gasped Wally, under his breath.
 Wally, though he had been sufficiently puzzled to take the mysterious papers to Tom Merry, had not imagined for a moment that they would end by being taken to the headmaster of St. Jim's.

It was with an almost scared expression on his face that Walter Adolphus D'Arcy followed Mr. Railton and Tom Merry from the Housemaster's room, on their way to the Head!

CHAPTER 9.

The Amazing Truth!

DR. HOLMES was busy at his desk when Mr. Railton entered his study, with Tom Merry and Wally following nervously at his heels.

The kindly old Head laid down his pen and rose courteously to his feet when he saw that Mr. Railton was one of his visitors.

"Well, Mr. Railton?"
 "I have come to you about rather an extraordinary matter—and, I believe, a very important one, sir," said Mr.

Railton quietly. "I have had brought to me by Tom Merry certain papers which D'Arcy minor happened to discover this afternoon hidden in a tree, in a tin box. There are reasons why I think the discovery is an important—even a startling one. I should be glad if you would examine them yourself, sir."

"Dear me!"
 Highly mystified, the Head placed his spectacles upon his nose, and took the papers that Mr. Railton had held out. Almost at once he glanced up, frowning.

"Why, Mr. Railton! These are replies written to some of the questions set in the recent Armitage Scholarship examination!"

"Precisely, sir."
 "But I fail to comprehend—"

"The writing, sir, I am told, is undoubtedly that of Figgins, of the New House, who recently left the school," added Mr. Railton quietly. "As you will, of course, remember, he was one of the candidates for the scholarship."
 "Bless my soul!"

The Head adjusted his spectacles, and scrutinised the sheets he held with a keener interest than ever. An odd look appeared upon his handsome old face.

"Extraordinary!" he muttered. He glanced up. "Mr. Railton, it would almost appear as though these sheets comprised part of this boy Figgins' papers in the Armitage examination! But such a notion is manifestly absurd—"

"It would seem impossible, I agree," put in the Housemaster quickly. "But surely no boy would take the trouble of answering examination questions secretly, after the examination! Such an act would be utterly purposeless."
 "Great Scott!"

Tom Merry breathed that amazed exclamation, his face suddenly incredibly startled.

(Continued on next page.)



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He was beginning to understand Mr. Railton's suspicion! "In any case, had Figgins, for some extraordinary reason, gone to the trouble of answering those questions, to no practical purpose after the examination, it is surely inconceivable that he would further conceal them in a tree!" went on Mr. Railton significantly. "Does it not appear that someone else hid them there—someone who, in some amazing way, had succeeded in wickedly removing those sheets from Figgins' papers after the examination?"

The Head gave an exclamation.

"Bless my soul! Mr. Railton, your suggestion is an astonishing one! But I see the force of your arguments. It really would seem—"

Then Dr. Holmes broke off and shook his head decidedly.

"But it is impossible! I myself collected the Armitage Examination papers immediately upon their completion, and they were never out of my possession."

"Nevertheless, sir, I feel that it would be advisable to examine Figgins' Armitage paper, if you still have it in your possession, and make certain that there has been no foul play!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

"There is no harm in that, certainly," assented the Head. "I still have the examination papers here, I am glad to say."

The silence in the study was oddly tense as Dr. Holmes turned to his desk, and from a drawer produced three sheafs of foolscap.

"Here is Figgins' paper," murmured the Head. "I remember that he left more questions unanswered than either of the other two candidates. In fact, I was greatly surprised at the time to find that that was so, for he had been working steadily, I noticed, during the whole course of the examination."

He laid the sheets that Mr. Railton had brought him on the desk, and glanced at them.

"I see that these loose sheets are numbered from twenty-two to twenty-eight," he observed, turning the pages of the sheaf of foolscap that he held. "I—Bless my soul!"

The Head had seemed almost to jump clean into the air as that thoroughly startled exclamation broke from him.

"Good heavens!"

"You have discovered something?" cried Mr. Railton.

The Head looked at the Housemaster with a face that had gone dark and stern.

"Yes!" he said in steely tones. "Pray look at this, Mr. Railton! You see? The last page of Figgins' paper has been altered—from twenty-nine to twenty-two! At the time, of course, I would attach no significance to that fact, but now I realise that your suspicions are only too right! There has been foul play here without a doubt!"

"My hat!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Yes, it is clear enough, sir," nodded Mr. Railton grimly. "Some unscrupulous person has clearly removed those seven sheets from this boy's Armitage paper, and altered the number of the last sheet in order to cover their absence!"

"I—I can hardly believe the evidence of my senses!" breathed the Head. "Who can have perpetrated such a terrible deed? Why—good heavens, Mr. Railton, the removal of these sheets, however it was effected, may entirely have upset the result of the examination!"

"That, sir, I presume, was the intention of the person who tampered with these papers," nodded Mr. Railton, with gleaming eyes. "Someone, clearly, has wished to make sure that Figgins should fail to win the scholarship!"

"Phew!"

There was a low whistle from Wally D'Arcy, which neither of the two masters noticed.

"This—this is terrible!" exclaimed the Head, in a low tone. "Figgins had to leave the school when he failed to win this scholarship. It seems now that he may have been entitled to remain on as the winner!"

Tom Merry stepped impulsively forward.

Tom's eyes were shining. The knowledge that, after all, Figgy might yet prove to be the rightful winner of the Armitage Scholarship, had caused his heart to leap.

"What'll happen, sir?" he breathed excitedly. "Will you take these papers that Wally—I mean D'Arcy—has found, into consideration now?"

"I shall be compelled to do so, my boy," said the Head quietly. "Justice must be done. I shall mark these additional papers carefully, and if Figgins' total is then better than that of Brown, the supposed winner, Figgins must be awarded his due. I fear the shock to Brown in such circumstances would be a severe one. But justice, as I say, must be done at all costs."

He turned to Mr. Railton.

"Who the individual is who removed these sheets from Figgins' examination papers I cannot imagine. But I shall leave no stone unturned to discover the culprit. It is a mystery to me, too, how this unknown, unscrupulous person managed to gain access to the examination papers before

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they were corrected, as he undoubtedly did. But, though they are to some extent still mystifying, the facts themselves are clear. Those seven sheets were deliberately extracted from Figgins' paper, so that he might stand no chance of winning the Armitage Scholarship!"

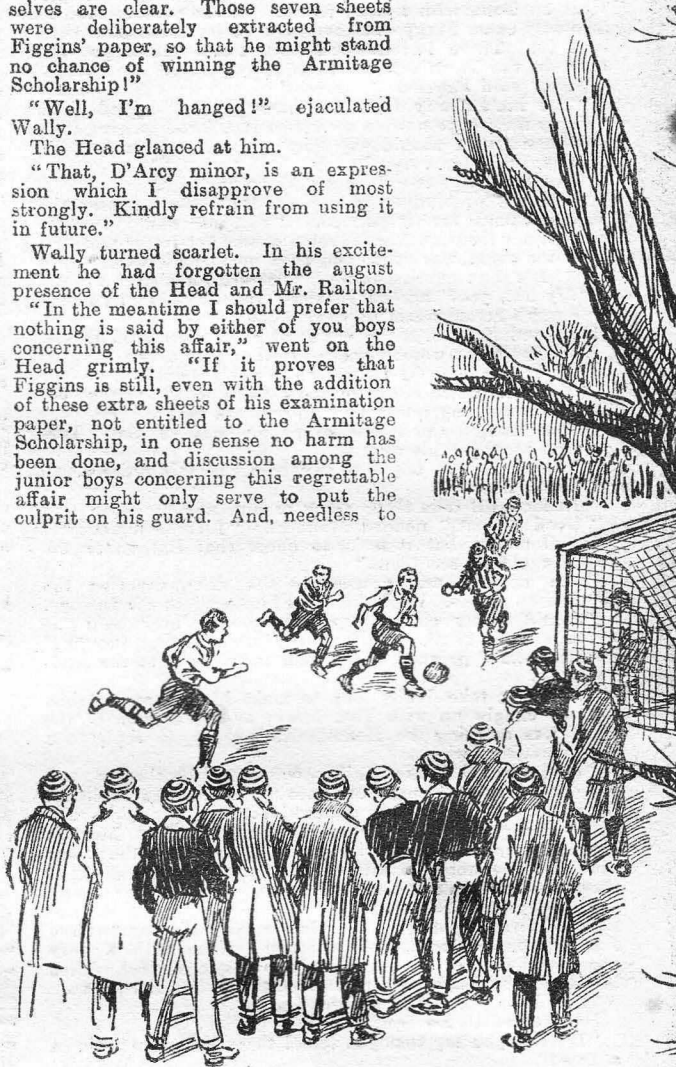
"Well, I'm hanged!" ejaculated Wally.

The Head glanced at him.

"That, D'Arcy minor, is an expression which I disapprove of most strongly. Kindly refrain from using it in future."

Wally turned scarlet. In his excitement he had forgotten the august presence of the Head and Mr. Railton.

"In the meantime I should prefer that nothing is said by either of you boys concerning this affair," went on the Head grimly. "If it proves that Figgins is still, even with the addition of these extra sheets of his examination paper, not entitled to the Armitage Scholarship, in one sense no harm has been done, and discussion among the junior boys concerning this regrettable affair might only serve to put the culprit on his guard. And, needless to



"Funny!" muttered Wally D'Arcy. From a deep hole in the trunk of the great elm, he took a rusty tin box. How could it have got there?

say, every effort will be made to identify whoever is responsible."

"I won't say a word about it, sir," said Tom Merry, nodding.

"Neither will I, sir," put in Wally, though there was a faint note of regret in his voice.

"You boys may go," went on the Head. "Thank you for bringing this matter to light. You have rendered a great service to the school."

"We shall have if it means that old Figgy comes back!" Tom muttered to himself as he left the study and turned in the direction of the Shell passage.

His eyes were shining.

Figgins back at St. Jim's!

The idea seemed almost too good to be true. Yet it was more than possible now.

It was with a light step that Tom approached Study No. 10.

Blake & Co. were still there, with Manners and Monty Lowther, eager to hear what had happened concerning the mysterious papers. Tom grinned as questions were fired at him from all sides.

"Sorry, you chaps. I can't say anything; the Head asked me not to—"

CHAPTER 10.

Back to St. Jim's!

BUT the St. Jim's fellows were not kept long in ignorance of the amazing affair of Figgins' stolen papers!

Though Wally kept his word as loyally as Tom Merry, the news leaked out the very next day.

Knox of the Sixth overheard Mr. Railton talking to Mr. Ratcliff about it, and Reggie Manners, fagging for Knux, overheard the Sixth-Former telling his cronies, Cutts and St. Leger of the Fifth, the astonishing story.

And once Reggie knew it, it took only about twenty minutes for all the Third to be acquainted with the facts. From the Third the whole story spread upwards through the school like wildfire, and caused a terrific stir.

That same day, when St. Jim's was humming with the story, it was definitely known that Figgins would return.

His paper had been re-marked, with the recently discovered pages included, and he had topped Dick Brown's score by no less than fifteen marks. And the jubilation among Figgy's friends was delirious.

Nobody dreamed for a moment that Aubrey Racke was the unknown individual who had tampered with the Armitage papers. And Racke himself, as it happened, was the last fellow at St. Jim's to hear of the discovery of his villainous act.

Racke had caught a chill on the evening before the day of the Grammar School match. He had been seen tramping to and fro under the leafless elms in the quad, and had come in shivering with cold. The next day he had gone down with a sore throat, and had been sent to the sanatorium. He had not been allowed to see anyone, for fear of infection; and Marie Rivers, though she had heard of Figgins' imminent return to St. Jim's from Reginald Talbot, who was a great chum of hers, had not thought of mentioning the fact to Aubrey Racke.

It had taken Racke several days to recover. He had seemed queerly ill before catching the chill even, and in his run-down state the slight ailment took a great deal of throwing off. Not till Saturday was he allowed out of bed, and he had still been allowed no visitors.

In the afternoon he was sitting by the window of his room in the sanatorium, staring out into the quad with brooding eyes, when a sudden terrific cheer from the direction of the gates drew his surprised attention.

"What's up?" Racke asked himself, frowning.

From his window he could not see the gates. But the lusty cheering that came from that direction was loud enough to tell Racke that something very out of the way was happening.

Again and again the cheering echoed round the handsome old buildings of St. Jim's.

"What on earth—"

Round the corner of the sanatorium building a swarm of fellows had suddenly appeared, surging across towards the New House from the school gates.

School House and New House juniors, for once all mixed up in complete amicability, were marching in a cheering crowd towards the New House steps.

Racke stared down wonderingly.

Then he caught his breath.

High on the shoulders of half a dozen fellows—Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Dick Redfern and Kerr and Fatty Wynn, and Reginald Talbot of the Shell were the six—an athletic figure was being chaired across the quad, swaying high above the excited crowd.

For a moment Racke did not recognise the centre of the excitement. Then the laughing, protesting fellow on the juniors' shoulders turned his face towards the window from which Racke was peering down.

It was Figgins—his honest, rugged face alight with happiness—who was being chaired across the quad, and in whose honour the ceaseless cheers were echoing round the grey old buildings.

Figgins!

For a moment or two Racke could not believe his eyes. He felt that he must be dreaming.

"Figgins!" he breathed. "It can't be!"

But it was. There was no doubt about it. George Figgins was in the quad below—back at St. Jim's!

And from the fact that he was wearing the school cap on his tousled head, it was quite clear that he had come back for good.

With dazed face, Aubrey Racke stared after the crowd as it joyously marched Figgins home again to the New House.

His hands were gripping the arms of his chair, so that the knuckles showed white.

Figgins—back at St. Jim's!

All that he had risked, all that he had suffered at the hands of Baggy Trimble, when Baggy had blackmailed him with such insatiable demands, and the torments he had gone through after reading of the loss of the Harvester, and

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"The Head?" gasped Blake. "You mean to say the Head's in it?"

"Rather!" said Tom grimly. "I expect you'll know all about it before long. But all I can tell you now is this—that I'd bet a term's pocket-money to a rotten apple that old Figgins is back at St. Jim's within a week!"

"What?" yelled Monty Lowther.

"Back at St. Jim's?" cried Manners breathlessly.

"Yes! It's not certain, but I think he will."

"But what on earth—"

"How the dickens, deah boy—"

"I can't explain anything," laughed Tom. Then he frowned. "I suppose, though, there's no harm in telling you that there's been dirty work at the cross-roads! And, as I say, old Figgy will be back at the school soon, I feel as sure as eggs."

There was a moment or two of silence in Study No. 10. That the others were dying to bombard him with questions, Tom knew. But his chums evidently realised that to do so would be unfair, in view of his promise to the Head.

And in the meantime they had Tom's assurance of the likelihood of Figgins' return to St. Jim's to think about.

"Three cheers for old Figgy!" yelled Monty Lowther.

And the cheers rang out in Study No. 10 deafeningly.

knowing that he had sent Baggy to his death—all had been utterly in vain.

Figgins was back!

There was a sound at the door. Marie Rivers had come, bringing him his medicine. At sight of Racke's face she gave a startled exclamation.

"Goodness! What's the matter with you?"

There was alarm in Marie's voice, and her pretty face was alarmed, too.

Racke turned a haggard face towards her.

"I—I'm not well," he said.

From the quad a last, deafening, triumphant cheer rang out thunderously, as Figgins was borne in at the doorway of the New House.

Racke turned away from the window, and for a moment put a hand to his face, as if to bury it in his trembling fingers.

"Why, you poor boy!" said Marie anxiously. "You must get back into bed at once. I'll send for the doctor—"

"Who was that?" jerked out Racke, staring at her. Even yet he could not quite rid himself of the idea that he must have been dreaming. "That fellow they were chairing across the quad—"

"That was Figgins," said Marie; and for a moment she smiled. "Didn't you know he's come back? Splendid, isn't it? It's awfully hard luck on Brown, though, I'm afraid."

"Brown?" muttered Racke, staring at her almost wildly now. "What do you mean?"

"Why, they've found out something terrible!" said Marie. "They've found that somebody stole some pages from Figgins' exam papers. They've re-marked the pages with the stolen ones added, and he's come out top for the Armitage! Poor Brown can't have it, after all, of course. And Figgins is back already. They haven't found out yet who stole the pages, but if they do—"

She broke off with a little cry.

Racke's eyes had closed. His head had fallen sideways.

He had fainted.

CHAPTER 11.

In Study No. 12.

"GENTLEMEN—"

"Hurrah!"

"On the ball, Figgy, old hoss!"

"Gentlemen—"

"Hip, pip!"

"Three cheers for good old Figgy!"

"Gentlemen—"

In the junior Common-room, in the New House, the celebration tea in honour of Figgins' return to St. Jim's was over at last. In answer to repeated yells for a speech, though very unwillingly, as was evident from his red and bashful countenance, George Figgins was on his feet at the head of the long table struggling to make his voice heard above the din.

But though they had insisted upon a speech from the hero of the hour, now that he was doing his best to make it, his hearers seemed far keener to yell their appreciation of Figgy's return than to listen to what Figgy had to say!

New House juniors and School House juniors yelled and cheered and rattled their plates, to express their joy at seeing him once more in their midst. And Figgins looked as though he would almost have liked the earth to open and swallow him.

Figgins was a modest individual, and all this "fuss," as he called it, over his return to St. Jim's, though he appreciated it, had left him decidedly unnerved.

"Quiet, you blithering asses!" yelled Fatty Wynn, jumping to his feet and making his voice heard with difficulty. "Give old Figgy a chance!"

In answer to Fatty Wynn's appeal the din subsided somewhat—sufficiently, at any rate, for Figgins to make himself audible without bursting his lungs.

"Gentlemen—"

"And School House chaps," put in Redfern.

The New House fellows chuckled. But Figgins grinned and shook his head.

"Rats to that! We've had our little rows in the past, but we all know that the School House bounders—I—I mean School House chaps," he corrected hastily—"are jolly good fellows!"

"Hurrah! Rather!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

The New House fellows agreed noisily. At the moment, at any rate, House rivalries were shelved!

"I can't make a speech—"

"What are you doing now, then, old chap?" inquired Monty Lowther. "Saying your twice-times table?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, I can't make a good speech, as I'd like to, to thank all you chaps for giving me such a ripping welcome

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back," went on Figgins quietly. "But—well, I appreciate it more than I can say. I was miserable when I had to go, and to be back at the old place is just wonderful!"

He sat down abruptly.

Redfern jumped to his feet.

"Listen, you chaps!" he shouted. "I'm not going to make a speech—"

"Oh, good!"

"Shut up, Levison, you ass! All I want to say is that I want to tell old Figgy that he can't be any more glad to be back than we're glad to see him back—"

"Hurrah!"

"Figgy and I have had our little differences in the past, of course. The new firm—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nothing to cackle at! The new firm—that's me and these two asses," added Redfern, indicating his two chums, Owen and Lawrence—"the new firm mean to be Cock study one of these days in the New House, as you all know—in fact, we're Cock study now, if only Figgy & Co. knew it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't you believe it, Reddy!" grinned Kerr.

"Of course we are!" declared Redfern wrathfully. "But this isn't the time to argue about that, anyway. What I want to say is that the new firm are as glad as anybody to see old Figgy back again. And if ever it's found out who the chap was that pinched those pages out of Figgy's exam papers, to do him out of winning the Armitage, we'll be among the first to help scrag him till he wishes he'd never been born!"

And Dick Redfern sat down, hot and red, amid a cheer that had a grim note in it.

"Yes, if only we could find out who it was," muttered Manners, with clouded brow.

Tom Merry, seated beside him, nodded.

"If only we could!" he agreed grimly. "But I don't see how even the Head can ever find that out, worse luck."

"What beats me," said Manners thoughtfully, "is why the chap, instead of destroying those papers, hid them in that blessed tin, in the tree."

"Goodness knows! He must have had some queer idea or other—must have had some reason. But I don't suppose we'll ever know now."

Soon after, the fellows began to disperse, with thoughts of prep. There was scarcely one of them that did not shake Figgins by the hand before leaving the Common-room.

There was something very like a lump in Figgins' throat when at last he and his two chums went upstairs to their study in the Fourth Form passage.

"It's great to be back," he said simply, as he strode into Study No. 4 with shining eyes.

For a while Figgins, Kerr, and Fatty Wynn sat and talked happily. But at last it was necessary for Kerr and Fatty Wynn to start their prep. Figgins, in the circumstances, had no prep to do, and so he strolled from the study intending to pay one or two visits to his friends.

In the passage, as he closed the door of his study, he paused, suddenly thoughtful.

He realised for the first time that Dick Brown, the fellow who had been the supposed winner of the Armitage Scholarship, had not been in the Common-room during the big tea there.

Figgins had scarcely thought about Brown, in his own happiness at being back at St. Jim's. But suddenly it came to him in a rush that his gain was Dick Brown's loss.

What did Brown think of it all?

"It's rough luck on the kid!" muttered Figgins, with a faint frown. "Still, it won't be so bad for him, not winning, after all, as it was for me when I thought I hadn't won. He won't have to leave St. Jim's because of not getting the scholarship."

He turned along the passage, towards Study No. 12—Dick Brown's study.

He halted outside the door and tapped upon it.

There was no answer from within.

"He's not here!" thought Figgins.

Then suddenly he stared. A queer sound had come from the other side of the closed door—a sound which caused Figgins to push open the door without further ceremony and hurry in.

Dick Brown was there, alone.

He was seated at the table, his head buried in his hands, sobbing.

CHAPTER 12.

The Fellow Who Lost!

FIGGINS stared down at the sobbing figure at the table in utter dismay.

Dick Brown was, as yet, evidently, ignorant of his entry.

Hot, dry sobs were shaking him—weary sobs, as though he

had been there at the table a long time, alone with his misery.

Figgins softly closed the door.

"Brown! Brown, old chap—"

The youngster did not hear him. His shoulders continued to shake wretchedly.

Figgins had seldom felt so uncomfortable in his life before. He would have liked to slip quietly from the study, and pretend he had never been there. But it was not Figgins' way to give in to any cowardice, whether physical or moral.

He stepped up to the sobbing youngster and touched him on the shoulder.

"Brown!" he whispered.

The hands came away from the hidden face, and Figgins found himself looking down into two red, swollen eyes. At sight of his visitor the youngster's miserable face went oddly pale.

"Figgins!" he stammered. "I—I—"

"What's the matter, young 'un?"

Figgins drew up another chair to the table and sat down beside the still trembling youngster, putting a comforting arm round his shoulders.

Dick Brown gulped, and hastily wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"I—I wish you hadn't found me like this!" he stammered ashamedly. "I—I—" He broke off with another sob. "You won't tell anybody?"

"Of course I shan't!"

"I saw you come this afternoon," muttered the youngster, bravely getting control of himself. "The chaps weren't half glad to see you, weren't they?"

"They did seem to be," admitted Figgins awkwardly. "But—"

"I'd wanted to be one of the first to welcome you, and—congratulate you," said Dick Brown haltingly.

"But I—I didn't go after all. You don't think it's rotten of me?"

"Of course I don't! It was jolly nice to think of it at all, anyway!"

"If I'd been a chap like—like Tom Merry—or somebody, I'd have been the first to congratulate you, in spite of everything, I suppose," said Brown miserably. "But I couldn't face it—"

"Look here," said Figgins bluntly, "what's the trouble? I feel a beast, in a way, over this—I feel almost as if I was doing you out of your rights, after it was thought you'd won the Armitage, for weeks, as you did. But—well, I can't very well help it, you know," he added, with a twisted smile. "The Head told me to come back and explained everything—"

"Of course!" cried Brown quickly. "Oh, you had to come, of course. The scholarship's properly yours. But I can't help being frightfully disappointed—"

He broke off.

"I—I don't quite mean that, you know. I'm glad for your sake, because I know what it means to you. But for my own sake, apart from you altogether—"

"I understand," nodded Figgins sympathetically. "It's rotten luck."

"You don't think they'll think I'm the chap that stole those pages from your paper, so that I could win?" muttered Brown, suddenly staring at Figgins wide-eyed.

"Of course not, you old ass!" laughed Figgins. "If that's what's worrying you, you can get that idea right out of your head!"

He rose to his feet. But to his consternation the youngster buried his face suddenly in his hands again.

"Look here, Brown," said Figgins gently, "what is it? Did the scholarship mean so much to you?"

"Yes," came the sobbing answer. "It—it meant everything!"

"Great Scott!" breathed Figgins in dismay.

"Didn't you understand?" Brown raised a tear-stained face to Figgins. "If I didn't win the Armitage I should have to leave St. Jim's. Just—just like you, you know. I thought I'd won it, and that I could stay. But now—now I shall have to go. I'll have to leave St. Jim's, and my—my mother—"

He broke off and again buried his face in his hands.

George Figgins, his face suddenly pale, stood staring down at him in dumb dismay.

"I—I didn't know!" he said lamely at last. "I didn't understand."

"I'm going home on Monday."

"Oh my hat!" breathed Figgins. "This is rotten!"

He scarcely knew what to say. The silence grew more than he could bear. He touched the quivering youngster on the shoulder, resting his hand there for a moment.

"I'm awfully sorry!" he said, in a low voice. "Terribly sorry!"

Dick Brown did not answer. Figgins felt that there was nothing more that he could say.

He turned and went silently from the room, closing the door softly behind him.

CHAPTER 13.

Figgins' Sacrifice!

"IT'S rotten!"

George Figgins it was who spoke, and his tone was very gloomy.

It was the following day, and Figgins was taking a Sunday afternoon walk along the banks of the Rhyl with Cousin Ethel.

It was not often that Figgins was gloomy in Ethel's cheerful company. As a rule, to be with Ethel put Figgins into high spirits at once. But on this occasion his face was clouded and his voice was glum.

No one had been more delighted than Ethel at Figgins' return to St. Jim's. She had been astonished at Figgins' lack of spirits that afternoon. Ethel had imagined that her boy chum would be full of joy at his return.

Now, as he came out with that gloomy remark, she stared at him in bewilderment.

"Rotten!" repeated Figgins.

"Rotten?" echoed Ethel blankly. "What's rotten? I should have thought you'd have been ever so happy to be back again!"

Figgins glanced at her quickly, and smiled faintly. "Oh, I am!" he said hastily. "Of course! Rather! But I was thinking for the minute of young Brown—"

"Brown?"

Ethel puckered her brow in bewilderment.

"He's the chap that was supposed to have won the Armitage," explained Figgins gloomily. "He's got to leave now, apparently. I found him in his study yesterday—well, awfully cut up; in fact, he was blubbering, poor kid. I said I wouldn't tell about that, but it doesn't matter telling you. He goes on Monday."

"Oh!"

Ethel's exclamation was full of distress and sympathy. But her eyes softened as they rested on Figgins. It was so like Figgins, she told herself, to be worrying about somebody else's unhappiness to the exclusion of his own good luck.

"What a shame," she said gently. "But you mustn't worry about it so—so deeply—it won't do any good. After all, the scholarship is rightfully yours. Supposing you had been given out as the winner in the very first place, as you ought to have been, and not had all your own unhappiness over having to go, you know—"

"Yes," nodded Figgins. "If that had happened it wouldn't have seemed quite so bad, in a way. As it is, I can't get rid of the feeling that I'm doing him out of

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A CHAT WITH YOUR EDITOR.

Well, here we are again, chums, and all feeling merry and bright, I know. There doesn't seem to be much doubt that you've enjoyed this number of the good old paper! You have? That's the stuff! The GEM is going great guns now, and no mistake. Of course, Martin Clifford can always be relied on to give us a rattling fine story, but there are times when he weighs in with something, really extra-special. Take the wonderful series we're having now, for instance. First there was "Under Trimble's Thumb!" then "A Rogue's Reward!"—both strong, gripping, full-of-meat yarns. And next week comes

"THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!"

—in which our famous author brings the series to a finish in a way that only he could have done. It's thrills, thrills all the way, in this great story—right from the beginning of Tom Merry & Co.'s dash to rescue Baggy Trimble, until they—

But you'll discover for yourselves what happens when you read

"THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOYS!"

next Wednesday!

That's just the first item. For a grand follow-up, we have another amazing instalment of our new serial—

"THE VALLEY OF FORTUNE!"

which carries on the story of peril and adventure in far-off South America in breath-taking fashion.

Even his worst enemy would admit that our MR. PARKER has a wonderful nose for news (it's long enough any way!), and he uses it to best advantage next week, when he pops in to give Bradford the "once-over." His report is full of facts and funniosities!

Finally, there's our whiskey old wonder the ORACLE, with his weekly supply of bright and breezy replies. Have you sent him your poser yet?

So-long, chums!

YOUR EDITOR.

It! I know that's rot; but that's how I'm feeling all the time! It's rotten."

"You mustn't feel that way—"

"I can't help it," said Figgins miserably.

They were turning a bend in the towpath, and another gleaming stretch of the Rhyll came into sight, bright and sparkling in the sunlight.

A sudden exclamation broke from Figgins.

"My hat! Why, there is Brown!"

Some distance up the river, on the opposite bank, a figure could be seen standing at the water's edge. It was Dick Brown, and he was staring about him in what struck Figgins a moment or two later as being an odd way.

It was almost as though Brown, for some reason, was making sure that he was unobserved.

Figgins and Ethel were hidden from him by a row of willows that grew at the water's edge just where they were walking. Though they could see the New House junior through them, he would be unable to see them.

"What is he doing?" breathed Ethel. "Why does he keep looking about him like that? I— Oh!"

She broke off with a sharp cry.

For the figure on the opposite bank had suddenly stepped to the edge of the water and leapt into the dark current that swept by under the grassy margin. Figgins and Ethel heard a distant splash and a faint cry. For a moment Dick Brown's head could be seen as he was carried downstream towards them, on the farther side. Then his white face vanished from sight.

For a moment Figgins was so startled that he felt rooted to the spot.

"Good Heavens!" His voice was wild and hoarse. "He can't swim!"

And in a flash Figgins understood.

Dick Brown, his nerves utterly unstrung from his misery and despair at having to leave St. Jim's, had leapt into the river while scarcely knowing what he was doing.

"Help! Help!"

The youngster's head had appeared again, and a shrill scream of terror came quavering over the water to Figgins' ears.

Brought to his senses now, Dick Brown was struggling wildly as the current carried him on in its merciless grip.

"Help!"

The pitiful cry broke off abruptly as the junior's head vanished again beneath the surface of the smooth, rushing water.

Figgins sprang to life.

He flung off his coat and cap, tore feverishly at the laces of his boots and kicked them off. With a spring he reached the edge of the water, and dived.

On the tow-path Ethel saw him striking out with long, powerful strokes towards the farther bank to intercept the helpless, struggling youngster who was being carried down so swiftly beneath the glittering surface of the water.

"Oh!" she breathed.

There was no sign of Brown now.

Figgins, fighting against the current, reached at last the spot to which he judged the drowning youngster would be carried by the flow of the stream. Ethel saw him vanish as he dived in desperate search.

And luck was with Figgins!

Almost at once his groping hands found what he sought.

From Ethel Cleveland there broke a sobbing cry as she saw Figgins' head appear above the water—and beside it another head, with white face and closed eyes.

"Oh, well done!" she breathed.

Twisting on to his back, grasping the unconscious figure of the New House junior by the shoulders, Figgins kicked out towards the tow-path.

The current was powerful, and it dragged him downstream despite himself. But little by little he managed to work his way towards the bank.

His one fear was the weeds that choked the river in patches might entangle his legs, or those of his burden. Once he felt his foot caught for a moment, but with a despairing kick he freed it and struggled on.

It seemed a long while to George Figgins before at last he found himself dragging the senseless form of Dick Brown from the water, with eager aid from Cousin Ethel.

"How splendid of you!" breathed Ethel, almost sobbing with relief.

Figgins glanced at her in genuine astonishment.

"Well, I had to go in for the silly young ass!" he expostulated.

Figgins knew how to apply artificial respiration, and he got to work now energetically. Before long, the white-faced youngster's eyes flickered open. He stared about him dazedly.

"Feeling better?" asked Figgins cheerily.

When at last Dick Brown could sit up, with chattering teeth, to stare with wild, terrified eyes at the river, Figgins surveyed him very grimly.

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"You young fool!" he said quietly. "Do you realise what you did?"

"No, not really," whispered Brown. "I—I was so miserable—something seemed to crack in my head—"

"You'll never do such a thing again?" said Figgins, laying a hand upon the youngster's soaked shoulder.

"Never!" breathed Dick Brown fervently. "I swear it!"

"I should jolly well think you do!"

"I—I'll never be able to thank you enough—"

"Oh, rats! Best thing you can do now is to bunk back to the school as fast as you can." Figgins rose to his feet and stared down at his own soaked clothes ruefully.

"And I suppose I'd better come with you, too!"

He glanced at Ethel. She nodded sympathetically.

"You must both run back as fast as you can, or you'll catch severe colds."

Her eyes were misty as they met Figgins'.

"Well, good-bye!" muttered Figgins, colouring as he understood that look. "Come on you young ass!"

Ethel stood watching the pair as they set off at a brisk trot along the tow-path.

That misty look was still in her eyes as she watched Figgins vanish round the corner of the path.

Figgins opened the door of Study No. 4, in the Fourth Form passage in the New House, and walked slowly into the room.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn were there, making tea. They looked up in great surprise at sight of Figgins.

"I thought you were having tea out, with Ethel?" ejaculated David Llewellyn Wynn.

"I did mean to," said Figgins quietly. "But something happened."

He had changed into dry clothes in the dormitory, and as yet his chums knew nothing of his adventure.

"I say, Figgy, what's up?" asked Kerr, staring at his chum keenly.

Figgins smiled faintly.

"You know young Brown? You mustn't breathe a word about it to a soul, but the young ass jumped into the Rhyll this afternoon. I—I happened to be near, and was able to fish him out. If no one had seen him, though, he'd have been drowned."

"He jumped into the Rhyll?" breathed Kerr.

"Yes," nodded Figgins; "because he's so miserable over having to leave. I've been having a talk with him. It seems he's not got a father, and his mother's very hard up, and can't afford to keep him at St. Jim's any more. He feels he's let her down terribly by failing to collar the Armitage."

"My hat! How rotten!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

"It is, isn't it?" agreed Figgins quietly.

"Rotten!" repeated Fatty Wynn. "But I suppose it can't be helped—"

"Of course it can be helped!" cried Figgins, in a tone that was almost savage. "It's obvious enough! It matters even more to young Brown than it does to me, that scholarship! I have got a father, anyway."

"Figgy!" Kerr caught his chum by the arm. "What on earth do you mean?"

"It's clear, isn't it?" answered Figgins roughly. "The decent thing? I'm not going to rob the kid. I can't do it—I can't! I'd never be happy here if I did. So I'm going to resign my right to the Armitage Scholarship, and young Brown, as second highest, will get it."

His two chums stared at him in horror, struck utterly dumb. Figgins' eyes were burning with a resolute light.

"That's what I'm going to do," he said quietly. "It's only decent, in the circumstances."

"You don't mean it? Figgy, you—you don't mean it?" breathed Kerr. "To go away again—after you've come back? It's your right—"

"Hang my rights!" Figgins laughed, almost harshly. "I do mean it. I'm going away again—for good!"

And the look in his eyes told his chums, as he spoke, the wretchedness that filled his heart—the stupendous sacrifice that Figgins was making.

In order to do what seemed to him the decent thing, what seemed to him to be right, Figgins was giving up all that he held most dear.

"Figgy—"

But Kerr's despairing cry was too late.

Figgins had swung on his heel, and hurried swiftly from the study.

CHAPTER 14.

Racke's Win

"YOU!"

Aubrey Racke broke out with that exclamation, and stopped dead.

For the first time since Figgins' departure from St. Jim's, when it was thought the leader of the New House had lost the Armitage Scholarship, the black sheep who had

Almost at his last gasp, George Figgins dragged the senseless form of Dick Brown from the river. "How splendid of you!" breathed Ethel Cleveland.



brought about that grave error of justice had come face to face with his victim.

Figgins halted, meeting Racke's gleaming eyes with a steady look.

Figgins had been tramping to and fro under the elms. Racke, released at last from the sanatorium, had been crossing towards the School House. And the pair had come face to face.

"You!" breathed Racke, in a strange tone.

There was a malignant hatred in his eyes.

Though all his mental stress over finding himself in the ruthless hands of Baggy Trimble, followed by the loss of the Harvester, had been his own fault, the result of his own villainies, Aubrey Racke, with his twisted mind, regarded Figgins as being the original cause of all his troubles.

Figgins' unexpected return to St. Jim's, which had made all Racke's torments vain and unrequited, had caused his hatred of the fellow he had tried to wrong to flame up tenfold, with a savage bitterness that had almost startled even himself.

Figgins nodded.

"Yes, it's me all right," he said. He laughed grimly. "You don't look pleased to see me."

Racke's face took on a snarl. All idea of caution, of hiding his hatred for Figgins, went in a moment.

"I'm not," he said savagely. "I was never so disappointed in my life as I was when I knew you had come back. That's the truth. I don't mind your knowing it."

"Thanks!"

Racke seemed about to speak again, but he checked himself. With a muttered word he tried to push past Figgins, to continue on his way towards the School House. But he felt his arm seized in a vice-like grip.

"Hands off, hang you!" he ejaculated.

He tried to shake off Figgins' restraining hand. But he could not. He stared into the New House junior's face, and the look in Figgins' eyes startled Aubrey Racke.

"What are you staring at me like that for?" he muttered. "Let me go!"

"Great Scott!"

He heard George Figgins breathe the words in a queer, startled way. He felt the fingers on his arm tighten.

In a flash of intuition, Figgins had guessed! And from

the look in his eyes, Aubrey Racke knew that Figgins had guessed.

"It was you, then!" breathed Figgins. "You, you cad! It was you, I'll swear, that stole those pages from my exam paper! Who else would have done it but you?"

Racke felt his heart go cold.

"It's a lie!" he cried shrilly.

Figgins let go his hold of the black sheep's arm, as though Racke's very touch was a loathsome contamination.

"I believe it was you, Racke," he said steadily. "I'm not going to try to prove it, because that's impossible. I shan't even say anything of my suspicion to anyone. What would be the use? But to my dying day I shall believe it was you."

"It wasn't me—I swear it!"

There was panic-stricken terror in Racke's tone. Figgins lips curled contemptuously.

"No need to perjure yourself. I can't prove it, if I wanted to, so I shan't tell my suspicion to anyone. Oh, you needn't be afraid! I won't even lick you—you aren't worth touching."

"I tell you you're mistaken," muttered Racke.

"Rats!" Figgins laughed bitterly. "Anyway, you'll have your triumph, Racke. I admit you score in the long run."

"What do you mean?"

Again Figgins laughed mirthlessly.

"I'm going," he said. "That's what you wanted, wasn't it? To cause me to leave St. Jim's? Well, you've succeeded, after all. I'm giving up the scholarship to young Brown—and I'm leaving again on Monday—for good!"

Racke stared at him dazedly.

"Is that true?" he stammered.

"Of course it is, you cad, if I tell you so!" said Figgins savagely. "You can have your triumph, for what it's worth to you."

Aubrey Racke's amazement changed to a malignant joy. "Good!" he said harshly. "I'm glad you're going. It's meat and drink to me to hear this!"

"I thought it would be," grinned Figgins. But there was no atom of mirth in his smile. "Now get out of my sight!"

Figgins thrust Racke aside, and strode off through the gloom towards the lighted doorway of the New House.

Racke stood staring after him, exultant, triumphant.

Figgins was going, after all! He had won!

A low, malicious laugh broke from his thin lips, as he turned towards the School House steps.

As he entered the House, a flicker of lightning crossed the sky, followed by an ominous rumble of distant thunder. A few spots of rain began to fall, borne on the blustering wind that scurried across the quad.

A storm was coming.

But Aubrey Racke neither saw nor heard it. His heart was filled with gloating triumph, to the exclusion of all else.

Figgins had come back—but he was going away again!

"So I win after all!" muttered Racke.

His low words, spoken half-aloud, were drowned by a crash of thunder that pealed out above the grey old building of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 15.

The Truth at Last!

BOOM!

It was one o'clock.

In the Shell dormitory in the School House, Racke lay sleepless, listening to the storm.

His face was white in the darkness.

A savage wind was howling across the quad, beating against the long windows of the dormitory, driving stinging sheets of rain against the glass. Every now and then flickering sheets of lightning shone through the wet panes dimly, and the thunder crashed and echoed across the wild sky.

Racke's eyes were strangely bright as he stared with fascinated intentness at the window opposite his bed.

Crash!

A peal of thunder seemed to split the very heavens, echoing across the quad, dying fitfully away. A glare of forked lightning glimmered brightly through the driving rain, flickering in at the window and lighting up Racke's white, staring face.

He turned restlessly, closing his eyes. But somehow his gaze was drawn again to the window.

He wanted to put his hands to his ears, to shut out the howling of the wind and the rumble of the thunder. But something compelled him to listen.

"It must have been like this—out there—that night the Harvester went down—"

Racke broke off in his wildly muttered words, and a shudder seized him.

He could feel a cold perspiration standing out on his forehead.

"A night like this—"

He gave a little moan. His limbs had begun to tremble strangely. His nerves were utterly unstrung.

He fought to rid himself of the terrible vision that was living in his brain—the picture of the doomed ship rolling and plunging on the giant waves, with the fury of the storm howling over it. And Baggy Trimble on board, doomed to go down with the helpless ship.

"And I sent him—"

He covered his ears, and his eyes filled with unreasoning terror. But even with his fingers pressed to his ear-drums he could still hear the roar of the storm.

"I can't stand it—I can't stand it!" sobbed Racke. "It wasn't my fault! I swear it wasn't my fault! Trimble, I never knew when I let you be taken away—how could I know?"

His face had gone grey. His eyes were burning with a feverish light.

He stared round him fearfully, peering into the dark shadows, as if half-expecting to see a spectral, accusing figure—the figure of the youngster he had sent to his doom; unwittingly, perhaps—but his guilty heart was sick within him.

He pressed his face into the pillow, his hands clasped over his ears. But still before his mind was that mental picture of the sinking Harvester, tormenting him, maddening him.

One or two other fellows were awake now, though Racke did not know it. The storm was awakening them. Tom Merry sat up in bed, and so did Reginald Talbot. Monty Lowther and Clifton Dane rolled over restlessly.

"I can't stand it!"

It was a wild shriek from Racke's bed that rang through the dormitory.

"What on earth—"

Tom Merry, staring through the darkness, saw Racke's dim figure leap from the bed and stagger into the centre of the long room. His hands were pressed to his ears, his eyes were fixed on the window opposite with a wild, haunted stare.

"I can't stand it—I can't stand it!"

Tom Merry leapt from his bed. Racke saw him and gave a wild scream.

"Racke—"

"Keep back!" Racke gave a choking cry, retreating before Tom's white, pyjama-clad figure. "Keep off! Why have you come to torment me? It wasn't my fault! I didn't mean you to drown—"

Half the dormitory was already sitting up in bed now, staring at Racke's shaking form in startled amazement. The wild words pouring from his lips were almost incoherent, but it was clear enough to Tom Merry that Racke was in a state bordering on delirium. Plainly he imagined the captain of the Shell was someone else—someone, it seemed, who had come to torment him.

"Racke!"

Tom Merry, thoroughly alarmed, ran swiftly up to Racke, and laid a hand upon his shoulder. Racke covered his face after a wild stare in which he seemed to realise that he had been the victim of an illusion, and that it was only Tom Merry who had been standing there, white and dim in the darkness.

"I can't stand it!" he sobbed. "I've got to tell—"

"What's the matter, Racke?" breathed Tom.

A crashing peal of thunder caused Racke to turn his head towards the window, his face working strangely, his eyes filled with guilt and horror.

"It was my fault!" he moaned. "I sent Baggy to his death! I didn't know—but it was all my fault! He was on board the Harvester when she went down! It must have been on a night like this. Think of it—the gale, and the waves, and the ship sinking—"

Tom Merry's face had gone incredibly startled.

"Racke, what are you talking about?"

Other fellows were slipping from their beds now, crossing to where Racke was standing. The black sheep of the Shell grasped Tom Merry by the arm with a shaking hand.

"I've got to tell!" he whimpered. "I can't keep it to myself any more! It's driving me mad—mad! I tell you, Baggy Trimble was on board the Harvester when she went down—lost with all hands! And it was through me that he was there. I wanted him out of the way—he'd been blackmailing me, and I wanted to be rid of him for a while, so that I could find those papers and destroy them. He'd found out that it was I who had stolen those pages from Figgins' exam paper, and he'd got them, hidden them. He threatened me. He bled me white! I wanted him out of the way so that I might find where he'd hidden those papers—but I never dreamed of looking in that tree! He was kidnapped by the captain of the Harvester, who wanted a ransom—he thought Baggy was rich. And I let him be taken away in that ship—and now he's drowned, and his death is on my hands!"

Racke's torrent of words broke off with a moan, as he stared down at his hands, as if expecting to see them sullied.

"His death is on my hands!" he said again, with an odd quietness.

"Great heavens!"

Tom Merry was staring at Racke's working features as though he could scarcely believe his ears.

The other juniors white-faced and horrified, seemed struck dumb with what they had heard. One by one they recoiled from Racke, who stood shaking and whimpering in the centre of the floor, on the verge of an utter breakdown.

"Racke," said Tom Merry, and his face was as grim as Fate "you had better come with me at once to Mr. Railton. There's a light in his window—he's sitting up late. Put on some clothes and come."

Racke turned to his bed and began to pull on a few clothes in docile obedience. Tom slipped on a coat and trousers and slippers, and crossed to him, touching him on the shoulder.

"Come along," he said quietly.

Without a word Racke followed the captain of the

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Shell, as Tom Merry turned towards the door and opened it. The two vanished into the passage, and Tom Merry closed the door behind them.

In the Shell dormitory there was a silence of amazement and horror.

"Good heavens!"

It was Talbot who spoke at last.

"So it was Racke who stole Figgins' pages," he breathed. "We know at last! And that's how poor Baggy disappeared. Poor old Baggy! Drowned when the Harvester went down!"

A flicker of lightning gleamed into the dormitory through the wet windows. The storm was passing, the thunder was fainter now.

But it had done its work.

To Racke's overwrought nerves the sound of the storm had been more than he could bear, with that haunting picture of the lost Harvester ever before his mind. The storm had wrung his wild confession from him!

And the Shell fellows knew the truth at last!

CHAPTER 16.

The Last of Aubrey Racke!

THE clang of the rising-bell awakened St. Jim's to a morning of golden sunlight.

Fatty Wynn, sitting up sleepily, rubbing his eyes, felt a sudden sinking of his heart.

He had remembered that this was Monday, the day on which Figgins was leaving St. Jim's, to make his great sacrifice for what he held to be "the decent thing!"

Despite all his chums' pleadings, Figgins had been adamant. Even the Head's grave advice had been of no avail. Figgins was determined to do what he thought to be right. And since he insisted, even the Head could not compel him to stay; but had to agree to allowing Dick Brown, as the second best candidate for the Armitage Scholarship, to take it upon Figgins' resignation of his rights.

So Figgins was going.

(Continued on next page.)

ASK THE ORACLE!

The Oracle wishes to thank all those readers who have sent in such complimentary letters about his special feature, and to add also that it wasn't any use, for the Editor flatly refused to increase his salary on the strength of them!

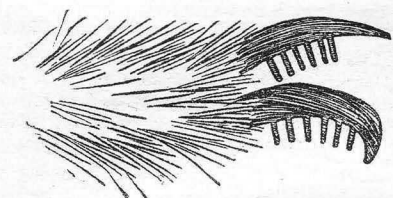
use among drift ice. Our artist has visited the port of Wapping to draw one for you.

Q.—Is there any truth in phrenology?

A.—I should say yes, "Inquirer," of Porthcawl. You state that you went to a phrenologist, and he told you that you had a big bump of carelessness, whereas the bump was caused by a garden rake which you had forgotten to put away and which you accidentally trod on in the dark. The phrenologist was right: that bump certainly denoted carelessness!

Q.—What insect has leg-combs?

A.—This is the queer question sent in by a lad who signs himself "Hobbies," and who also asks if I know anything about entomology. Entomology! My aunt, I've got medals for that! Also for pharmacology, amphibiology, ornithology, physiology, anthropology, zoophytology, and wothethumpinwallolology! However, my apology—there I go again!—I mean, excuse this slight digression from the original question about leg-combs,



These are combs that are very common sights, although you cannot see them except through a magnifying-glass. They are the legs of a spider.

which is of more than usual interest. Leg-combs, my chum, are possessed by spiders, which many people greatly dislike because they're of the creepy-crawly species. Still, they are full of wonders, and not the least wonderful things about them are these leg-combs which, to be seen, requires a good magnifying-glass. By these combs spiders can suspend themselves on the finest threads of web, and they can be used also for keeping themselves and their webs neat and tidy. We captured a spider which had spun a web on the office-boy during his usual afternoon slumbers, and the sub-editor held it while the Editor kept a magnifying-glass in position and the artist made the accompanying delightful natural history sketch.

Q.—What is the difference between pluriy and pleuriy?

A.—Only an "e" so far as the spelling is concerned. Reginald Kent, of Huddersfield, but a dickens of a lot as to their meaning. Pluriy means a superabundance of anything, whereas pleuriy is a nasty complaint of the chest that

usually starts from a chill. Sorry to hear about your getting knocked off your bike by a hearse, Reggie, but you can think yourself lucky to have suffered nothing worse than a damaged saddle!

Q.—What garden plant is free from the ravages of birds and insects?

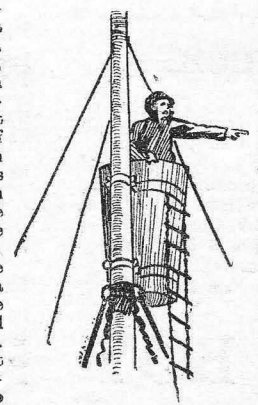
A.—The castor-oil plant. Most boys will agree that the birds and insects show a nice discrimination!

Q.—Will the moon ever be reached by a rocket?

A.—The answer, "Young Woodham," is in the affirmative, or possibly in the negative—I don't know which. All I can tell you is that a German Johnny recently took a trip in a rocket aeroplane for about a mile, and a French air expert has expressed the opinion in a lecture before the Royal United Services Institution that a rocket will be fired one hundred and twenty miles from the earth within a year's time. The office-boy has suggested that I apply to go as a passenger in the said rocket, but I suspect he wishes to "jockey" me out of my job!

Q.—What is a crow's-nest?

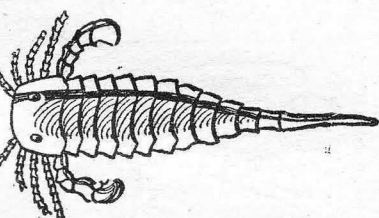
A.—A look-out post on a ship's mast, Geo. St. D., occupied in various circumstances at sea by one of the sailors. In smaller ships it is often nothing more than a large barrel, although some liners have a much more elaborate kind of crow's-nest. This look-out post is especially useful to the older type of whaling vessels and for



A sailor on the look-out, high up in the crow's-nest.

Q.—What is a eurypterus?

A.—Ha! Just the sort of question I like, Tom Fenn, of Darlington, for I keep this sort of thing in my head. A eurypterus is a Paleozoic crustacean, often of a large size, the fossil remains of which are sometimes found in English Silurian rocks. (Silurian, I may add, refers to the Silures, one of the peoples of Ancient Britain.) By permission of the Editor I sent our artist



What a nasty-looking creature! It's an eurypterus, and actually not half so fearsome as its name.

down to Devonshire to unearth a specimen of the crustacean in question, and, as you will perceive, he has made a faithful and artistic portrait of it. In its fossilised state, owing to its immovability, etc., it has points of resemblance to our office-boy.

Q.—Is Brazil a country or a province?

A.—A country, "Reader," of Tiverton. Regarding your second question: The eight planets are the Earth, Jupiter, Moon, Uranus, Venus, Mars, Mercury, and Saturn.

Q.—Who was Jumbo?

A.—He lived before your time, Freddy Clarke, of Walthamstow. His home for a long time was in the London Zoo—in the elephant house, as you will have guessed. There was a great outcry in England when he was sold and taken to America, where, one day, the luckless Jumbo took a sudden dislike to a freight train and started in to have an argument with it. The train won, and Jumbo became the centre of interest at an inquest.

Fatty Wynn glanced across towards his chum's bed. He gave an exclamation of surprise when he saw that it was empty.

For Figgins had risen early, to take a last solitary walk around the school he loved, unaccompanied even by his chums.

At the sound of the rising-bell Figgins was down by Little Side, tramping silently across the grass between the opposite goalposts, into which he had kicked so many goals in the past, but never would again.

His face was quiet and thoughtful. He had made up his mind to sacrifice himself for the fatherless junior to whom the scholarship meant so much, and now that his decision was taken, he was, in a way, satisfied. Even the dull ache of farewell in his heart did not betray itself in his face as he tramped over the damp grass of Little Side.

He turned towards the river. Though footer and cricket had always been his games, Figgins was a good rowing-man, too, and as he trudged down to the water's edge he had many memories of thrilling tussles on the water with rival crews—against the School House and against the Grammar School, against Greyfriars and Abbotsford.

Well, it was good-bye to all that now.

He turned, staring back towards the buildings of St. Jim's, lit up in the early morning sunshine, splendid and handsome. And at the sight Figgins' eyes went misty.

"I wonder what Ethel will say?" he asked himself.

That had been one of the hardest things to say good-bye to—the cheery tea-parties and walks with the girls of Spalding Hall. But he had made up his mind, and there was no going back on it now.

With a heavy sigh, Figgins trudged slowly towards the quad.

As he entered it one or two fellows could be seen standing by the School House steps. He recognised Tom Merry, Monty Lowther and Manners and Talbot of the Shell.

They saw him and turned quickly in his direction, hurrying across towards him.

"Figg!"

Figgins smiled faintly.

"Hallo!"

Then something in the faces of the four School House juniors caused him to stare at them.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Figg, it's known who stole those pages from your Armitage paper," said Tom Merry grimly. "It was Racke!"

He's confessed. He got hold of a duplicate key to the Head's desk and stole those pages in the middle of the night—"

"So that's how he did it?" said Figgins slowly. "You knew?" ejaculated Talbot in amazement. "You knew it was Racke?"

"Yes, I guessed it," nodded Figgins.

"And you never told anyone?" breathed Manners.

"What was the use?" Figgins shrugged. He seemed scarcely interested in what they had to tell him.

"And Baggy—poor old Baggy—" muttered Tom.

He told Figgins of Racke's confession regarding Baggy Trimble of the Fourth, the junior whose disappearance had so mystified St. Jim's.

"Great Scott!" breathed Figgins. "How—how terrible! Poor old Trimble!" There was horror in his eyes.

"Figg," said Tom quietly, "is it too late? Can't you change your mind? For goodness' sake, don't go!"

"No, I can't change my mind," said Figgins almost roughly. "Don't tempt me. Isn't it bad enough without that?"

"I'm sorry."

"I think I'd better get in. I've not finished packing yet," went on Figgins in a quiet tone. "I'd like to get that job done before breakfast. I'm catching the eleven o'clock train from Wayland. I'll see you again before I go."

He nodded and turned towards the New House. Tom Merry & Co. watched him vanish up the steps with clouded brows.

In the hall of the New House Figgins found a group of fellows gathered round the letter-rack. Kerr and Fatty Wynn were there. At sight of their chum they hurried towards him.

"Figg, old chap! Where the dickens—"

"Just been having a last look round," explained Figgins evenly. "No letters for me?"

"Yes. From your pater, I believe, by the writing," said Kerr gloomily. "Figg, old chap, is it too late to change your mind? I—"

"Yes," answered Figgins grimly. "Do you mind not asking me that again? There's a good chap!"

He moved towards the letter-rack.

"Yes, this is from my pater all right," he nodded. "I expect he's written to say he'll meet me at the station at home. I wired to him—I was coming back, as you know, and he wired I was to do what I felt to be right. That was decent of him."

Fatty Wynn and Kerr did not answer. They felt in their hearts that they would have been far more appreciative of Mr. Figgins had he insisted upon his son's accepting the scholarship that was his had he cared to take it.

Figgins ripped open the envelope and drew out the letter from within.

A peculiar look came into his rugged face as he read. He drew a sudden deep breath and laughed.

It was a laugh so full of happiness that Kerr and Fatty Wynn stared at him.

"What is it, Figg?"

Figgins' face was shining with a wonderful light. He stuffed the letter into his pocket, and seized Kerr and Fatty Wynn by the arms and waltzed them round joyously. The other fellows in the hall stared in amazement.

"What the dickens—"

"Figg, old chap—"

Figgins released his breathless chums and looked round at the astonished juniors with a cheery grin.

"I've had the most wonderful news in the world!" he cried. "My pater's written to say that he has unexpectedly recovered his financial losses in the City! It doesn't matter any more about the blessed Armitage Scholarship! I'm staying on at St. Jim's!"

There was a breathless hush in the hall; then a terrific cheer rang out.

"Just like the old dad!" grinned Figgins happily. "He knew several days ago about this; but when I wired to say I wanted to give up the scholarship to Dick Brown he said nothing, to see if I really would do the decent thing. Not that anyone wouldn't have done it, of course," he added hastily.

There was a step on the stairs. The figure of Dick Brown had appeared, pale-faced.

"Talk of angels!" grinned David Llewellyn Wynn.

Brown had heard that excited cheer, but he did not know the reason for it. He crossed the hall towards Figgins, and halted before him with burning eyes.

"Figgins," he breathed, "I can't let you sacrifice yourself for me! You mustn't go. I'll go, not you—"

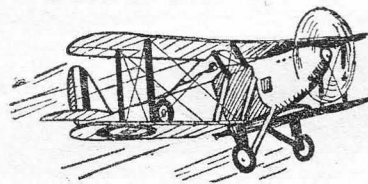
Figgins clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good for you, young 'un!" he breathed. "I'm glad you've said this. But don't worry; the Armitage is yours! And I'm staying on; my pater's got his money back, and so I don't need the scholarship any more."

Dick Brown drew a deep breath. His face was shining as he stared almost dazedly at Figgins.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Then everything's all right?"

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Figgins gripped Aubrey Racke's arm. "It was you, you cad!" he breathed. "It was you who stole those pages from my exam, paper!"

"Everything!" chuckled Figgins. "Every blessed thing!"

Neither George Figgins nor Dick Brown left St. Jim's to catch the eleven o'clock train from Wayland that morning; but there was someone who did.

Aubrey Racke. Racke's career at St. Jim's was finished. His confession concerning the pages stolen from Figgins' scholarship papers, wrung from him by his guilty conscience during the storm, had sealed his fate.

The Head had ordered him to go. The expulsion that the black sheep of the Shell had so often deserved but always escaped, had come at last!

Expelled from St. Jim's! And no one was sorry—but for his few cronies. Nearly everyone at St. Jim's felt that the school would be a better place for his going.

A cab rolled into the quad at half-past ten that morning, and old Taggles emerged from the School House bearing Racke's luggage. He was followed by the stalwart figure of Eric Kildare, who had been requested by Dr. Holmes to see Racke to the station.

At Kildare's heels came Aubrey Racke. His face was white and haggard as he paused at the top of the School House steps and stared round quickly at the school buildings, with an almost furtive look.

Even Racke was sorry to be going—but for him there was no choice.

He bitterly regretted now that he had confessed his infamy. But it was too late for regrets.

"Come on!" said Kildare curtly. Without a word, Racke followed the captain of St. Jim's down the steps, and crossed to the waiting cab.

A crowd of juniors in the quad watched him go with faces full of scorn.

"Good-bye to bad rubbish!" breathed Monty Lowther to Tom Merry.

And from the doorway of the New House, George Figgins, also with his eyes on the ignominious figure hurrying at Kildare's side, took a deep breath as he thought how nearly he had been in Racke's place—leaving St. Jim's for good.

The watching juniors saw Racke glance round furtively. He caught sight of the contemptuous faces that were watching him, and his face paled and his eyes fell. Swiftly he turned and jumped into the cab.

Kildare climbed in after him and closed the door. The cabman flicked his whip, and the horse broke into a brisk trot.

Out of the great gates rolled the cab. Aubrey Racke had gone.

No one had wished him good-bye. Nearly everyone was glad. He had gone with ignominy, if ever anyone had; and already—or so it seemed to some of the juniors—the air of St. Jim's felt fresher and cleaner for his going.

But in the Fourth Form room Baggy Trimble's empty desk still bore silent witness to the rascalities of Aubrey Racke.

Never again, it seemed certain, would Baggy Trimble of the Fourth enter the gates of the school again.

That was the grim memory left by the rascally junior who had met his deserts at last, and been expelled from St. Jim's!

THE END.

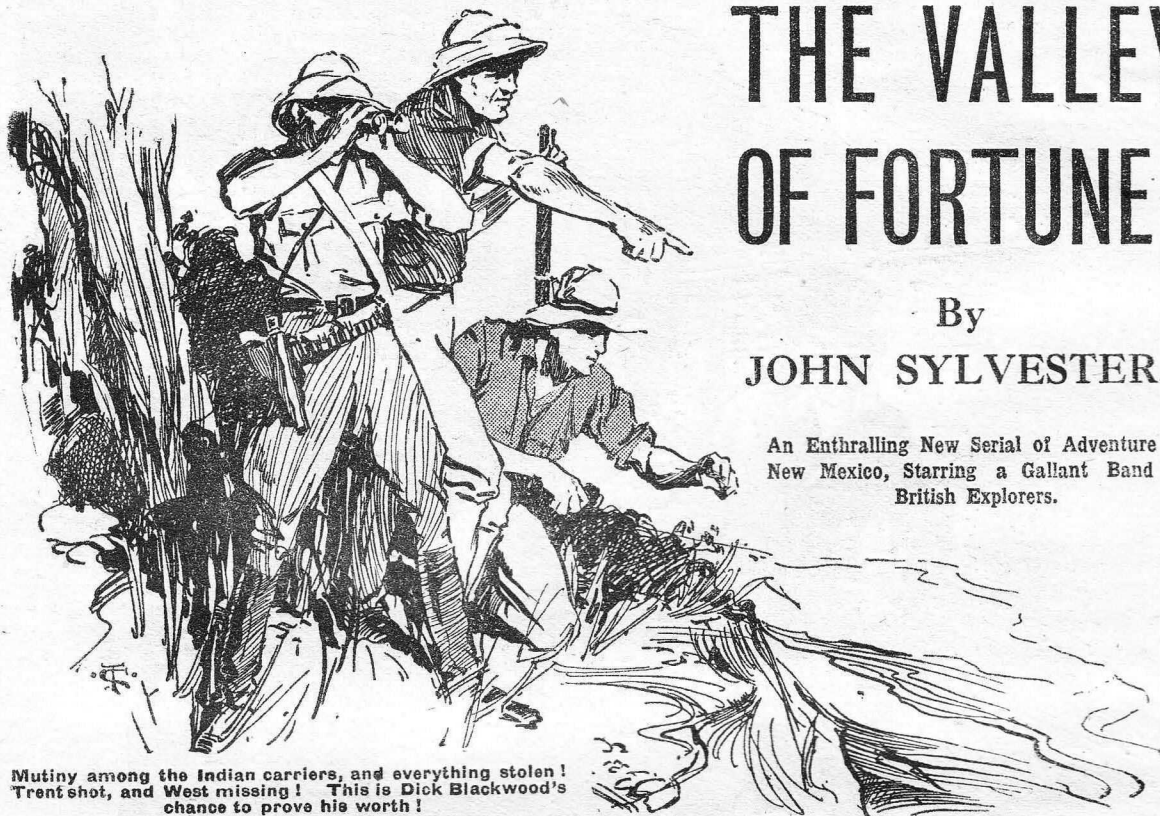
(And so we bid adieu to Aubrey Racke, the black sheep of the Shell! But what's become of Baggy Trimble? Ah, thereby hangs another story:—"THE SHANGHAIED SCHOOLBOY!" which will thrill you more than ever! Look out for it in next week's GEM. You'll enjoy every line of it!)

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Mutiny among the Indian carriers, and everything stolen! Trent shot, and West missing! This is Dick Blackwood's chance to prove his worth!

A Declaration of War!

NOW, then, Senor Mascaes, we can talk!" said Trent grimly. "If you don't want to go out of this house feet first you will answer every question I put to you! Sabe?"

The man scowled, but he kept his hands above his head. "The first thing I want to know is where I can find Lopez. I'll give you three seconds to answer."

"But I don't know. I swear I don't know!"

"One—"

Mascaes paled visibly.

"I only know where I promised to meet him. He won't be there now. I tell you none of us ever knew where—"

"Two," said Trent remorselessly.

"I can't tell you any more!" the man cried, trembling from head to foot. "Even if I could it would be more than my life is worth. I may just as well be shot now as wait for the vengeance of Lopez."

He drew himself up half defiantly. But underneath he was a jangling mass of nerves. As though hypnotised, he watched the black muzzle of the revolver.

"Thr—"

"Wait!" He almost screamed the words. He had expected some sign of relenting on Trent's face; but it remained hard and implacable. Even Dick, to his horror, thought Trent was going to shoot the man in cold blood. "Wait!" Mascaes panted. "I'll tell you all I can. It isn't much, but it may help. Will you promise not to let Lopez know that I've betrayed him?"

"Yes," said Trent laconically. "Go on!"

"If you want to find him you must—"

He got no further. There was a sudden knocking on the door. Trent did not move, but he spoke to West.

West crossed the room and opened the door. There was a manservant standing there holding a silver tray on which a visiting card rested.

"There's a gentleman to see you, sir. A foreigner, by the looks of him."

West picked up the card, and for once his imperturbability was shaken. He gave a cry of amazement, but before he could turn, a soft footstep made him look up. A tall man was looming above the butler, with a smile flickering across his pallid face.

"Excuse me being unceremonious," said a suave voice; "but I felt sure you wouldn't refuse to see me!"

West stared, and even Trent moved his eyes from the

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shrinking Mascaes. For standing on the threshold was Senor Lopez himself!

It was as though a bombshell had exploded. Mascaes was so astounded that he didn't make the slightest attempt to take advantage of Trent's shifted attention. Or perhaps his fear was even greater than before as he wondered if Lopez could have overheard what he had said. All eyes were riveted in tense silence on the figure in the doorway.

So, thought Dick, this was Lopez—the man of whom he had heard so much, and yet of whom everyone knew so little; the scientist and the criminal, who had pitted all his brain and resources against them; who had caused Professor Sparling to be murdered not twelve hours ago. With incredible audacity, just as they were despairing of being able to find him, he had walked coolly into their midst. Evidently that was typical of the man. One glance at him was enough to show that he didn't know the meaning of fear.

He was actually smiling, and there was no weapon in his hand, nothing but a cigarette. He was tall, rather loosely built, and his sunken eyes and immense forehead gave him a gaunt yet intellectual appearance. Yet there was something evil and almost inhuman about the face, the colour of which was the yellow of old ivory.

"Am I welcome?" he murmured in a curiously deep, resilient voice.

Trent was the first to recover. The blood seemed to rush to his head. He raised his revolver.

"Come into the room!" he rasped. "West, lock the door. Now," he added, "you devil, I haven't the least idea what game you think you are playing, but we've got you, and we are not going to let you go in a hurry. Last night you sent a perfectly innocent man to his death. You tried at the same time to murder the boy who had visited him. It's no use denying that you deliberately tried to run Harry Vernon down in your car. If I were to telephone for the police—"

"But you won't," said Lopez, advancing under the menace of the revolver, but showing not the slightest trace of nervousness. "In the first place you have no proof, and in the second place you yourself are hiding something from the police. Last night a trusted servant of mine disappeared. I have very good reason to believe that you shot him—"

"In self-defence!"

"And buried him," continued Lopez blandly. "I have no doubt that your motives were excellent, but you can

hardly expect the authorities to take that view. It would be much easier to prove that you shot Goya than that I had anything to do with the mystery of Dr. Sparling's death. In fact, unless I rejoin certain friends in an hour's time, the proof will be on its way to Scotland Yard. I mention that in case"—he flicked the ash from his cigarette—"in case that gun of yours should go off."

Trent lowered the weapon, after having intercepted a warning glance from West. He was compelled to recognise the truth of what Lopez had said.

"Then why have you come here?" he demanded. "Why not inform Scotland Yard, in any case?"

"Because, although publicity would not be fatal to my prospects, it might be exceedingly inconvenient," answered Lopez, with a shrug. "You see, I am being frank with you. But I bear no particular malice, Trent. In fact, I am going to make you an offer." And he drew a dark wallet from his inside pocket. "If you accept my conditions, I am willing to make you a present of ten thousand pounds—which you can share with your distinguished companion."

"What conditions?" snapped Trent, bending forward like an infuriated bull about to charge.

"Simply that you withdraw your opposition to my interests in South America." Lopez paused and straightened. "Being a gambler by nature, your first instinct is to refuse. But I suggest that you think for a moment. Ten thousand pounds is a lot of money. But I have to admit that you are capable of making yourself a considerable source of annoyance. You cannot do any real harm, but you can still cause me a certain amount of trouble. I am prepared to pay to avoid it."

"To bribe me!" ejaculated Trent, appearing to breathe with difficulty.

"That is a ridiculous word. Suppose we both face the facts candidly. You have certain directions for finding what we both believe may be an untapped source of radium in Brazil. But, unfortunately, those directions are written in a cipher you cannot read. They are no use to you. I alone possess the secret, and you are never likely to obtain it. Your only alternative is to endeavour to track me to South America. Even if you succeed you will have to follow me across the Andes, into an utterly unexplored region. Even if you did that you would still arrive at the goal second—after I had made my claim. But, of course, you will never get so far. I need not make myself any clearer."

"You needn't," said Trent grimly. "Nor need you try to offer me money. So far, you've succeeded, by murder and robbery, but in the end we shall beat you. You can't buy us off, Lopez, or frighten us either!"

"You've made a mistake this time!" It was West who spoke, and his voice was cold and contemptuous. "You've won the first move, but the game isn't finished! Once we are out of England, I think we can settle our accounts better."

"As you please," murmured Lopez, replacing his wallet. For the first time his eyes rested on Dick, and they became ironic. "Is this boy going as well?"

Dick felt a gust of rage. He couldn't control himself.

"If it comes to a fair fight," he cried hotly, "I reckon I'm the equal to any of the dagoes you can put up against me!"

"I am sure of it!" was the sardonic rejoinder. "I congratulate you, West, on your support of the Scout movement. Meanwhile"—the sneer died and his eyes glittered until they seemed almost green—"are you determined there must be a fight? Am I to take this as a declaration of war?"

"War to the bitter end!" cried Trent.

Lopez paused, and then gave another slight shrug of his shoulders.

"You are foolish!" he said softly. "But I understand—and I accept!"

He bowed, and the ghost of a smile still hovered on his bloodless lips, ominous and mirthless, as he turned and walked across the room.

"If you should regret your decision—" he began, hesitating by the door.

"It's you," exclaimed Trent, "who will do the regretting. You are out of reach of law now, but when next we meet there will be no law but that of the man who can shoot swiftest and straightest."

"We may," Lopez replied, "meet sooner than you think!"

He would have gone; but West called out:

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

He turned, puzzled for a moment until his eyes followed West's, and came to rest on Mascas, who stood trembling.

"I never forget traitors!" was all he said—and the door closed!

In the Andes!

THE body of an unknown man was picked up near London Bridge by the river police, and although an open verdict was returned at the inquest, the police never solved the mystery. This occurred the day after Trent released Mascas. Dom Pedro had kept his word!

But Trent knew nothing of this. Nor did he learn about the failure of the police, despite their frantic efforts, to discover the murderer of Dr. Sparling. Nor did he hear anything of Lopez for two months.

In the meantime, with West and Dick, Trent had sailed as arranged. The map in their possession—a copy of the original which had been stolen from Sparling—was intelligible up to a point where the Andes began to descend to the Valley of the Amazon. After that, unless they could pick up the trail taken by Lopez, they would be compelled to abandon the quest.

The point they reached was at the end of a desolate plateau, twelve thousand feet above sea level. But it ended abruptly in what looked like a high wall of rock, bounded on two sides by the precipitous sides of unscalable mountains. Streams from the surrounding peaks emptied into the plateau, so that the wall blocking their advance was reflected in a lake.

It was a magnificent, awe-inspiring sight—especially to Dick, who had never been out of England. To him the whole journey had been an adventure. He was staggered by the immensity of these mountains. It was like standing on the very roof of the world.

This nameless lake—so the thought flashed across him—must have looked exactly the same in the time of the lost race of the Incas. Or perhaps in the still more misty past, when prehistoric monsters ranged over the plain. He could almost imagine, as he drew his mule to a standstill, the black fin of some long extinct reptile, stirring the green scum.

"And to think," he reflected, with an inward chuckle, "I might have been doing nothing more exciting than mending punctures if I hadn't met that greasy dago! If I'd had a puncture myself that night I might have missed all this." He drew his hand across his forehead, as though the thought made him perspire. "Gosh, what a lucky escape!"

As it was, his whole life had been transformed. London and the rather drab world he knew seemed inconceivably remote. He was in a new world, with dazzling possibilities opening out like the vistas from those mountain-tops. He was in the middle of an adventure as astounding as though he had slipped back three or four centuries, and was crossing the Andes in search of El Dorado.

Suddenly he jerked himself out of these dreams and looked around for his companions. He knew perfectly well that they didn't regard it so romantically. West was the cold scientist, with more intellect than imagination; and Trent had expressed himself typically not very long ago when he described the mountains as a "damned nuisance."

They had halted, he noticed, about two hundred yards away, on the marshy bank of the lake. Coming up behind them were six Indians with pack-mules; lithe, bronze-skinned, flat-faced men.

savages at heart, brave and yet cruel, and with a reputation for treachery. But they knew the mountains, and it would have been impossible to get on without them.

"Hallo!"

That was Trent shouting and waving his arm. Instantly Dick turned his unaccustomed mount, and rearing up and nearly throwing him, in a spasm of bad temper, the mule submitted and trotted off tamely enough.

"I thought I was going over the handlebars," grinned Dick, as he approached. "I haven't got used to this sort of bus."

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CHAPTERS ONE TO THREE.

DICK BLACKWOOD, on route for London in search of employment, is held up by foreigners, hirelings of

PEDRO LOPEZ, a clever, suave Brazilian, who believes him to hold a certain map which, once decoded, would disclose the whereabouts of a fortune in radium. Dick is rescued, however, by

JOHN TRENT, who kills one of the assailants and then takes the youngster to his quarters, where he meets

ROBERT WEST. Trent informs Dick that he was mistaken for West's nephew, Harry Vernon, who had gone to Dr. Sparling to get the map decoded. Dick is offered the chance to go with Trent and West to Brazil, and he gladly accepts. Agitated over the non-appearance of Vernon with the decoded map, West makes the startling discovery that Dr. Sparling has been murdered and that his nephew, after leaving the map with the doctor, has been knocked down by a car and is in hospital with a broken leg. Attributing all this to be the work of Lopez, and convinced that he now possesses the secret of the radium fortune, Trent, West, and Dick determine to follow him to Brazil. They are discussing plans when Trent suddenly rushes from the room, to return a few moments later pushing before him one of the men who had attacked Dick.

(Now read on.)

"That's just your trouble," replied Trent. "You try to ride a mule like a motor-bike. She isn't built for speed, you know. If you put her as you did just now, you'll be breaking your neck!"

"Sorry," said Dick, abashed by the other's tone. It was only when Trent spoke again that Dick realised he had a good excuse for being snappish.

"I want to know what the blazes we are going to do!" he exclaimed. "Look at those cliffs on the other side of the lake. They go straight up from the water's edge. We can't possibly climb them, and we can't go around them, because they join a confounded mountain on each side!"

Dick stared, and he no longer thought of the mysteriousness of the lake. He was seeing it with Trent's eyes—an impassable barrier.

"Then we've got on the wrong trail!" he said, after a pause. "Surely the map—"

"The map brings us here. There's not the slightest doubt about it. But this is where the map ends. The other directions are contained in a long description, of which I can't make head or tail. It's in code—and Lopez is the only man who can understand it."

"You mean the rest is what old Sparling translated?" "Exactly!" muttered Trent. "I had an idea that if we got so far we should either pick up news of Lopez, or else we might find the way by cudgelling our brains. After all, there aren't so many ways of crossing the mountains. But I'm hanged if I can see a single one from here. We've got into a kind of cul-de-sac."

While they were speaking West was standing up in the stirrups studying the face of the distant cliff with a pair of field-glasses. Finally he lowered them, with a puzzled expression.

"Well?" demanded Trent, in disgust. "Had a good squint? Are you going to read us a lecture on the geology of the Andes?"

"I don't suppose it would interest you if I said that those cliffs were composed of carboniferous sandstone," West replied with a dry smile. "Or that they belong to the

Mesozoic Period and are highly fossiliferous. On the other hand, you may take more notice if I point out that they contain caves. You can see some of them very plainly with these glasses."

"Why should I be interested in caves?" retorted Trent impatiently. "What I want to know is how we are going to get over the top."

"Or else tunnel through to the other side," was West's quiet reply. "That's by no means impossible."

"Tunnel through! Hang it, man, we'd each have a beard down to our knees, and probably go dotty in the process! It couldn't be done."

"But, perhaps it has been done," murmured West, and seeing the other man's look of amazement he hurried on: "I don't mean by human hands. But take a look at the lake. It's absurdly small and shallow when you consider the drainage it must receive. These caves are formed by the action of the water on soft sandstone. They provide a natural outlet, without which the whole of this plateau would be a lake. The water pours away in a number of subterranean streams. It must go somewhere. I'm suggesting that it goes straight through to the other side."

Trent opened his eyes wider. Without a word he snatched the binoculars, and for several minutes surveyed the face of the cliff.

"By thunder, I believe you are right!" But his delight at the discovery was immediately damped. "All the same, we can't swim through. We can't leave our baggage behind. We might make a raft, of course, but even then—"

"It's the only possibility," replied West. "That's what Lopez had to do. In fact, as we came along, I noticed that some trees had been recently cut. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that that was his handiwork."

"Then you think he has already come this way?" cried Trent excitedly. "But none of the Indians we've met have seen him."

"He bribed them too well. There's not much time to lose, however. We've got a small collapsible boat. I'll row across of the subterranean streams is most navigable. In the meantime you'd better set our men on to making a raft."

"Are you going alone?" asked Trent half-anxiously.

"There's no danger. I shall take one Indian in case of accidents. Apart from the current being too powerful, I don't see what there is to be afraid of. All the same, don't be alarmed if I am a long time. I want to make a thorough exploration."

"I wish I was going with you!" growled Trent—a sentiment which Dick fervently echoed.

They had talked enough, however. Trent's voice rang out in the best Spanish he could muster. His orders were promptly obeyed. The tiny boat they had brought for emergencies was unpacked, and there was just room in it for two people.

"Well, get along with the good work!" West called, as he climbed in, the Indian following.

"Good luck!" Trent sang out, watching him quite enviously.

The boat pulled off, overweighted, but secure enough on the calm, green water of the lake. It grew smaller and smaller, and Trent watched its progress through the glasses. When finally he put them down he turned to Dick.

"We shouldn't go far without him, sonny. I told you from the start he's the brains of the outfit."

Dick nodded, and then suddenly swung himself out of the saddle.

"Now for the muscle," he said cheerily. "Give me a chopper and you'll find I'm a budding George Washington!"

Mutiny!

IN that sparkling, mountain air Dick enjoyed swinging a hatchet, bringing it down with a crack like a rifle-shot on the pink, resinous pinewood. Altogether, Trent estimated,

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they would need three rafts, unless they were to abandon some of their equipment, which he was loath to do, especially as they were going into unknown territory. A possibility which occurred to him, however, was that the bearers might be scared of going on an underground river. He had not mentioned this to any of them, or even to Dick, but as they worked he watched them narrowly.

Certainly they worked with terrific energy. But he fancied he detected a strangeness in their general manner. They were curiously subdued. They did not sing as they worked. Their feverish haste, their almost too great promptitude to carry out his orders, perplexed him.

"Tisn't natural," he told himself uneasily. "There's some reason why they are on their best behaviour. Somehow I don't trust the beggars."

He had long given up trying to understand the workings of the native mind, although he had acquired a little of their fatalism. If they decamped—well, they did, and there was nothing to be done about it. It would be awkward, but not fatal.

The sun began to set as the second raft was finished. And no sooner had twilight begun to fall than work stopped. From the point of view of the natives, the really great moment of the day had arrived—the time when they could sit around the camp-fire and eat their one big meal. Already a savoury smell was coming from the cooking-pot.

"Wish West had come back!" Trent muttered.

He began to be really worried when it was quite dark and still no sign of the scientist. However, he kept his thoughts to himself. Probably West had gone farther than he meant, and was waiting for daylight to show him the way out.

Trent ate sparingly that night. Dick's perpetual cheerfulness helped to keep his fears at a distance.

"Better turn in now," he told Dick, when they had finished their meal. "We've got to be up with the sun in the morning."

"I'll be jolly glad," grinned Dick, who had never eaten so much before, "to loosen the old belt."

Yes, this was life! As he rolled himself in his blanket, unconscious of Trent's troubled thoughts, Dick felt an exhilarating contentment and a marvellous glow of health. The exercise and the open air had made him ravenously hungry, and then so sleepy that he only had to shut his eyes. He felt that he never wanted to sleep with a roof above his head again.

"Fine!" he murmured; and the next moment he was dreaming that a gigantic Dinosaur was chasing him across a bumpy plain. He was on his old bike. But she was losing speed. All at once she gave a tremendous back-fire.

Bang!

Dick woke up. The stars were shining like diamonds. But the explosion was still ringing in his ears. Somehow, confusedly, he felt that he hadn't dreamt all of it. He had actually—

The silence was shattered. This time there could be no mistake. That was a revolver shot. But it hadn't come from the camp. It had come from across the lake. Therefore, it must be connected with West.

What had happened?

Dick was thoroughly awake by this time. He sat up, listening tensely. West was firing, or else he had been fired at. But by whom? Was Lopez across that sheet of water? Had they at last come face to face with the man?

Barely two seconds had elapsed since the moment he had woke up, and he had no sooner collected his wits than he became aware of another sound, more stealthy, like a snake creeping along the grass.

Instinctively Dick felt for his revolver, but even so he was not quick enough. Something moved just behind him. A brown hand clutching a knife flashed across his line of vision. The knife would have been buried in his heart if he had not seized the wrist. It was hard as iron, but he used both hands, and as he shifted his position he could see



Using his rifle as a club, Dick swung it in the air, and then brought it crashing down on the skull of his assailant!

a native bending over him, the man's face contorted with hate.

Vaguely he also realised that pandemonium had broken loose. He could glimpse dark figures rushing about wildly. They were yelling, and someone was shooting. That would be Trent—but the fire was replied to.

In a blinding flash Dick realised the terrible plight they were in. Their carriers had mutinied, and were trying to murder them. They were outnumbered by three to one.

All this was taking place at the back of his mind. But he needed every faculty alert to save himself from the immediate danger. The man whose hand he was gripping, and who had just tried to knife him, was more powerful than he was. Dick felt another hand reach his throat, and the long fingers gripped his windpipe chokingly so that he fell back. He tried to break free, but it was impossible. He was being forced steadily back, and the knife was coming nearer.

Nothing in all his experience had ever seemed so vivid to him as that thin, straight, wicked-looking blade. It moved in remorseless jerks, until at last the point was pressing on his chest, and he could feel the prick as it penetrated his shirt.

Confident now of victory, the Indian redoubled his efforts, forcing back the boy's head, and at the same time trying to thrust the knife deeper. For a moment they were locked in terrible immobility, their strength equal; but to his dismay Dick realised that the other was beginning to gain. He saw those eyeballs blaze, and then, despite his struggles, he was pressed back. He could no longer see either the face or the knife.

It was just as well, for suddenly a shudder went through the man, following close on the report of a gun. Dick's arms became so wet that he could hardly be certain which of them had been shot. But he was not kept in doubt for long. The other collapsed, a shot clean through the head killing him instantaneously.

Dick gasped and rubbed his throat. He realised it must have been Trent who had saved him. Feeling for his rifle (he always slept beside it), he sprang to his feet. Someone was rushing at him. There was no time to shoot. He used

his rifle as a club, swung it in the air, and brought it crashing down on the skull of the approaching figure.

The man hardly groaned. He pitched forward on his face as though he had been driven by a mallet into the earth.

"That counts for two!" he thought, peering into the darkness ahead and trying to make out what was happening.

"Run!" bellowed a voice. "Behind that boulder!" The sound seemed to electrify Dick. He started to obey automatically; but then he caught a glimpse of a man, head and shoulders above the pack of wolfish figures that surrounded him, lashing out with his bare fists.

There could be only one reason why Trent was using his fists in preference to a lethal weapon; certainly not squeamishness, since he was fighting for his life, but necessity, for he hadn't an opportunity to reload.

Dick raised his rifle to his shoulder, and was about to fire when the barrel was knocked upwards and the gun was discharged into the sky. At the same time a revolver was thrust into his face. As it went off he jumped aside, as if dodging a right hook in boxing. His cheek was singed, but there was no damage done. As his gun was on the ground he was compelled, like Trent, to use his hands.

He caught a glimpse of an infuriated native face, and the next moment his left hand leapt out like an arrow from a bow, perfectly straight and deadly accurate. The blow caught a hard, unshaven chin. Every bone in Dick's body was jolted in its socket. It hurt him, but it hurt his opponent more. The Indian reeled drunkenly.

"Come on, you skulking, pug-nosed mongrel, you! I'll knock every tooth out of your head! I'll show you—"

Smash! It was a beauty. Dick felt a thrill of almost artistic satisfaction as he drove in with his right, sending the man to the ground like a log.

But where was his rifle, and where was Trent? Something else had happened in the meantime. Mules were stampeding and neighing where Trent had been. As soon as Dick grasped the new situation they were galloping away, the sound of their hoofs getting fainter.

"Trent!" he shouted in alarm.

There was no answer. An awful suspicion smote him. He pictured Trent lying dead, West murdered by Lopez, and himself alone in the middle of the Andes. But suddenly hoofs drummed on the stony ground, and a rider took shape out of the darkness.

"Wait there, Dick. There's a mule kicking about somewhere."

The boy drew a breath of relief. Never had Trent's voice sounded so welcome. But what did it all mean?

He couldn't actually see what Trent was doing, but he could follow his actions by the sounds. He knew by the snorting and stamping that he had captured one of the loose mules the Indians, in their hasty flight, had left behind. The animal had careered away, frightened by the shooting.

"Jump on!" Trent rasped as he rode up. "We've got just a chance."

"What are we going to do?" cried Dick, taking a run, and somehow landing, more by luck than judgment, on the bare back of the mule.

"Follow them!" Trent retorted. "They thought they'd finished me. My only chance was to lie quite still and pretend to be dead. It wasn't easy, I assure you, with an inquisitive chappie sticking a knife in my ribs to make sure."

"Then you are wounded?"

"It's nothing much. They made a hurried job of it. I think I can last out a bit longer."

"But where have they gone?"

"Bolted, bag and baggage. That's the serious part of it. They've got all our guns and ammunition, to say nothing of provender and medicines and charts. I haven't the slightest doubt they had this planned from the beginning. Lopez has bribed every man jack of them."

"But why did they leave me?" cried Dick.

"I don't think they worried much about you, son. They were in too much of a hurry to get away with the loot."

"Still, why the hurry?" he persisted.

"By gosh, what questions! Because even up here, in these punas, there's some sort of law. Anyhow, there are other wandering Indians who might have wanted to share the spoils. They've gone off to hide 'em while it's still dark. Also, I happen to know they don't like this place. They think the lake is haunted, and there's precious few natives who'd care to spend the night here, especially after they had flattered themselves they'd murdered a white man." He paused, and his tone changed. "But the battle isn't lost, Dick. They'll be leaving by that narrow gorge, where we saw a white-faced bear staring down at us. They'll go the long way round by night, but there's a short cut and we've got to make it. It is going to be dangerous, especially as we are riding bare back. But are you game to try?"

"I'm game!" retorted Dick swiftly.

"That's the stuff! I've got a rifle and plenty of cartridges, and here is a revolver. If we get there first we can pip them one by one as they come around the bend."

Dick took the revolver, and at the same time dug his heels into the mule's flanks. It went off like the wind, still shivering with terror. Somehow he kept his seat, clutching the animal's mane. Trent, who was a more experienced rider, kept level, as though they were engaged in a neck-to-neck race.

There were a hundred obstacles in the darkness, that would not have been encountered by day. How they escaped being dashed against an unseen tree, or one of those tall slabs of granite, standing up like a megalith, with which the plain was littered, was a miracle.

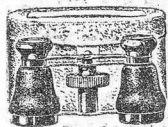
They had gone two miles before the thing Trent had been dreading happened. The wound he had mentioned so carelessly had been bleeding all the while, and the violent motion of riding increased the flow. He suddenly felt dazed, and the next thing he remembered was Dick, kneeling over him, trying to improvise a bandage.

(It looks as though Dick Blackwood has entered into the greatest adventure of his life, doesn't it chums? Does he bemoan his fate? Not a bit of it! You'll agree with me when you read next week's instalment of this great adventure serial that it's packed with thrills—Your Editor.)

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