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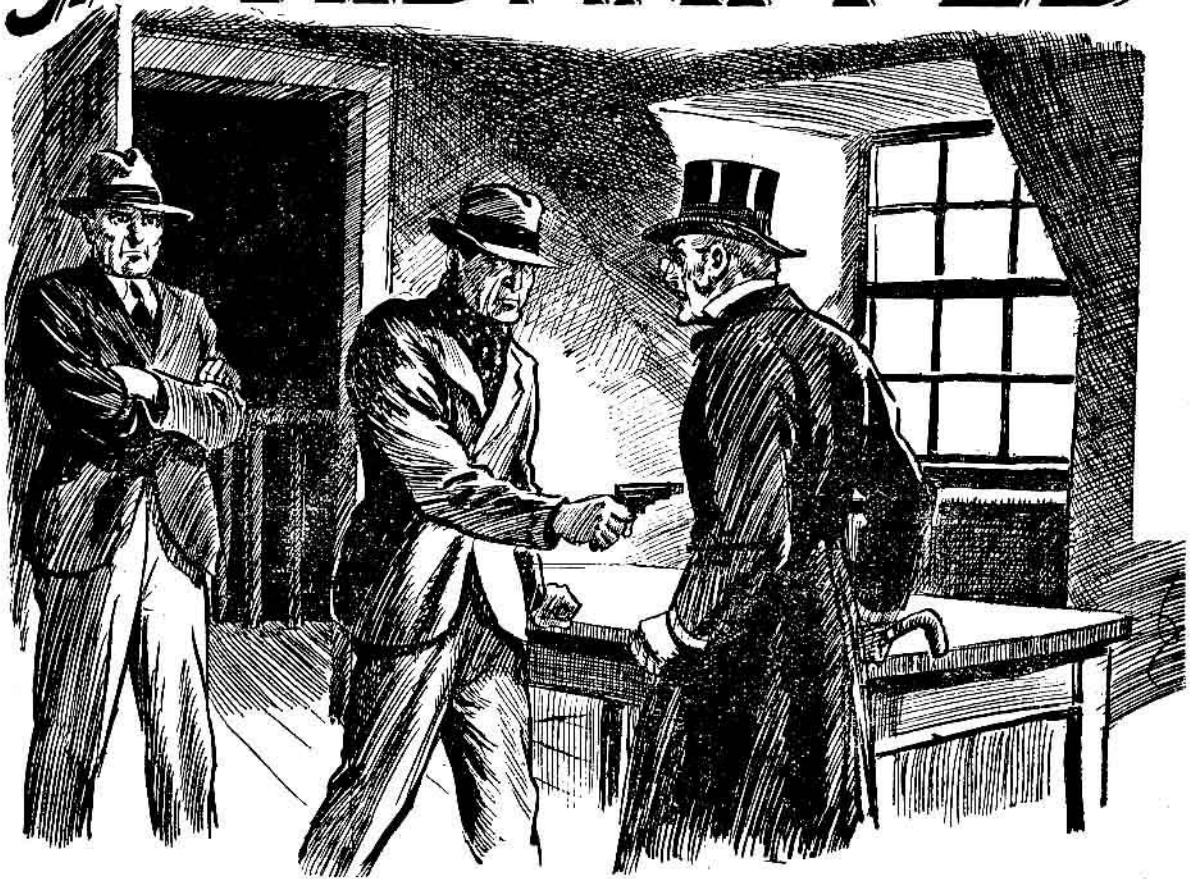
The GEM 2^d



The Kidnapped Headmaster!

THE HEAD OF ST. JIM'S HELD TO RANSOM BY CROOKS!—

The KIDNAPPED



Dr. Holmes made a movement to go, and both Pete Carson and the Beetle stood in his way. "Let me pass!" said the Head. "Stand back!" exclaimed Carson. And Dr. Holmes started as he saw the muzzle of a revolver pointing at his body.

CHAPTER 1.

The Order of the Chuck!

"YOUNG shaver!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was standing in the gateway of the old school, looking out into the road, when that remark fell upon his ears.

That the remark was addressed to him, there could be doubt.

The dusty, sunburnt man whom he had noticed tramping up the road from the direction of Rylcombe Village, had stopped directly opposite D'Arcy, and he had his keen black eyes fixed upon the swell of St. Jim's as he spoke. There was no one else in sight, either upon the road or in the gateway. It was therefore quite evident that it was Arthur Augustus who was addressed; and as D'Arcy did not reply, the stranger repeated his remark.

"Young shaver!"

Still D'Arcy did not speak. His gaze remained fixed upon the leafless trees across the road, as if he were totally unaware of the sunburnt man's existence, and quite unconscious of the keen black eyes. If Arthur Augustus had

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condescended to speak, he might have explained that he was not accustomed to being addressed in such disrespectful terms. But he did not condescend to speak.

"Deaf?" inquired the stranger pleasantly.

Arthur Augustus flicked a speck of dust from the sleeve of his immaculate Eton jacket, but gave no other signs of life.

"Are you deaf, you young swab, or only silly?" asked the sunburnt man.

No reply.

A large, sinewy brown hand dropped upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's shoulder, and the man shook him to attract attention.

Then the swell of St. Jim's woke to life.

"Pway take your hand fwm my shouldah!"

"Look here—"

"Will you kindly wemove your hand fwm: my shouldah?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with great politeness. "You are wumplin' my jacket, and pewwaps soilin' the cloth. I shall take it as a favah if you will kindly wemove your hand. Otherwise I shall have no wresource but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

The man stared at him, and burst into a laugh. He was amused; but it was a laugh that was not wholly pleasant to hear. But he removed his hand from the Fourth Former's shoulder.

"Look here!" began the man.

"Were you addressin' me?"

"I reckon so."

"Then, if you wish to address me again, pway do so in a more wespectful term," said the swell of St. Jim's in his most stately way. "I am not used to bein' chawactewised as a young shavah."

The man laughed again.

"Is this St. Jim's?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"Oh, good! I was afraid I had missed the place," said the stranger. "This is St. Jim's, hey—and the head-master is Dr. Holmes?"

"Yaas."

"Good! Much obliged, young shaver."

And the man entered the old gateway. Arthur Augustus looked at him in stately surprise.

"Twamps are not admitted here," he said, with emphasis.

"What?"

"If you come on a message fwm ore

HEADMASTER!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD.**

of the twadesmen you must go to the side entrance," D'Arcy explained. "If you are—as I pwesume—a twamp, you had better clear out."

"You cheeky young cub!"

D'Arcy's eyes glittered behind his eyeglass.

"I am sorry to have to administiah a thwashin' to a perfect stwanger," he said, pushing back his cuffs. "But in the circo, I have no othah wresource. I wegard you as a wude beast. Put up your hands!"

And Arthur Augustus advanced upon the sunburnt man, sawing the air with a pair of delicately-gloved fists. The stranger stared at him, and backed away. He was a short, thick-set man, not much taller than the slim junior but evidently very much stronger. His thick compact figure looked as if it had the strength of a bull.

"You silly young swab—" he began.

"Put up your hands, you wottah," said Arthur Augustus, pushing his silk hat a little farther back on his head, and letting his eyeglass drop to the end of its cord. "I am going to thwash you!"

"Hallo! Gussy—Gussy!"

It was a shout from the quadrangle as two juniors came dashing up. One of them was Tom Merry of the Shell, and the other was Jack Blake of the Fourth. They ran between Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the sunburnt man.

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Tom Merry, in wonder. "What on earth are you going to fight with a tramp for, Gussy?"

"I am sowwy to have to soil my hands upon such a person, Tom Mewwy, but he has tweated me with the gwossett diswpect. He—"

"Hold on, Gussy! You'd better get out of here, my man," said Tom Merry, turning to the dusty stranger.

The man laughed unpleasantly.

"I reckon I'm coming in," he said. "I'm on a visit to your headmaster, Dr. Holmes."

Tom Merry laughed. A more unlikely visitor for the reverend Head of St. Jim's could not be imagined.

"You'd better buzz off," he said.

"I reckon not."

"Pway stand aside, deah boys, while I thwow this wottah out," said D'Arcy.

"Look here, Gussy—"

"Wats! I'm going to thwow him out!"

"But look here—"

Arthur Augustus was not listening. He eluded his friends, and made a rush at the man in the gateway. This time the stranger did not back away. He stood waiting for the swell of St. Jim's with a peculiar grin on his dark face.

Arthur Augustus laid hands upon him and swung him round to the road.

"Out you go, you boundah!"

The man seemed to stiffen up in D'Arcy's hands. He returned grip for grip, and the swell of St. Jim's suddenly found himself in a grasp of iron. He was held perfectly helpless, and the dark face grinned into his.

"Not so fast, young shaver."

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy struggled violently. The sunburnt man grinned and swept him off his feet. Arthur Augustus was swung into the air as if he had been a baby and tossed like a sack through the gateway into the dusty road.

Bump!

The swell of St. Jim's landed, sprawling, in the road.

His silk hat went in one direction and his eyeglass in another, and the elegant junior rolled in the dust.

"Ow! Yow! Gwo!"

The sunburnt man gave him one glance and laughed, and tramped away into the quadrangle towards the School House of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus sat up in the dust and gasped.

Tom Merry and Jack Blake stared after the stranger, and then looked at the dusty junior. Arthur Augustus seemed bewildered. He blinked at the two juniors, evidently in a state of great bewilderment.

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake.

"Weally, Blake, deah boy—"

Jack Blake helped his chum to rise. Arthur Augustus found his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye.

"Bai Jove! Was—was that an—an earthquake?" he stammered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where is that howwid wuffian?"

Kidnapped by gangsters and held a prisoner in a lonely cottage, there seemed little hope of freedom for the Head of St. Jim's—unless he paid the five hundred pounds demanded by his captors! But neither Dr. Holmes nor the kidnappers bargained for the pluck and resource of those cheery chums Tom Merry & Co.

"He's gone in," chuckled Tom Merry. "I suppose he has really come to see the Head, after all. You were a little bit too previous, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! I'll give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gathered up his silk hat, and, without even waiting to dust his clothes, he rushed into the quadrangle after the sunburnt stranger. The latter had already reached the door of the School House.

CHAPTER 2.

A Strange Visitor!

"WHAT do you want here?" Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, asked that question in a very abrupt tone as the sunburnt, dusty man came into the wide oak-panelled Hall of the old School House of St. Jim's.

Kildare had just come out of his study, and he was considerably surprised to see the stranger in the House.

The man did not seem at all taken aback by the abrupt address of the St. Jim's captain. He looked at Kildare with perfect coolness.

"I reckon I want to see your headmaster," he said.

"What?"

"Don't I speak plainly?" said the sunburnt man, with irritating calmness.

"I reckon I want to see Dr. Holmes."

Kildare looked at him with suspicion.

"You can send your name in by the page if you like," he said.

The man nodded.

"Yes, I suppose I can, but I reckon I'll go in myself."

Kildare stepped in the man's path.

"You won't," he said grimly.

"Who'll stop me?"

"I will."

The sunburnt man looked at the stalwart captain of St. Jim's and noted his strong, athletic figure, and paused. Kildare was a tougher opponent to tackle than the elegant Fourth Former had been.

"I reckon you can take in my name," he said.

"Very well. What is it?"

"I'll write it down," said the man coolly. "It isn't for you to see."

"You can do as you like."

"I reckon I can."

The man drew a stump of pencil and a fragment of paper from his pocket and wrote a few words, and folded the paper. Then he looked at Kildare.

"Can you give me an envelope?" he asked.

The Sixth Former stared at him.

"What do you want an envelope for?"

"To put the paper in."

"Why?"

"So that the name cannot be read?"

"It cannot be read as you have folded the paper, if there is any need for secrecy."

The man grinned.

"Papers are easily unfolded," he remarked.

Kildare flushed crimson.

"Do you think I should unfold it?" he asked angrily, taking a step towards the sunburnt man.

The latter looked at him steadily.

"Well, no. I reckon you wouldn't," he said. "Take the paper as it is."

Kildare took the paper without another word and strode away in the direction of the Head's study. He was very much puzzled. The man, tattered and dusty as he was, had about him the air of one who had seen better days. He seemed to have perfect confidence, too, that the Head of St. Jim's would see him on demand. That he was not merely a tramp with an unusual gift of impudence Kildare felt sure. It was possible that he was someone whom the Head had known in better times, and he was now in need of assistance. That seemed to the captain of St. Jim's the likeliest theory.

The sunburnt man remained in the Hall. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking round him with cool

inquisitiveness. Several fellows came by, and they all looked at him and wondered to see him there.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in, followed by Blake and Tom Merry, and D'Arcy's eye gleamed behind his eyeglass as he saw the stranger. He came up to him directly.

"You ruffian!"

The man chuckled softly. Tom Merry and Blake both caught hold of the swell of St. Jim's and dragged him away from the stranger.

"Don't be an ass, Gussy," advised Blake. "You can't tackle him here, you know. You mustn't kick up a row in the House."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You're not two yards from Mr. Railton's door," urged Tom Merry. "Don't play the giddy goat, Gussy."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Come up to the study."

"I wufuse—"

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

And Arthur Augustus, still expostulating, was marched upstairs between the two juniors.

The sunburnt man looked after them and grinned. Monty Lowther and Manners of the Shell came into the House, and stopped as they saw him.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "What do you want, my man?"

The man looked at him.

"I reckon that's no business of yours," he answered.

Monty Lowther flushed.

"What I mean is, you look to me like a tramp, and you'd better get out!" he exclaimed. "We don't allow your sort in here."

"Perhaps you can put me out?" suggested the man.

"I dare say I could," said Lowther, "only, you'd make my clothes dirty if I touched you. Shall we pitch him out, Manners?"

"Certainly!" said Manners.

The man backed away a little. Between them, the two Shell fellows would certainly have given him plenty to do to defend himself.

"I reckon you'd better go slow," he remarked. "I'm here to see the headmaster, and I've just sent my name in to him."

Monty Lowther sniffed.

"Old friend of Dr. Holmes, I suppose?" he said sarcastically.

"Exactly!"

"Well, of all the check—"

"Blessed check!" said Manners.

"He's a tramp, of course. I'll tell you what—Herries has got his bulldog out in the quad, and Towser dislikes tramps. Let's whistle Towser in, and he'll see whether the chap's a tramp or not."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners went to the doorway. Herries of the Fourth was taking Towser for a run, and he was just passing the door. Manners called him in.

"Herries, this way!"

Herries looked round.

"Hallo!"

"Bring Towser in. There's a tramp here."

"Good egg!" said Herries. "Come on, Towser! Tramps, Towser—tramps!"

And Herries came in, with Towser on a chain. The sunburnt man backed away in alarm. He was not afraid of the schoolboys, but he was evidently afraid of the bulldog. And Towser's teeth looked formidable enough to make anybody feel afraid when the bulldog opened his wide jaws and growled.

"Blessed check of a tramp to come in here," said Herries. "Seize him, Towser!"

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Gr-r-r-r!

"Keep that dog off!" yelled the sunburnt man. "Do you hear?"

"Get out, then!"

"I've got business here."

"Rats!"

"I'm waiting to see the Head—"

"Bosh! Buzz out!"

The sunburnt man's hand went to the back of his belt, and it swung into view again with something in it that gleamed and glistened. A revolver was levelled at Towser as the bulldog cautiously advanced upon the tramp.

"My hat!" gasped Manners.

"Call that dog off, or I'll lay it dead on the floor," said the sunburnt man savagely.

"Towser! Towser!"

Gr-r-r-r!

Kildare came back down the passage. He stared in amazement at the sight of the deadly weapon, and frowned.

"Herries, take that dog away."

"Ye-es, Kildare!"

"And you'd better put that gun away, you ruffian," said Kildare sternly. "You could be arrested for having it in your possession."

The sunburnt man gave him a savage look, and then slid the revolver back into his pocket.

"The Head will see you," said Kildare. "Follow me!"

"Serenno!"

The sunburnt man followed the captain of St. Jim's. The juniors in the Hall stared at one another in blank amazement.

"The horrid ruffian!" muttered Manners.

"And the Head's going to see him!" said Monty Lowther. "My hat! I wonder what it means?"

"Something jolly odd about it, I know that."

"Yes, rather!"

They looked after the man. Kildare had tapped at the door of the Head's study and shown the tramp—if tramp he was—into the presence of the Head of St. Jim's. And the chums of the Shell went their way, amazed.

CHAPTER 3.

Bad News!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, was standing in his study.

In his hand he had a dirty fragment of paper, which the man had sent in to him by Kildare.

There was a strange expression upon the kind old face of the Head.

His brows were wrinkled in a slight frown, and his cheeks seemed a little paler than usual. Kildare had noticed that he changed colour when he read the message, and he had wondered. Dr. Holmes looked steadily at the sunburnt man as he came in. Kildare followed him into the study.

"This is the man, sir," he said.

"Very well, Kildare."

"I think I should tell you, sir, that this man is armed," said Kildare. "I've seen a revolver in his hand."

The Head started.

"Thank you, Kildare! But you may go."

"Yes, sir."

The St. Jim's captain withdrew, and closed the study door. The sunburnt man had taken off his shabby slouch hat. In spite of his cool impudence, he seemed to be somewhat impressed and abashed by the grave dignity of the Head of St. Jim's.

"You sent in this note to me, my man?" said Dr. Holmes.

"I reckon so."

The Head glanced at the dirty pencilled fragment of paper. The words scrawled upon it ran:

"I have a message from your brother, who is sick and needs assistance."

That was all.

"You come from—from someone else?" asked the Head.

"Yes, James Holmes."

"Where is he now?"

"In the village."

"He wishes to see me?"

"I reckon so."

"He is ill?"

"Yes."

"What is his complaint?"

The sunburnt man grinned.

"Same old complaint," he said—"too much to drink and too little to eat!"

The Head's face did not relax.

"You seem to know something of my younger brother," he said; "but I do not accept your word in any way. You do not look to me a reputable person. What is your name?"

The sunburnt man shrugged his shoulders.

"Carson," he said. "That is near enough, at all events. I may have had other names at other times."

"I know the name," said the Head. "My brother has written to me from America, and he mentioned the name as that of an unscrupulous sharper with whom he had come into contact."

Carson grinned.

"We are good friends now," he said. "I shall not believe that without proof," said the Head coolly. "If my brother is in England again now, and in need of assistance, why does he not come to me himself or write?"

"He cannot come, and he will not write. He wishes you to see him if you are willing to help him. If not, you can say so."

"I shall always be willing to help him," said the Head, "even if he has once more taken to the evil paths I hoped he had abandoned for ever. But I shall not take the word of a man of your character. You certainly appear to know something of my brother, but I have no proof that he is in England at all. In fact, I have the best of reasons for supposing that he is in Canada at the present moment."

"And you had better allow that supposition still to exist," said the sunburnt man, with a grin.

"Why?" asked the Head sharply.

"Because if it were known that he is in England, he would not be safe."

"Why not?"

"The police!"

Dr. Holmes turned pale.

"You mean to say—" he began.

"I reckon he was innocent, of course," said Carson, with a grin; "we all are. But you can hear the story from his own lips if you care to see him. I don't expect you to part with money till you've seen him. Naturally, you want proof."

"Most decidedly."

"I reckon you can see him as soon as you like."

"I shall do so."

"Come this evening then," said Carson. "Jim is sick and badly in need of help. I've been looking after him ever since we landed in England, but I'm pretty well at the end of my tether, I guess. Will you see him to-night?"

"Yes."

"Serenno, then!"

"Where can I see him?"

"He doesn't want anybody to know exactly where he is, for the best of reasons," said the sunburnt man; "but



"Not so fast, young shaver!" said the sunburnt man, as Arthur Augustus rushed at him. Next moment D'Arcy was swept off his feet and swung in the air as if he had been a baby. Then the stranger tossed him like a sack through the gateway into the dusty road!

he will be glad to see you. I will take you there. I will wait for you in the road this evening at any hour you please."

"Very well," said the Head. "I will leave the school gates at nine o'clock precisely. But I warn you that if this is a trick to obtain money from me, you will not succeed. Unless I actually see my brother, I shall not part with a shilling."

"That's a bargain."

"Very well. Kindly go now."

The sunburnt man left the study.

Dr. Holmes sank into a chair.

The grave calmness he had maintained while the sunburnt man was in the study seemed to desert him now that he was alone.

The kind old face was pale, the brow deeply wrinkled. An old trouble, which the Head of St. Jim's had believed to be over for ever, had risen again to confront him. His younger brother—handsome, happy-go-lucky Jim Holmes—had always been a trouble to him, yet the Head's affection had never wavered. He had borne all the trials and troubles the scapegrace had brought upon him with cheerful fortitude.

And at last it seemed that Jim had determined to lead a steady life. He had started in Canada, and had written him reports of his progress which gave great satisfaction to the old Head. Was it all over now? Had he fallen into his old ways, and fallen lower than of old? If he was now hiding near the school—sick, penniless, and wanted by the police—it was a terrible ending to all the Head's hopes for him.

There was a tap at the door, and Mr. Railton came in.

Dr. Holmes straightened up.

But the Housemaster of the School House could not help seeing the signs of distress in his face, and he paused.

"You do not wish to be disturbed, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, yes! Come in!"

Mr. Railton closed the door.

"I have had bad news," said the Head. "But—but I hope it will not turn out to be so bad as has been reported to me. But I shall know for certain this evening. You have the examination papers there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; let us get to work!"

And the two masters were soon busy, and the Head, with an effort, drove the thoughts of the troubling communication he had received from his mind. But in spite of himself his brow remained wrinkled with care and the usual colour did not return to his face.

CHAPTER 4.

Kerr Takes the Cake!

"BAI Jove!"

"Hallo, Gussy! What's the trouble now?"

"There goes that fearful wottah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the window of Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage in the School House—the study he shared with Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth. The chums of Study No. 6 were getting tea—at all events, Blake, Herries, and Digby were. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still feeling considerably ruffled by his encounter with the sunburnt man, and

he could not devote himself to commonplace tasks.

As he looked from the study window he saw the stranger crossing the quadrangle towards the gates, walking with an easy and careless saunter.

Blake joined D'Arcy at the window, and looked out.

"He's seen the Head, I suppose," he remarked.

"It is vewy wemarkable that the Head should consent to see such an extremely disreputable wottah!"

"Yes, it's queer. Mind how you fry those sausages, Dig!"

"Oh rats!" said Digby. "Do you think I can't fry sossingers?"

"Are you going to open the sardines, Gussy?" asked Herries.

"No, Hewwies, I am not goin' to open the sardines. The last time I opened the sardines I had a stain of beastly oil on my cuff. Blake can open the sardines."

"What about my cuffs?" howled Blake.

"Oh, pway don't argue, deah boys! I was thinkin' that, in the cires, I ought to pwoceed to follow that wottah and give him a feahful thwashin'. He has treated me with gross disrespect. What do you think, Blake?"

"I think you had better open the sardines."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why the dickens doesn't Tom Merry come?" said Blake, looking at his watch. "Those three fatheads are coming to tea, and they're late. Tom Merry's going to bring a cake."

Bang!

The impact of a heavy boot sent the study door flying open, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell—marched in. Tom Merry carried a large paper package in his hand.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed cheerfully.

"That the cake?"

"Yes."

"Good!" said Blake, with satisfaction. "It's a jolly big one."

"I bargained with Dame Taggles for the biggest she had," said Tom Merry. "We came jolly near losing it!"

"How's that?"

"Figgins & Co. spotted us bringing it in," Tom Merry explained. "They made a rush for it, but I dodged into the House just in time."

"Good!"

"Yaas, wathah!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "By the way, Tom Mewwy, I want to ask your advice."

"Go it, my son!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Always ready to give advice to kids!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What's the trouble?" asked Monty Lowther. "Have you decided to remonstrate with the Head about the kind of visitors he receives?"

"I am wondewin' whethah I weally ought to follow that wufflan and give him a feahful thwashin'!"

"The only question is," said Lowther, "how are you going to do it? Will you insist upon his keeping his hands in his pockets while you thrash him?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"I don't see how you can manage it otherwise," grinned Tom Merry.

"Weally, you ass—"

Clink!

A pebble rattled on the window of the study. Blake crossed to it and looked out. Three figures were dimly visible in the gloom of the quadrangle. Blake recognised Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, the heroes of the New House.

"Hallo, you New House bounders!" said Blake. "What do you want? Has Fatty Wynn got his eye on our cake?"

Figgins grinned.

"Oh, it's your cake, is it?" he said.

"We've got it," said Blake. "It's a nice big cake, full of plums, and weighs three pounds. Doesn't that make your mouth water, Fatty?"

"Oh!" said Fatty.

"Is Herries there?" asked Figgins.

"Yes."

Herries had just opened the sardines. He came to the window.

"What's wanted?" he asked.

"It's about Towser. I suppose it's all right."

"All right!" exclaimed Herries, in alarm. "What's all right? Is anybody meddling with my bulldog? I'll—"

"Then you didn't tell them he was to be killed?" asked Figgins, in astonishment.

"Killed!" roared Herries. "My dog! My hat! Why, I—"

Herries said no more. He paused only to snatch up a cricket stump, and rushed from the study.

Figgins & Co. melted away into the gloom.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Of course, I suppose there isn't anybody in the House, except Herries, who wouldn't be glad to see the last of Towser. But—"

"But this is rather thick," said Blake. "We'd better back him up!"

"The sossingers are done!" said Digby.

"I'm going to back up Herries," said Blake. "Towser is a beast, but Herries would be frightfully cut up if he were hurt. Come on, you chaps. Tea will wait."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake ran out of the study, and the other fellows followed him. Towser had been in danger of death on more than one occasion. When he got loose, he had playful ways which were appreciated by no one but Herries. In Herries' eyes, Towser could do no wrong. But several fellows owed long grudges against Towser. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy frequently complained that Towser had no respect whatever for a fellow's trousers, but he was willing to back up Herries in defending his favourite.

In a minute or less the study was empty.

Two minutes later the door was cautiously opened, and Kerr, the Scots member of Figgins & Co., put his head in.

He grinned as he saw that the room was empty, and stepped in quietly. Kerr had a packet under his arm exactly resembling in shape and size the wrapped-up cake that Tom Merry had just purchased at the tuckshop.

The cake was still lying on the table where Tom Merry had placed it, not yet unwrapped. To pick up Tom Merry's cake, and substitute his own parcel for it occupied Kerr but a second. Then he quitted the study.

CHAPTER 5.

With Compliments!

"TOWSER! Towser!" Herries shouted the name of his favourite as he reached the kennels.

A whine from Towser's kennel answered him. Herries stopped breathlessly. He had run without a pause from the School House, stump in hand, ready to do battle in Towser's defence.

He paused in amazement as Towser whined in reply. The place was in dusk, and quite deserted. No one was there, and it was evident that Towser was not in danger.

Tom Merry & Co. came racing up after Herries, and arrived in a breathless crowd.

"What's happened?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Nobody's here!" growled Herries. "Towser's all right. Aren't you, Towser?"

And he patted Towser's huge head as the bulldog rubbed it against his leg.

"We've had a run for nothing," said Tom Merry. "Figgy was pulling your leg, you duffer!"

"The uttah wottah! He—"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh.

"He didn't say Towser was being hurt," he remarked. "He simply asked Herries if he had told anybody Towser was to be killed."

"The bounder!" said Blake, laughing, too. "We've been fooled. It was a little joke to give us a run round here for nothing. He knew that Herries would rush off without stopping to think, like a silly ass—"

"Look here, Blake—"

"And that we should run after him to prevent him from committing manslaughter," chuckled Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's all right," said Herries, in great relief. "They'd better not touch my bulldog, that's all!"

"Bai oave—"

"Let's get back," said Digby. "The sossingers ought to be eaten while they're hot."

And the juniors, breathing hard after their rapid run, returned to the School House. There was no sign of Figgins & Co. in the quadrangle, which was just as well for the New House juniors, as they would certainly have been bumped hard if Tom Merry & Co. had fallen in with them just then.

The juniors crowded into Study No. 6. All looked as they had left it, and Digby lifted the dish of broiled sausages out of the fender. Tom Merry & Co. and the Fourth Formers had pooled resources on this occasion for an extra good feed, and it certainly looked very inviting. The big cake was large enough for seven juniors to make a meal of, or a dozen of them, for that matter.

"Pass the sosses, Dig," said Blake.

"You can unwrap the cake, Gussy."



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"I am wathah busy at the pwsent moment."
 "All right. Unwrap it, Herries."
 "How can I unwrap cakes when I'm eating sosses?"
 "They're jolly good," said Tom Merry.
 "They're cooked as well as Fatty Wynn himself could have cooked them."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Pass the bread-and-butter, Gussy."
 "Certainly, deah boy."
 "Have another soss, Gussy?"
 "I will twy anothah sausage, deah boy."
 And the sausages were disposed of to the general satisfaction, and the sardines followed them, and then Tom Merry cut the string of the large packet on the table.

He unrolled the paper, with all eyes fixed upon him. Mrs. Taggles' three-pound cakes cost half-a-crown each, and, naturally, they were not very frequently found in junior studies. It was a special treat, and the juniors were anticipating it keenly.

Tom Merry took off the wrapping of brown paper, and then looked puzzled. He expected to find a wrapping of white paper inside, and inside that the cake, but instead of that he found a second layer of brown paper.

"Blessed if I remember seeing Mrs. Taggles put all this paper round it!" he exclaimed.

He unwrapped the second paper. A cardboard box was disclosed. Tom Merry gazed at it in astonishment.

"My only hat!"
 "What's the matter?" asked Blake.
 "Look at that box."

"Well, Mrs. Taggles sometimes puts the cakes in cardboard boxes, doesn't she? What's the matter with it?"
 "The cake wasn't put into a box."
 "It's in one now."

Tom Merry looked utterly bewildered.
 "Blessed if I can understand it at all!" he exclaimed. "I watched Dame Taggles wrapping that cake up, and I'd swear there was no box."
 "Oh, wats!" said D'Arcy. "There must have been a box, or it wouldn't be here now. Pway take the cake out, deah boy!"

Tom Merry cut the string that was tied round the cardboard box, and took off the lid. Inside was a parcel wrapped in brown paper and tied.

The juniors were all on their feet now, and gazing at the mysterious package in great surprise. It was evident that there was something decidedly wrong. The parcel disclosed inside the box was not large enough to contain one of Dame Taggles' three-pound cakes.

"It must be vewy much smaller than usual, deah boy," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Tom Mewwy has broughit a two-pound cake by mistake."
 "I didn't," said Tom Merry.

"Then you have brought the wrong parcel from the shop."
 "I haven't. It's just as Mrs. Taggles handed it to me."

"Oh, rats! You've been dreaming."
 Tom Merry cut the new string, and unfolded the paper. Inside the smaller parcel a fresh cardboard box of a smaller size was disclosed. The juniors gazed at it in blank amazement.

"Gweat Scott! Where is the cake?"
 "I—I can't understand it."
 "You've got the wrong parcel," said Digby.

"I haven't, I tell you."
 "Then where is the cake?"
 "Goodness knows!"
 "Open that blessed thing, and see what's inside it," said Blake.

The thing was opened. Inside was a small wooden box, and when that was

opened it was found to be closely packed with pebbles, which gave weight to the parcel. On the pebbles was lying a note.

Tom Merry picked it up dazedly.
 "My hat!"
 "Wead it out, deah boy."
 "The—the rotters!"
 "What is it?" asked Manners.
 "Look!"

Tom Merry held up the note. It was written in a large and sprawling hand, easily recognised as that of Figgins of the Fourth. And it ran:
 "Thanks! With Figgins & Co.'s compliments!"
 "Bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 6.
 A Bad Catch!

TOM MERRY & CO. stared blankly at the note. For some minutes they could not understand it.

That their old rivals of the New House had japed them was certain, but they could not imagine how Figgins & Co. had done it.

"You ass!" said Blake, at last, breaking the silence. "You've let Figgins & Co. raid the cake after all."

"But—but how have they done it?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lowther suddenly. "That was why they sent us on a wild-goose chase after that rotten bulldog—"

"That what?" demanded Herries.
 "Rotten bulldog," said Monty Lowther innocently.

"Look here, you fathad—"
 "But I don't see—" began Blake.
 "They saw Tom bringing the cake in, and they got up a parcel to look like it, and they must have slipped in here while we were out—"

"And changed them! My hat!"
 "Bai Jove!"

"And now we're done," said Digby.
 "All through—"

"Towser," said Monty Lowther.
 "Oh, rats!" said Herries crossly.

"I wegard this as wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It does not mattah so much about losing the cake, but we have been done by the New House boundahs. I think we ought to go ovah and give them a feahful tiwashin'."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Lucky they didn't take the sosses," said Digby.

"Let's go over and see Figgins," said Blake, with a very warlike look. "If they're eating the cake we shall catch them."

"They'll be on the look-out," said Tom Merry doubtfully.

"Oh, come on!"

The School House juniors streamed out. They had little hope of recovering the cake, but there might be a chance of bumping Figgins & Co., which would make matters even. There was a bright light streaming from the window of Figgins' study in the New House, and three figures could be seen there, seated in a row in the window. They were Figgins, Kerr and Wynn.

"Hallo!" sang out Figgins, as the juniors came into the radius of light from the New House windows.

Tom Merry & Co. halted.

"Give us our cake!" roared Jack Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You rotters—"

"We're eating the cake," said Figgins, looking down upon the School House juniors with a sweet smile. "It's ripping!"

"Splendid!" said Kerr.
 "Jolly good cake," said Fatty Wynn, with his mouth full. "Did you find Towser all right, Herries, old man?"

And the three New House juniors roared.

"Ha ha ha!"
 "Bai Jove, you wottahs—"

"You can come in if you like," said Figgins; "we're ready for you. Come upstairs, and we'll roll you down again. You're welcome!"

"You—you—you—"
 "Hear us smile," said Figgins.

"Who's Cock House at St. Jim's?"
 "We are! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, let's get away!" said Blake crossly. "We can't get at the bouders now, but they'll be coming out presently for their evening sprint," he added, sinking his voice.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the School House juniors returned. It was the invariable custom of Figgins & Co. to take a sprint round the quadrangle before bed unless they were very busily occupied, and Tom Merry & Co. determined to be on the watch for them.

At a quarter to nine the heroes of the School House quietly slipped out into the quadrangle, and took up their position near the fountain, which Figgins & Co. would pass if they took their usual path.

It was intensely dark in the quadrangle, and hardly a star glimmered in the black sky.

The juniors waited and listened for footsteps. Nobody else was likely to cross the quad at that time of night, and there was little danger of making a mistake. But, as a matter of fact, the juniors were too keen upon bumping Figgins & Co. to think of the possibility of a mistake.

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly, in a suppressed voice.

The gravel on the path was grinding under a boot.

"Go for them!"
 The School House juniors made a rush.

Tom Merry and Blake bumped into a dark form, and bumped it over, and rolled on it; and there was a gasping cry.

"Bless my soul!"

The juniors jumped away from the fallen form as if it had suddenly become red-hot. For they knew the voice.

It was the Head!
 "B-bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

"Bless my soul! What is this—who is it? Boys! How dare you!"

"Oh, sir!"
 "We're sorry, sir!"

Tom Merry and Manners lent a hand to the Head to rise. Dr. Holmes gained his feet. Blake found his hat, and handed it to him. The Head was in coat and gloves, evidently going out. He gasped for breath.

"Boys, what are you doing out of your House at this hour? I—I— Why did you attack me in that way?"

(Continued on the next page.)

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"We—~~we~~ thought it was Figgins, sir," stammered Tom Merry.

"Go into your House at once, and take fifty lines each!" said the Head.

"Ye-es, sir."

The juniors moved off disconsolately to the School House. Dr. Holmes, breathing very hard, walked on to the side gate and let himself out with a key. Tom Merry & Co. entered the School House in dismay.

"Bai Jove, that was wotten!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

"What the dickens is the Head going out for at this time of night?" said Monty Lowther crossly. "It wasn't our fault."

"Can't be helped now, anyway," said Tom Merry. "Figgins & Co. have got off. But I hope we didn't hurt the Head."

"Yaas, waitiah!"

And the School House juniors went into the Common-room, giving up, for that evening at least, further thought of reprisals against Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 7.

Caught in a Trap!

DR. HOLMES closed the little gate behind him and the lock clicked shut.

It was very dark in the lane, and all the darker from the shadow of the high school wall and the overhanging trees inside.

The Head walked along slowly to the great gates, and as the sound of footsteps was heard, a figure detached itself from the shadow of the wall. From the clock tower of St. Jim's the hour boomed out.

"Is that you, sir?" came a voice the Head knew. All he could see was a dim shape against the darkness of the night. But it was the voice of Carson.

"Yes," replied the Head steadily.

"Good! You are on time."

"I am punctual," said the Head.

"Pray lead the way, and let us lose no time."

Carson chuckled softly.

"Very well. Come on," he said.

The Head followed him.

All the country round St. Jim's was very well known to the Head. He expected to be led to the village of Rycombe, but before the village was reached the man stepped off into a path that led through the wood. The wood was dark and lonely; the trees, stripped of their leaves, barely discernible in the blackness.

The Head stopped in the path.

"Where are we going?" he asked abruptly.

"To Jim Holmes."

"I understood that he was in the village."

"It wouldn't have been safe for him to go there," said Carson.

"Then where is he?"

"In a cottage on the river—by the Wayland Road."

"Very well."

No more was said as the guide led the way; Dr. Holmes followed him without a word. They passed through Rycombe Wood by the footpath, and came out on the edge of the Wayland Moor. From the darkness came a sound of running water. Where the wood joined the moor a stream that fed the River Rhyl ran between steep banks, and there was a glimmer of light from a cottage window. The little two-story building was very lonely, with no other habitation within a mile. Dr. Holmes knew the cottage. It had stood un-

tenanted for a very long time, and a better place could not have been chosen by his brother, if it were really necessary for him to keep in hiding. It was called Moor Cottage, and the lonely moor, with its deserted quarries, stretched round it, and behind was the wood.

The guide made directly for the glimmering light, which had evidently been left burning in the window as a sign. They reached the cottage, and Carson opened the gate of the unkempt wild garden, overgrown with weeds and bushes. He knocked at the cottage door and whistled in a peculiar way.

The Head of St. Jim's gave him a quick look of suspicion.

"Why that signal?" he asked.

"It's to let my pal know who's here."

"Is there anyone in the cottage besides my brother?"

"Yes; the man who's looking after him—my pal, the Beetle."

An expression of strong disgust came into the kind, scholarly face of the Head. It seemed as if his quiet, grave nature had been brought suddenly in contact with the vulgarity and coarseness of the criminal classes, and he shrank from it.

Clearly he would have liked to turn his back upon the cottage, upon Carson, and his pal the Beetle, and return to St. Jim's, but he thought of his brother. If Jim, the scapegrace younger brother, lay sick in that desolate place, it was his duty to stand by him.

The door was opened, and a dim light glimmered out. A tall, thin man in shabby clothes, with a cap on the back of his head, peered out at the two forms in the doorway.

"That you, Pete?"

"Yes," replied Carson.

The Beetle retreated to allow Carson and his companion to enter. He closed the door again, and a key grated in the lock.

The Head looked round quickly.

"Nothing like making sure, sir," said the Beetle apologetically.

Dr. Holmes nodded without speaking.

"This way," said Carson.

The door opened directly into a room which was evidently the kitchen of the cottage. At the back of the room a rickety wooden stair led up to the two bed-rooms, and the Head followed Carson up the stairs.

Dr. Holmes stooped his head as he entered the first room. A feeble light was burning from a guttering candle stuck in the neck of a bottle. The surroundings were sordid and dirty. Dr. Holmes shuddered as he entered. Had his brother come to this?

A bed was in one corner of the room, half in shadow. In the bed a young man lay, with a pale face, only dimly seen in that light.

"You returned, Pete?" whispered the sick man.

"Yes, old pal."

"And my brother?"

"He's come."

"I'm here, James," said the Head of St. Jim's, advancing towards the bed.

"Thank you for coming," came the whispering voice.

"James, is it really you?"

"Do you doubt it, Henry?"

"Let me look at you," said the Head firmly. "My brother James is supposed to be in Canada. I have not heard from him for some time, but he was going West, and that may account for it. I shall not easily believe that he has fallen into crime and disgrace, in spite of his reckless early years. I must be satisfied that you are my brother."

"Do you not know my face, Henry?"

The Head gave him a searching look.

The face he saw was very pale and somewhat handsome, and, so far as could be seen in the dim, glimmering light of the candle, it was that of James Holmes.

But the Head of St. Jim's, quiet and scholarly and retiring as his nature was, was no fool. It was not easy to impose upon him.

He picked up the candle and bent over the sick man and scanned his features closely. The man bore the scrutiny well.

"Well?" he said at last.

"I suppose you have told the truth," said the Head. "If you are not my brother, you are very like him."

"I am your brother."

The Head sat down by the bedside.

"How did you come to this?" he asked.

The young man made a feeble gesture.

"I have been a fool," he said. "The same old tale."

"And your promises to me?"

"I have no excuse to offer, Henry."

"And you are ill?"

"Do I not look it?"

"You do," said the Head quietly, scanning the face of the sick man in the dim light of the candle—"you do, James. But answer me one question. What did you do with the £200 you received in Quebec?"

"It went like the rest."

"All of it?"

"Every penny."

Dr. Holmes rose to his feet. His eyes, burning with indignation, turned upon Pete Carson.

"Kindly allow me to pass," he said, as Carson drew between him and the stairs.

The feeble voice came from the bed.

"Do you desert me then, Henry?"

"I do not desert you," said the Head;

"I give you two hours to throw up this rascally pretence and escape from the neighbourhood. By that time the police will be looking for you."

"Is that your answer to your brother?"

"You are not my brother," said the Head quietly. "I never sent my brother £200 in Quebec. If you were my brother you would know that. You have attempted to impose upon me by your likeness to my brother. You are a scoundrel, sir!"

And Dr. Holmes' voice trembled with anger and scorn.

Carson uttered an angry oath.

"Then the game's up!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the Head of St. Jim's indignantly, "the game is up, as you express it."

Carson smiled sneeringly.

"Not so fast, I reckon!" he said; and he called out to the man below:

"Beetle!"

"Hallo, Pete!"

"Come up here."

"You bet!"

The long-limbed ruffian came up the wooden, rickety stairs. Dr. Holmes made a movement, and both Pete Carson and the Beetle stood in his way. There was a glimmer of steel as the sunburnt man drew his hand from behind him; a revolver was glinting in the glimmer of the candle.

CHAPTER 8.

Kidnapped!

LET me pass!" Dr. Holmes' voice shook with angry indignation as he endeavoured to push his way past the two ruffians to the stairs.

"Stand back!"

"I will do nothing of the sort! I—"
Click!

Dr. Holmes started back, in spite of himself, as the muzzle of the revolver touched his body.

Carson grinned evilly.

"Better go slow," he remarked.

Dr. Holmes faced him calmly, scornfully.

"You dare not use that weapon," he said quietly. "Whatever may be the ways of the country you come from, you dare not use that weapon in England. You would be hanged, sir, if you were to do so."

The sick man sat up in the bed and kicked the bedclothes off. He was grinning; his grin looked strange enough on his pallid face. But it was clear now that his pallor was merely the effect of make-up.

"I only half expected it to work," he said, and his voice sounded strong enough now. "But we have another string to our bow, Dr. Holmes."

"You have soon given up your hypocrisy, sir," said the Head.

The man shrugged his shoulders. He stepped to a rickety washstand and drew a wet sponge over his face, and then proceeded to towel it. As he did so he spoke with perfect coolness. It was clear that this man, the youngest of the three, was the leader.

"They all said I was like Jim Holmes," he said, "and I reckoned I was like enough to pass for him in a dim light, and made up like an invalid. But you were sharper than we gave you credit for, sir."

"Your wretched trick is useless now," said the Head. "You have made me anxious about my brother, but I think I could forgive you now that I know he has not fallen so low as I was led to fear."

"Your brother is perfectly well, and digging gold, I believe, in the Canadian North-West," said the other coolly. "I knew him there, but did not get on with him. When he was tipsy sometimes he blurted out enough for me to know his history, and when circumstances made it necessary for me to give Canada a rest, I thought of this little game."

"You have had your trouble for your pains, sir."

"I guess not."

The Head smiled contemptuously.

"You can hardly expect to gain anything from me now," he said.

"That's where you make a mistake," said the other coolly. "That's just what I do expect. This was only a trial run, as it were. As it has failed, I have another string to my bow."

"You will get nothing from me."

"Give it to him straight, Kid, and get it over," growled Carson.

"Hold your tongue, Pete, and leave me to manage matters my own way. You see, my dear sir, we know enough about you to know that you could afford, if you liked, to hand a cheque for five hundred pounds to a brother in distress."

"I shall certainly not hand anything of the sort to you."

The Kid smiled agreeably.

"I rather reckon you will," he replied.

"But we shall see."

"What do you mean?" asked the Head, in amazement. "Why should I give you money when I have proved you to be an impostor and a cheat?"

"Because you cannot help yourself," said the Kid coolly. "In the first place, supposing that your brother was here, hiding from the police, you have kept your visit a secret."

"That is true. What of that?"

"A great deal," said the Kid. "You

are here—and you are going to stay here."

"Stay here?" repeated the Head dazedly.

"Exactly!"

"I shall certainly not stay here! Why should I do so? Are you mad?" asked the Head of St. Jim's, in angry amazement.

The Kid shook his head.

"Not at all."

"Do you mean that you will detain me by force?"

"I guess so."

The Head stared at him. That the three ruffians would venture upon any such course had never occurred to him. To his quiet and law-abiding mind, it seemed wildly impossible that even these ruffians could think of introducing Wild West outrages into a peaceable English countryside.

"Are you speaking seriously?" Dr. Holmes asked at last.

"Quite."

"You will detain me here by force?"

"Yes."

"Till when?"

"Till you hand us a cheque for five hundred pounds, and the cheque has been cashed, and we have the money in our pockets."

"You are mad!"

The Kid laughed.

"You will see," he replied.

Dr. Holmes made another movement towards the stair. The Beetle stepped in the way, and Pete Carson raised his revolver. The Kid turned on him sharply.

"Put that gun away, you fool!"

"I guess—"

"Put it away!"

Carson sullenly obeyed.

"There is no need for that," said the Kid smoothly. "I think the three of us could handle our respected friend easily enough if he should be so ill-advised as to attempt violence. Do you not think so, sir?"

The Head smiled contemptuously.

"I think that you can do as you like if you dare to use violence towards me," he said. "I am an old man, and you are three to one. But there is a law in this country to punish you."

"If we are caught. Please sit down, sir. You must be tired."

The Head made a negative gesture.

"Very well," said the Kid, seating himself upon the bed and nursing one knee as he talked. "Let me explain the situation to you a little. You have come here without anyone knowing it. Nobody suspects for a moment that you are here, that you have been kidnapped, that there is a scheme for holding you to ransom. When you are missed from the school it will be known that you left of your own accord, and that you have met with violence will be an inadmissible theory. It will be supposed that you are absconding yourself for reasons best known to yourself, especially—"

"Well?" said the Head, as the Kid paused.

"Especially," went on the young man, with perfect coolness, "as a telegram will be received at the school, signed with your name, stating that you are detained unavoidably, and asking Mr. Railton to take your place temporarily. You see, I am well posted up to the work I have taken in hand. What do you think?"

The Head could only stare at him blankly.

"Do you think that you will be found, or even looked for?" asked the Kid blandly.

(Continued on the next page.)



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BEATEN BY THE BANK!

Kind Lady (to convict): "What are you in prison for, my man?"

Convict: "Well, ma'am, me and the Bank of England 'ad a contest to see who could make the best pound notes, and the Bank won."

A football has been awarded to J. Skipsey, Orchard Hotel, Portman Street, Marble Arch, London, W.1.

* * *

A "GORGEOUS" TIME!

Johnny had been the guest of honour at a party the day before, and his friend was regarding him enviously.

"How was it? A good time?"

"Did I?" was the emphatic reply. "I ain't hungry yet!"

A football has been awarded to D. Lutton, Castlewellan Road, Banbridge, Co. Down, Ireland.

* * *

NO EXCUSE!

"The next time you are late, Tommy, you must bring an excuse from your father," said the teacher.

"He ain't no good at excuses!" exclaimed Tommy. "Mother finds him out every time!"

A fountain-pen has been awarded to Miss P. Lester, The Hazels, Winsor Lane, Winsor Woodlands, Hants.

* * *

PRECAUTIONS!

Medical Officer: "Now, sergeant, I am very concerned as to the quality of the drinking water. What precautions do you take against infection?"

Sergeant: "Well, sir, first we filter it."

M.O.: "Good!"

Sergeant: "Then we boil it."

M.O.: "Excellent!"

Sergeant: "Then we drink ginger-ale!"

A propelling pencil has been awarded to Miss M. Shimmis, 4, Albany Street, Douglas, Isle of Man.

* * *

KEEPING TEACHER COMPANY!

"Now," said the teacher, "you are all blockheads, but there must be one who excels in something, if only ignorance. Let the biggest duffer stand up."

To the teacher's surprise, one boy stood up.

"Oh," he said, "I'm glad to see that one of you has the honesty to admit his ignorance!"

"It isn't that, sir," said the boy. "I hadn't the heart to see you standing by yourself!"

A football has been awarded to R. Munroe, 25, King Edward's Road, Middlesbrough, Yorkshire.

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"You will not keep me here long, you scoundrel!" said Dr. Holmes.

"Why not?"

"I shall be traced."

"We shall see," replied the Kid. "What I chiefly regret is that it will be very inconvenient for you, as you will have to stay in a single small room and live on decidedly plain fare. But doubtless that will bring you to a reasonable view of the situation all the more quickly."

Carson and the Beetle chuckled.

"What do you ask of me?" asked the Head quietly.

"Five hundred pounds."

"You will certainly never get anything of that sort. If you will let me leave this house without further trouble I will give you what loose money I have about me."

The Kid laughed.

"We are not pickpockets, I reckon," he said. "You can keep your loose cash, and your watch, too. We are out for higher stakes, and we are going to get that five hundred quid, or know the reason why."

"You will certainly get nothing of the sort out of me!" said Dr. Holmes contemptuously.

"We shall see. You refuse to sign the cheque?"

"Most decidedly."

"Perhaps you will be in a more amenable frame of mind to-morrow," said the Kid, rising. "Meanwhile, may I trouble you to enter your room?"

He opened the door of the adjoining bed-room.

Dr. Holmes cast one glance at the stairs. But the two powerful ruffians were in the way, and either of them was more than a match for the Head of St. Jim's, even if it had not been inconsistent with his age and his profession to enter into a violent struggle with them. Without a word the Head of St. Jim's stepped into the adjoining room, and the door was closed upon him.

There was a click of a key in the lock, and it struck strangely upon Dr. Holmes' ears. He was a prisoner, held to ransom, and it seemed to the Head of St. Jim's like a strange dream from which he must presently awaken.

CHAPTER 9.

Missing!

MR. RAILTON, the master of the School House, knocked at Kildare's door.

It was a late hour for St. Jim's—half-past ten. Kildare had seen the Shell off to bed at half-past nine, and then he had retired to his study to work till half-past ten, his own bed-time. He was just finishing when the Housemaster knocked, and came in.

Kildare rose from the table.

There was a troubled frown upon Mr. Railton's face, and the captain of St. Jim's could see at a glance that something was wrong.

"Kildare, I suppose you do not know—"

Mr. Railton paused.

"Yes, sir?" said Kildare inquiringly.

"Where the Head has gone?"

"Has he gone out, sir?"

"Yes."

"I did not know it, sir."

"Mrs. Holmes has told me that he has not come in," Mr. Railton explained. "She is a little anxious about it, I think, as he has been—well, I suppose it does not matter if I mention it to you—a little troubled about something this evening."

"Ah!" said Kildare.

Mr. Railton looked at him sharply.

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"What are you thinking of, Kildare?"

"I thought the Head seemed a bit bothered about that tramp chap who came to see him this afternoon, that's all, sir," said Kildare frankly.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I was thinking of the same thing," he said. "I did not know that the Head intended to go out, and as he has explained nothing to Mrs. Holmes, she seems anxious. I thought I would ask you if you knew anything."

"Nothing, sir."

"Very well."

"You are going to stay up, sir?"

"Yes."

"Shall I stay up with you, sir?"

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"No, thanks. It is not necessary."

And Mr. Railton returned to his study. He was looking and feeling very troubled. There was a very strong bond of friendship between Mr. Railton and the Head, tempered with deep respect on the younger man's part. He remembered what the Head had said in his study about having received bad news, of which he would know more that night.

It seemed clear to Mr. Railton that something had happened, and he was very anxious for the return of Dr. Holmes.

He sat in his study reading till eleven o'clock chimed out, and then he rose un- casily.

Half an hour passed, while Mr. Railton paced his study. Half-past eleven.

The House was now quite silent.

Everyone, with the exception of Mr. Railton and Mrs. Holmes, had gone to bed. There was a light tap at Mr. Railton's door, and Mrs. Holmes came in.

The Housemaster bowed to her very gravely.

"Dr. Holmes has not returned, Mr. Railton."

"I know it," he said. "I cannot understand it; it is inexplicable. But I should advise you to go to bed, madam—or, at least, to lie down. I shall wait up for Dr. Holmes."

"What can have happened?"

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"I cannot imagine. The Head must have been detained somewhere. You are sure that you did not know where he was going?"

"He did not tell me."

"It is very strange."

"There has been some accident," said Mrs. Holmes, in a trembling voice. "I am sure of it. Nothing else could keep him away."

Mr. Railton was silent. He could not help thinking so himself. There seemed to be no other way of explaining the strange absence of the Head. He persuaded Mrs. Holmes to go to her room at last, and waited up alone.

Twelve!

With deep, booming sounds the strokes came through the stillness of the night, waking strange echoes in the old buildings of St. Jim's.

Mr. Railton threw open his window and looked out.

Stars were twinkling in the sky. It was dark but clear, and the old trees, gaunt and leafless, swayed slightly in the wind.

Where was the Head? What had happened?

The Housemaster shut the window and paced his study again. He did not know what to do. It was unlikely that the Head would absent himself until midnight without giving a reason; yet it might so easily happen that he might be detained somewhere. Losing a train

would account for it if he had gone some distance from St. Jim's. But he would have telephoned in that case.

Mr. Railton felt a natural hesitation about commencing a search for a man who might come in at any moment, and who then would be surprised and certainly not pleased at having been searched for. The fact that the Head had not mentioned even to his wife where he was going seemed to indicate that he did not desire attention to be drawn to the matter at all.

Mr. Railton could not help thinking that the secret expedition had something to do with the tramp who had called in the afternoon. For many reasons it was possible that the Head did not wish the matter to be made too public.

There was a knock on Mr. Railton's door again, and he turned un- casily as it opened. It was Kildare this time. The captain of St. Jim's was fully dressed.

"Has not the Head returned, sir?" he asked.

Mr. Railton shook his head.

"There must have been an accident, then."

"I am beginning to fear so, Kildare. Yet, in case of an accident, it is very strange that word is not sent to the school. Even in case of a fatality, Dr. Holmes would have proofs of his identity upon him, and they would communicate with us at once."

"It is very strange, sir. Would it be any use to look for him?"

"In which direction, Kildare?"

The captain of St. Jim's was silent. They did not know in which direction the Head had gone, or even whether he had taken a train at Rycombe or not.

"I think, perhaps, we had better wait till morning," said Mr. Railton. "If Dr. Holmes is not here by dawn, I will go down to the village and make inquiries."

"Very well, sir."

And Kildare retired.

The rest of St. Jim's were sleeping soundly. In their dormitories, Tom Merry & Co. slept the sleep of healthy youth, little dreaming of the shadow that overhung the fate of their beloved headmaster.

Mr. Railton did not sleep. He was still wide awake and watching when the first grey streaks of the winter dawn crept in at his study windows.

And the Head had not returned.

Mr. Railton put on his coat and hat and quitted the School House. The early morning air blew refreshingly on his tired face as he strode across the quadrangle. He let himself out, and walked down to the village.

Kildare was up very soon afterwards, and he went to Mr. Railton's study and found him gone, and waited anxiously for his return. It was broad day when the Housemaster of the School House came back.

The rising-bell clanged out, and the boys of St. Jim's were turning out to a new day's work and play. In the bright, sunny quad a crowd of juniors were punting a footer about before breakfast as Mr. Railton came in.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Mr. Railton has been out early! Good mornin', sir!"

"Good-morning!" said Mr. Railton absently.

He entered the School House, leaving the juniors surprised at his pale and troubled looks.

"Something's gone wrong somewhere," opined Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kildare met Mr. Railton eagerly as he came in, and followed the tired and troubled Housemaster into his study.

The captain of St. Jim's read the result of his inquiries in his looks.

"You have heard nothing of the Head, sir?"

"No, Kildare. I have inquired at the station, and found that he did not go there last evening, and at Wayland, and he was not seen there. Nobody, apparently, has seen him. In the circumstances, I have laid the matter before Inspector Skeat, at Rylcombe, and he is going to have Dr. Holmes searched for. There was nothing else to be done, I think."

"I am sure of it, sir."

"I hope we shall hear news soon, if only for Mrs. Holmes' sake."

And Mr. Railton went to the Head's house to tell what he knew—and it was little enough.

In a very short time all St. Jim's knew the cause of Mr. Railton's troubled looks. The Head was missing; he had been away all night, and no news had been received of him since he quitted St. Jim's. The St. Jim's fellows simply gasped when they heard the news.

Where was Dr. Holmes? They little guessed how near he was to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

The Captive Schoolmaster!

"GOOD-MORNING, sir!"

It was a cool and mocking voice.

Dr. Holmes raised his head. He had been sleeping.

For the greater part of the long night

the captive schoolmaster had paced the narrow limits of the room in which he was confined, his eyes wrinkled and troubled.

He had thought of St. Jim's, of his wife's anxiety, of the alarm that would be caused at the school by his disappearance.

To the Head's quiet, serene nature, everything in the nature of disturbance and scandal and sensation was detestable. The talk that would go on, the surmising and the conjecturing that his disappearance would cause—he thought of them all and shuddered.

He would have given very much to be back in the old school. But he would not give what his captors demanded. It was not merely the money, although he could ill-afford to part with such a sum as five hundred pounds. But his principles would not allow him to yield to the demands of a kidnapper. If he had consented to purchase his freedom from these ruffians, he would have despised his own weakness. At any cost, he was determined that he would not yield to the demand that had been made upon him.

He had thrown himself upon the truckle bed at last, and slept. He was in an uneasy slumber when a knock at the door awakened him, and he raised his head to see the Kid in the room, looking at him with a mocking smile.

Dr. Holmes rose to his feet.

"Good-morning!" repeated the Kid coolly.

The Head did not reply.

"I hope you have slept well," said the Kid.

"I have not slept very well," said the Head.

"I am sorry."

The Head was silent.

"But you have only yourself to blame," the Kid went on cheerfully. "You have but to sign a cheque for five hundred pounds—"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!"

"And to promise to take no steps to recover the money, or to put the police on our track," went on the Kid, unheeding. "Then you can go."

"If that is the price to pay, I shall never go," said the Head coldly. "I will not part with one shilling to a gang of ruffians, and I certainly shall use every endeavour to bring you to justice when I am free again."

The Kid shrugged his shoulders. There was a growl of anger from the adjoining room, and the sunburnt man put his head through the doorway. There was a click as he moved the cylinder of his revolver.

"Lemme deal with him, Kid," said Pete Carson.

"Get out!" said the Kid.

"But—"

"And put that gun away, you fool! Do you think you are in the Rocky Mountains here?" said the Kid irritably. "Put it away!"

"Oh, have your own way!" growled Carson sullenly. "I'd treat him as we did the Mexican in San Antonio."

The Kid laughed.

"You are not in Texas now," he said.



The School House juniors made a rush at a dark form. Tom Merry and Blake bumped it over and rolled on it, and there was a gasping cry. "Bless my soul! Boys, how dare you!" it was the Head!

"Leave him to me. Dr. Holmes, I suppose you have thought over your position here?"

"Undoubtedly."

"You realise that you cannot escape?"

The Head glanced round the little room. There was but one window—too small for a man to pass without squeezing—and it was strongly barred, and outside a wire-netting was nailed over it. And the only door gave upon the room occupied by the kidnapers. It was very clear that there was no escape for the captive headmaster. The Kid watched his restless gaze, with a cool grin upon his handsome, reckless face.

"Well, sir?"

"Yes," said the Head slowly; "you have me a safe prisoner."

"Then you had better come to terms."

"Impossible!"

"Five hundred pounds is not so much to you."

"Five hundred pence, and it would make no difference. I cannot consent to pay money to a gang of criminals."

The sunburnt man growled again, and there was a muttered curse from the Beetle in the next room. But the Kid showed no sign of anger.

"You will remain, then," he said.

"Until I'm found," said the Head.

"That is not likely to happen."

"I shall certainly be searched for," said the Head. "I trust that I shall be found. In any case, I shall not yield to your demand."

The Kid gave a shrug.

"We shall see."

He quitted the room, and locked the door upon the outside. Dr. Holmes paced up and down the narrow chamber. He was thinking of the school, and of the excitement and alarm his absence would cause there. He could send no word; there would be no explanation. What would they think? What could they think? The cunning of the kidnapers in making use of his scapegrace brother's name to draw him into the toils had prevented him from saying a single word as to his destination when he left St. Jim's. There would be no clue, even if he were searched for. Where were the searchers to look?

The door was opened, and a tray was pushed into the room. It held a plate of dry crusts and a jug of water. That was the breakfast for the Head of St. Jim's.

For a long time Dr. Holmes left it untouched. But as the morning advanced hunger assailed him, and he ate and drank of the meagre fare.

It was very cold in the prison chamber. He paced uneasily up and down—six steps in one direction, and then six returning. In the next room he could hear a sound of clinking glasses, and the smell of tobacco came strongly through the door. He heard words that indicated that the three rascals were playing cards. Gambling, drinking, and smoking at an early hour in the morning.

The Head's lip curled with scorn. And these were the men into whose hands he had fallen.

CHAPTER 11.

A Little Argument!

FIGGINS of the New House came dashing across the quadrangle after breakfast with a very red and excited face.

Tom Merry & Co. were just coming
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out of the School House as Figgins came panting up, and he almost ran into their arms.

They were round him in a moment.

"Here's the New House bounder."

"Collar him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Where's our cake, you rotter?"

"Bump him!"

"Hold on!" gasped Figgins. "I—I say—"

"Bump!"

"Yow! Pax! I say, pax!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"I came over here to speak to you chaps!" roared Figgins. "Leggo!"

The chums of the School House grinned, and released the long-legged chief of the New House juniors.

"Why didn't you say so before, then?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yow! You didn't give me a chance, you fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins dusted himself down wrathfully. The School House fellows stood round him and chuckled. As a matter of fact, they had not supposed that Figgins was dashing across the quad to raid the School House single-handed; they had chosen to mistake his intentions, as Figgins knew very well.

"Look here, you chumps—" said Figgins.

"We're looking," said Monty Lowther blandly.

"The Head's disappeared!"

"Whose head?"

"Chump! Dr. Holmes has disappeared!" said Figgins excitedly. "I heard it over brekker!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"So did we," he said. "At any rate, he left the school last night, and hasn't come back. I hope nothing has happened!"

"Oh, I thought perhaps you hadn't heard the news!" said Figgins.

Jack Blake gave a sniff.

"Rot!" he remarked. "Of course we've heard it. The Head's a School House chap."

"What?"

"Well, the Head's house is part of the School House," said Blake. "I look upon the Head as a School House chap."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Rot!" said Figgins warnily. "Why should—"

"I don't want any trouble," said Blake, pushing back his cuffs as though he did. "But I'm willing to fight anybody who says that the Head isn't a School House chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, then!" said Figgins, assuming a very warlike attitude. "It's about time I gave you a licking, I think!"

Tom Merry pushed between the two warlike Fourth Formers.

"Hold on," he said. "It's quite possible that there's been some accident, and something's happened to Dr. Holmes. In the circumstances it would look rotten to start fighting!"

"Yaas, wathah! There's such a thing as keepin' up appearances, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"I quite agree with Tom Mewwy. I regard you as a pair of weckless boundlers!"

Blake dropped his hands.

"Oh, all serene!" he said. "Perhaps you're right. But I can't stand New House cheek, you know!"

"These things are only sent to twy us, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But if you fellows have

finished gassin', I've got somethin' to say. The Head has disappaeched!"

"Go hon!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Anybody coming down to the footer?" asked Digby.

"Weally, Digby—"

"I've got to go and see to Towser," said Herries.

"Hewwies, you ass—"

Monty Lowther waved his hand soothingly to the swell of St. Jim's, who seemed to be growing excited over these incessant interruptions.

"Keep calm, dear boy."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Don't lose your head. We've lost one Head already!"

"Pway don't make any of your wotten jokes on a sewious mattah, Lowthah! I stwongly object. I have been thinkin'—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Lowther incredulously.

"I have been thinkin'," said D'Arcy, taking no notice of Monty Lowther, "that as the Head has disappaeched, he ought to be looked for and found."

"Splendid," said Tom Merry. "I wonder whether anybody else has thought of it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Gussy had better suggest it to somebody," said Blake solemnly. "It's a brilliant idea, and nobody else will think of it."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! What I mean is, that we ought to look for the Head. It is our duty. I'm quite willin' to take the lead, as a thing of this sort wequiah a fellow of tact and judgment to take the lead. If you chaps will back me up, I will see the whole bisney through. What do you say?"

"Rats!"

"Weally, deah boys," said D'Arcy, as the other fellows made that reply with singular unanimity—"weally, you know—"

"It's not a bad idea to look for the Head, as far as that goes," said Figgins doubtfully. "If you School House chaps will back me up—"

"Bosh!"

"Look here!"

"Of course, it's a thing we ought to take up, as juniors," Tom Merry remarked in a thoughtful way. "I suppose the masters will be looking for him, but you know what they are."

"And I suppose the police will search, too," said Digby. "But you know how much they are worth."

"I dare say the prefects will take a hand," Manners observed. "But if the Head belonged to me, I shouldn't care to leave the search in the hands of the prefects."

"Rather not!"

"Quite wight, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "That is why I suggested your backin' me up, as it wequiah a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Oh, cheese it, you know!" said Figgins. "I admit that it's a matter for juniors to look into, but a New House chap will have to take the lead, of course."

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah; wats!"

"Look here, you chumps—"

"Look here, you fathead—"

"What I say is—"

"Rot!"

"I tell you—"

"Piffle!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Yah!"

JUST MY FUN



Monty Lowther
Calling!

Hallo, everybody!
You heard about the bird's-nester who got caught on a bough? He was "up with the lark."
"I don't see anything in wireless," says Skimpole. Patience—television is on the way.

News: "200 Parliamentary Seats Lost." So the candidates still really stand?

I hear Australian woodsmen had a tree-chopping competition. Who won? Don't "axe" me!

Stock Exchange News: "Silver Unchanged." Nobody spending much! "Rubber Rose Considerably." Presumably it was inflated. "Cotton Was Quiet." No thread to follow here.

It was young Frayne who thought you could find crab-apples in the sea.

"Who are your three favourite authors?" demanded Mr. Selby. "Shakespeare, Jack Hobbs, and Don Bradman," answered Wally D'Arcy. "You mean to say you regard all three as great writers?" gasped Mr. Selby. "Well, perhaps not Shakespeare," amended Wally.

Mr. Linton says a certain sort of crab induces a lung complaint. Seaside crabs, however, often stimulate the lungs! Yow-wow!

"Mosquito Menace Being Fought With Squirt-Gun." The end be-gun. I hear Clifton Dane's sister thought a football coach had four wheels.

As the 24-stone company promoter said: "Gentlemen, I plan

a train at either station. The Head of St. Jim's was too well-known in the neighbourhood to pass unnoticed.

Telephone and telegraph had been at work during the day, and if there had been any accident in which Dr. Holmes was involved, certainly news of it would have reached St. Jim's.

But no news came. What had become of the Head? The mystery seemed utterly impenetrable.

The roads and the wood had been searched, but in vain. Evon Wayland Moor was visited by mounted policemen, and searched up and down. Pedestrians had fallen into the old quarries sometimes, and if the Head had crossed the moor in the dark, that might have happened to him. But it was almost unimaginable that he should have gone in that direction at night. Still, the search was made, and nothing was discovered.

It seemed certain, to a disinterested onlooker, that Dr. Holmes had absented himself of his own accord—that nothing had happened, excepting that for some reason best known to himself he did not choose to return to St. Jim's.

But at St. Jim's no one was likely to place faith in such a theory as that.

to develop a corporation second to none!"

"What is it that makes the world go round?" asks a writer. Detour signs, usually.

From the Third: "Give me an example of perpetual motion," said Mr. Selby. "A bad half-crown circulating in Scotland, sir," replied Jameson.

Two teams of plumbers turned out for a football match. One team had to go back for their football boots, but it didn't matter, because the other team had forgotten the ball.

The postman dropped a package of glass on the school steps. "Crash-on-delivery!"

"What's better than a lazy hour by the fire?" asks Kangaroo. Two.

Remember, a grievance is seldom cured by being nursed.

Story: "These are some of the best cigars out," said the generous fellow, giving them away. "You were right," said his friend, meeting him again, "they were much the best out!"

"Have you seen 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'?" asks a reader. No, but I've just had a midwinter's nightmare.

"I think I could make a crooner," says Digby. Make him what!

A horn grumbler is a chap who dislikes eating because it spoils his appetite.

Oh, you heard about the carpenter who was always on the make?

Story: "What should I get," inquired the man who had just insured his property against fire, "if the place were to be burned down to-night?" "About ten years, I should say," replied the insurance agent.

Try this: "Speak up now," said the optician, testing young Jameson. "Can't you see the letters on the chart—B K L M Y O U X?" "Yes, I can see them all right," said Jameson, "but I can't pronounce the words!"

Heard after the House match: Pratt: "I could kick myself for missing that goal!" Figgins: "Better let me do it for you—you might miss again!" On the ball, boys!

They knew that Dr. Holmes would not alarm the whole school, and inflict cruel anxiety upon his wife, if he could possibly help it.

If he did not return to the school, it was because he could not. And if there had been no accident that could be heard of, what had happened? Was it possible that the Head had fallen into ruffianly hands, and was detained a prisoner somewhere against his will?

The theory seemed too wild for credence.

The fellows went into afternoon school in an excited frame of mind, which left them with little attention to bestow upon their lessons.

But the masters were patient.

The masters were troubled by the disappearance of the headmaster; and they had another trouble, too. In the Head's absence, the senior master of St. Jim's assumed his authority, and Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was senior master. Mr. Ratcliff was very unpopular, and his elevation into authority, if it lasted long, was likely to make him even more unpleasant than usual.

Afternoon lessons were over at last, and when the boys were dismissed, they

Blake and Figgins came to grips and rolled in the quad in a loving embrace. Kildare came out of the School House with a troubled expression upon his handsome face. He caught sight of the juniors, and came up, frowning.

"Blake! Figgins!"
"Oh!"
"Ow!"
"Stop that! You should be ashamed to be fighting when the school is worried about the Head!" exclaimed the St. Jim's captain sharply.

Blake and Figgins separated, looking very red and confused.

"H'm!" murmured Figgins.
"Ahem!" said Blake.

Kildare looked at them very sternly. "You had better keep quiet, all of you," he said. "Mrs. Holmes is in a state of great anxiety, and so are we all. I suppose you don't want to appear unfeeling?"

The juniors were silent.
The captain of St. Jim's walked away. Figgins and Blake were crimson. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and regarded them with an air of great severity.

"I told you so, deah boys."
"Oh, rats!" said Figgins crossly.

"Weally, Figgins—"
"Go and eat coconuts!"

And Figgins tramped away towards his own House, his usually sunny face quite clouded.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bestowed his attentions upon Jack Blake, who was looking very clouded, too.

"Blake, you ass—"
"Oh, shut up!"

"I told you—"
Biff!

Blake smote the beautiful silk hat of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and it floated away from the head of the swell of St. Jim's.

There was a wild ejaculation from D'Arcy as the shiny topper splashed into a puddle left by recent rain.

"Oh! You wottah! You feahful wottah!"

He rushed to rescue the damaged topper. He lifted it up dripping with muddy water. He turned round to take vengeance upon Blake, but he was gone. Blake had tramped into the School House with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his brows wrinkled, and Arthur Augustus was left to wipe his muddy topper, unavenged.

CHAPTER 12.

The Telegram!

THE day passed at St. Jim's—a strange day enough for the old school.

There was still no news of the Head.

In every interval from lessons the juniors asked one another eagerly for the news; but there was no news.

Mr. Raitton had nothing to tell.

Inspector Skat, from Rylcombe, had come to see him about noon, and they had had a long talk in Mr. Raitton's study. But that was all; nothing came of it.

The inspector had promised to do his best to obtain news of the Head, but the task was almost an impossible one.

Dr. Holmes had disappeared without leaving a trace behind.

He had said not a word as to his destination, or as to the probable time of his return, although it had been understood that he was returning later in the evening.

He had not been seen in Rylcombe or Wayland, and had certainly not taken

hurried to inquire if anything had been heard.

Nothing had been heard.

But news was coming. It was just after five o'clock when the telegraph boy from Rylcombe came up from the School House, with a buff-coloured envelope in his hand.

He was spotted at once, and everybody guessed that the telegram contained news of the Head, and quite an army followed the lad into the House, eager for information.

The telegram was for Mr. Railton.

The School House master had seen the telegraph boy from his study window, and he had come out into the Hall. He took the telegram and opened it immediately. The crowd of fellows, seniors and juniors, gathered round him thickly, eager but respectful.

Mr. Railton uttered an exclamation of surprise as he read the telegram.

"News, sir?" asked Kildare. "May we know?"

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Yes, certainly. The wire is apparently from Dr. Holmes, and is sent from London. I will read it out to you."

A pin might have been heard to fall, so intense was the silence as the School House master began to read out the message.

"Unavoidably detained in London. Writing later to explain.—HOLMES."

Kildare drew a deep breath.

"Then he is safe, sir?" he said.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Mr. Railton, with a puzzled look.

"And he is staying away of his own accord?" said Darrell of the Sixth.

"Yes, if this telegram is from him."

"If, sir?"

"I shall take it to Inspector Skeat immediately, and we shall inquire at the Euston Road Post Office, in London, whence it was dispatched," said Mr. Railton. "It is easy for anyone to send a telegram."

"Oh!"

And Mr. Railton departed at once.

He left the fellows in a buzz.

Opinion was divided as to the telegram.

Many of the fellows fully believed that it was from the Head, and that the anxiety and the alarm was a storm in a teacup. Other fellows, who favoured the theory of kidnapping, held that the kidnapper had sent the telegram to put the police off the scent.

Inquiry at the post office in London certainly should have revealed something, and the fellows waited eagerly for news.

It was late that night before the result of the police inquiry at the London post office was known.

As soon as the news was received, Mr. Railton allowed the whole school to know. It was only fair that the boys, who were quite as anxious as the masters, should know what was going on. And they learned that a detective had made inquiries at the Euston Road Post Office, and learned that the telegram had been handed in by an elderly gentleman with white hair, wearing glasses and a silk hat—a gentleman whom the young lady in attendance judged to be, by his appearance, a clergyman or a schoolmaster.

That settled it with most of the St. Jim's fellows.

Dr. Holmes had handed in the telegram himself, and there was no cause for anxiety. Most of the fellows felt relieved. Mrs. Holmes, though greatly puzzled, was thankful that the Head

was safe. But there were few fellows at St. Jim's who still held to the theory of foul play. The school settled down to wait for the Head's return.

And while the whole school waited for his return, for the most part satisfied that he was safe and well, the captive schoolmaster waited and watched in the prison chamber in the lonely cottage on the moor.

A day had passed—a day of monotony, anxiety, and physical discomfort to the Head of St. Jim's.

He was cold and he was hungry. Another meal of bread-and-water had been given him, and that was all. When darkness descended no light was afforded him, and he sat in the darkness, hearing the voices through the partition from the adjoining room. But there were only two voices now—those of Pete Carson and the Beetle. The Kid appeared to have gone. It was late in the evening when the Head heard the voice of the leader of the gang of adventurers again.

The door of his room opened, and a candle glimmered in. The Kid entered with his hat on, evidently having just returned from a journey.

He nodded coolly to the Head as he held up the candle and saw Dr. Holmes' pale and harassed face.

"Still here?" he said, with a grin.

"Yes, I am still here," said Dr. Holmes quietly.

"And as obstinate as ever?"

"As determined as ever." The Kid laughed.

"We will not argue about a word," he said. "I've been on a journey to London. I've sent a telegram to St. Jim's."

The Head frowned.

"Then you have become a forger as well as a kidnapper, you scoundrel!" he said bitterly.

"If you like to put it that way—yes."

"The police will inquire at the post office; they will discover that it was not I who sent the telegram," said the Head contemptuously.

The Kid grinned.

"They will discover that it was you," he replied. "I made myself up in what I flatter myself was a skilful disguise to represent you; and the man who sent the telegram will be found to answer to the description of the Head of St. Jim's."

Dr. Holmes' heart sank.

"There is no chance for you," said the Kid. "They will not even search for you any longer. Had you not better make up your mind to the inevitable?"

"I have made up my mind."

"To pay the money?"

"No."

"Very well! Another twenty-four hours on bread-and-water may bring you to your senses," said the Kid carelessly.

And he withdrew, taking the candle with him, and the door was locked

again. Dr. Holmes was left to himself in the darkness.

CHAPTER 13.

Tom Merry's Theory I

THE next day was Wednesday—a half-holiday at St. Jim's.

As a rule, the St. Jim's fellows would have thought of football that afternoon, and of nothing else. But for once a good many fellows gave no thought to the great winter game. There were many who were still anxious about the Head. The telegram and the



A man came dashing through the wood, his face pale and his eyes wide with fear. He saw the sight of the juniors, but without casting a glance in their direction he shot? W

subsequent inquiry had satisfied some; but it had not satisfied all, and among those who were uneasy were Tom Merry & Co.

Tom Merry thought more about the matter than about his work during morning lessons that day, with the result that he gained a total of a hundred and fifty lines from Mr. Linton, his Form-master. But he gave the impositions hardly a thought.

His brow was still wrinkled in reflection when the Shell were dismissed and he came out of the Form-room with his comrades. Then he was startled out of his reverie by a thump on the back from Lowther, and he gave a jump.

"Lowther, you ass—"

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Lowther. "What do you mean

by going about like a bear with a sore head?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I wasn't aware that I was going about like that," he replied. "I've been thinking about the Head. I'm certain that telegram is a fake!"

Monty Lowther nodded.

"I shouldn't wonder," he assented.

"I can't help thinking that the Head's disappearance has something to do with that rotten fellow who came to see him on Monday," said Tom Merry abruptly.

"Quite possible. But—"

"Of course, it seems a pretty wild theory to imagine that the Head has

got somebody there to do it. That's why the telegram came on Tuesday, after they had made sure of getting Dr. Holmes into their hands."

"Phew!" said Lowther. "You work it out like Sexton Blake, Tommy!"

"Besides, if the Head went to London, how did he get there?" demanded Tom Merry. "All the people at Rylcombe and Wayland Stations know him, and they all declare that he never took a train at either of those stations."

"Yes, that right enough."

"There's no other station within miles. And why should he walk six or seven miles across country to a station where he wasn't known, instead of taking a train at Rylcombe, as usual, if he was going to London?"

"That's a poser."

"It shows that the Head never went to London at all," said Tom Merry firmly. "And my belief is that he's still quite near St. Jim's. He would have taken a train if he had been going any distance; and if he has been kidnapped, or anything of that sort, he could not be taken far without discovery. Therefore—"

"Ergo—" said Monty Lowther.

"Therefore, he's still somewhere in the neighbourhood. You remember that Gussy was kidnapped once by some rotters who wanted to make money out of his father, Lord Eastwood. Something of the sort may have happened to the Head."

Monty Lowther whistled.

"Sounds more like a newspaper report than real life," he remarked.

"But newspaper reports are reports of things that happen in real life, you ass!"

"Yes—sometimes," agreed Lowther.

"Well, that's my idea of what's happened," said Tom Merry. "Now that the telegram has been received, I expect the police will let the matter drop, or they won't take much trouble, at all events. And if the Head has been really kidnapped, then—"

"Phew!"

"Anyway, I think he ought to be looked for," said Tom Merry.

"You mean that we ought to look for him?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm game," said Monty Lowther. "It's a good way of spending a half-holiday, if you think it will do any good."

"It won't do any harm, if it doesn't do any good," said Manners; "and I can take my camera, and get a few films, so the time won't be wasted."

"Oh, blow your camera!" said Tom Merry. "Let's go and see Blake about it, and see if he's willing to join."

"Right you are."

Blake & Co. were punting a ball about in the quad while they waited for dinner. They left off as the Terrible Three came up, and they listened with great attention to what Tom Merry had to say. Blake evidently agreed with Tom Merry's

opinion, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still more emphatic.

"I am convinced that that wottah who came here on Monday has done some injuwty to the Head," he said.

"Blessed if I know why you should feel so sure about it!" said Digby.

"He is an uttah wascall! He tweated me with gwoss diswespect and called me a 'young shavah.' A fellow who would do that would do anythin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah! That man is an uttah wottah, and I feel sure that he had somethin' to do with the Head's wemarkable disappeawance. If you fellows were willin' to follow my lead—"

"Rats!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Never mind about the leadership," said Tom Merry. "Let's look for the Head and see if we can get on the track."

"Hear, hear!"

"The question is—how are we going to begin?" said Digby.

"Not much question about that, I should think," said Herries. "There's only one way to begin."

"How's that?"

"I'll fetch Towser."

"Towser!"

"Yes," said Herries, a little defiantly. "Towser. You know how jolly good Towser is at following a scent. If I can get him on the track of the Head, of course he'll hunt him down as easy as winking."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, Towser can come!" said Tom Merry.

"I stwongly object to Towsah comin'! That beastly bulldog has no wewspect whatevah for a fellow's twousahs!"

"Towser's coming!" said Herries obstinately. "If the Head's lost, Towser will nose him out in no time. We've only got to show him something that belonged to Dr. Holmes, and he'll track him down—same as a bloodhound."

"Wats!"

"Look here, you tailor's dummy—"

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Peace, my children," said Tom Merry. "We'll take Towser if Herries will keep him on a chain."

"And muzzled, deah boy."

"Rats!" said Herries.

The bell, ringing for dinner, interrupted the discussion. After dinner the chums of the School House prepared for the expedition. Herries was so bent upon giving Towser a chance that Tom Merry & Co. had not the heart to deny him, though their faith in Towser was nil.

Herries brought his favourite round from the kennels, and joined the group of juniors in front of the School House.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy ostentatiously withdrew as far from the bulldog as possible.

"Ready?" asked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Got something belonging to the Head?"

"Ahem!"

"Towser can't start without that," said Herries.

"Perhaps we had better start without Towser," said Monty Lowther.

"Oh, don't be funny, Lowther!"

"Hallo!" said Kangaroo of the Shell, coming up. "You fellows off?"

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and a smoking revolver in his hand. He passed within reaction. It was the sunburnt man again. Whom had it Herries?

been kidnapped," Tom Merry said. "Only it's still more unlikely that he would stay away and make people anxious for nothing."

"But the telegram," said Manners.

"That could have been sent by anybody, and that anybody could easily have disguised himself to resemble the Head in general appearance."

"That's rather thick, Tom."

"Well, why wasn't the telegram sent on Monday night to save Mrs. Holmes from a night's anxiety?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Because it wasn't sent by the Head," said Tom Merry firmly. "Because the Head wasn't in London at all. Somebody is keeping him away from the school, and that someone either went to London to wire in the Head's name, or

"Herries is," said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries glared at Monty Lowther. But with Towser showing a strong desire to bolt just then, his master had plenty to do to hold him in, without paying attention to the humorist of the Shell.

"We're going out, Kangaroo," said Tom Merry. "You can come along if you like. We're going to look for Dr. Holmes."

"Good! I'll come," said the Cornstalk.

"We want something belonging to the Head," said Herries. "Something for Towser to sniff—to start him on the scent."

Kangaroo grinned.

"I'll get you something," he said.

"Jolly good, if you can—something belonging to the Head, mind."

"Yes, rather! Will a hat do?"

"Yes, if you're sure it belongs to the Head."

"Hats generally do belong to the head," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Herries crossly.

Kangaroo disappeared, and returned in a few minutes with an old silk hat. The Terrible Three grinned as they looked at it. It was an old topper which the Shell fellows sometimes used in amateur theatricals, but they did not know anything about its having been once the property of Dr. Holmes. But they did not feel called upon to venture an opinion.

Herries took the hat and looked at it, and held it out to Towser.

"Now you watch him!" he said.

And they watched Towser.

CHAPTER 14.

Towser Leads the Way!

TOWSER sniffed at the silk hat, and did not seem to be particularly interested. He sat down in the quadrangle and closed his eyes.

The juniors grinned.

"Bai Jove, he's goin' to sleep!" remarked Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, do shut up!" said Herries irritably. "How the dickens is Towser to get on the scent when Gussy's jawing all the time?"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Quiet! Give Towser a chance."

They gave him a chance. Herries rammed the silk hat under his chin, and the bulldog had to open his eyes. He made a snap at the silk hat, and tore off a considerable portion of the brim with his teeth, apparently under the impression that it was something to eat.

"Does he always begin like that?" asked Kangaroo.

Herries made no reply.

The juniors waited for Towser to get to work. The bulldog appeared to be in no hurry. He rent the portion of the hat that he had torn off with his teeth, and, apparently disgusted with it as an article of diet, left it, and closed his mouth and his eyes again. Herries jerked rather savagely on the chain, and Towser reopened his eyes and rose to his feet.

"He's getting on the scent," said Herries.

"Bai Jove!"

"Do be quiet!"

"Weally, Hewwies, old man—"

"Shut up!"

Arthur Augustus breathed hard through his nose, but he obeyed.

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Herries dragged on the chain, going in the direction of the spot where the juniors had "bumped" the Head on Monday night, in mistake for Figgins. From that spot Towser was likeliest to pick up the scent, if he picked it up at all.

Towser had no choice about going—Herries dragged on the chain, and he had to go. Arrived on the spot, Herries jammed the torn hat under Towser's nose again.

Towser looked round, sniffed, and began to lope off towards the school gates.

Herries' eyes gleamed with triumph. "What do you think now?" he demanded.

"I think he's seen the gates, and wants to go for a run," Monty Lowther remarked innocently.

"Oh, rot!"

Towser was certainly going now. He dragged on his chain, and Herries had to put on speed to keep up with him. The juniors followed fast. Towser might or might not be on the track, but as they had not the faintest idea in which direction to look for the missing schoolmaster, one direction was as good as another to them.

Towser trotted out of the gateway of St. Jim's, and into the road, with the juniors close behind.

In the roadway Towser paused, as if at a loss. Herries watched him anxiously. After so good a beginning he did not want his favourite to fail.

"Go it, Towser," he said encouragingly. "Stick to it, Towser, old boy. Buck up, Towser!"

Towser started again.

He trotted down the road in the direction of Rylcombe, the juniors following. Kildare, who had been down to the village, met them in the road.

"Where are you youngsters going?" he asked.

"Looking for the Head."

"Oh!" said Kildare.

"Towser is on the track," explained Herries. "We hope to find Dr. Holmes pretty soon, if he is still in the neighbourhood, Kildare. Towser is simply marvellous at following up a scent!"

Kildare smiled, and walked on. He thought that if the finding of the Head depended upon Towser's powers in following up a scent, St. Jim's was likely to be without a headmaster for a long time.

But there was no doubt in Herries' mind. Herries' faith in the bulldog and its wonderful powers was quite touching. Indeed, Monty Lowther had declared, in one of his humorous moments, that he was quite touched by it, and that he firmly believed that Herries was "touched," too.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Herries suddenly. "Look here!"

Towser was dragging at the chain, and was plunging into the wood that ran beside the lane. His eyes were gleaming now, and he was evidently on the track of something.

"He's got a scent!" shouted Herries. "Come on!"

"What price rabbits?" murmured Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Towser dragged furiously at the chain, and plunged recklessly through the thickets. Herries dashed after him at top speed, and the juniors put on pace to keep up with him. But they soon became separated in the tangled thickets.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy kept close behind Herries for some time, and when he turned to call to the others to keep

up, he found that they had disappeared from sight.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Hallo, you fellows!"

But no voice answered him. He turned again to follow Herries, but Herries and the bulldog had both disappeared. The swell of St. Jim's was alone in the wood.

"Bai Jove, that's wotten!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

He ran on, in the hope of finding Herries again. There was a rustle in the thicket, and D'Arcy paused.

"Is that you, Hewwies?"

Crash!

An unseen figure leaped upon the swell of St. Jim's from behind, and he was hurled to the ground.

A knee was planted in the small of his back, and D'Arcy was pinned to the ground, wriggling under the heavy knee very much like a worm. His face was buried in thick grass, and he could not raise his head sufficiently to see about him.

"Got him!" said a deep voice.

"Ow!"

"Aha! Silence!"

D'Arcy shivered.

He understood.

In hunting for the kidnapers of the Head, he had himself fallen into their hands. He had no doubt upon the subject. It was only too clear.

He tried to shout for help, but his captors, as if anticipating that, pressed the back of his head, and his aristocratic features were jammed yet more tightly in the grass, choking his cry; and he gurgled instead.

"Gwoo!"

"Keep still, will you?"

Arthur Augustus felt his heart sink at the sound of the surly voice.

"Not much!" he said defiantly.

"Wefuse me at once, you howwid boundah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You will not laugh latak on, you awful scoundwel! Ow!"

The ruffian ground his knee into Arthur Augustus' back.

"Tetch me the chopper, Bill!" a gruff voice said.

"Bai Jove!"

"Not so cocky now, are yer?" went on the gruff voice. "Hurry up, Bill!"

"I wefuse—"

"Keep still, d'you 'ear?"

"You howwid wuffian!" said D'Arcy, making frantic struggles.

The fellow who was holding him down was hard put to it to keep him down. But he did hold D'Arcy, all the same, as a sturdy yell testified next moment.

"Ow! Gwoogh! Ooooh! You beasty wuffian! Take my nose out of the ground!"

"Hurry up, Bill!" roared the ruffian. "Bring that there chopper—quick!"

D'Arcy struggled madly. But it was no use; the fellow kept his head buried in the grass.

"I'll jolly well cut yer 'ead off!" he exclaimed.

"I wefuse—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave himself up for lost. In his present state of excitement the laugh sounded like one of those terrible spasms so ably portrayed by shilling shocker writers. Such words as blood-curdling and fiendish glee instantly occurred to poor D'Arcy.

"We will cure you young cubs once and for all," went on the ruffian.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus, in dire peril, as he considered himself, was determined not

(Continued on page 16.)



Let the Editor be your pal. Write to him to-day, addressing your letters :
The Editor, The GEM, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, Chums! Since the GEM started to award ripping match footballs for published jokes, the response from readers has been terrific. That lugubrious individual, the Jester, tells me that never before have so many jokes poured in from readers. He's having a very busy time sorting out the best efforts.

He informs me, however, that quite often he comes across a joke which makes him smile, only to discover that the sender has forgotten to append his name and address. Bear this in mind when you are sending in your joke. Several readers would have won a football if I had known where to send it!

In giving away footballs for jokes, I didn't overlook the fact that I have many readers of the fair sex. Hand-some fountain-pens and propelling-pencils are offered as prizes to those girl readers who can make the Jester "crack his face." Next Wednesday there is another prize selection of jokes.

In this number you will also find another great story of St. Jim's. It is called:

"ST. JIM'S MISCHIEF-MAKER No. 1!"

This is a powerful yarn of a strange mystery in which Tom Merry & Co. and others find themselves up against an unknown mischief-maker. His cunning schemes cause all sorts of trouble for the chums of St. Jim's, but they are completely baffled as to who their enemy is. Ernest Levison, the cad of the Fourth, is the junior most likely to play treacherous tricks. But he is ruled out by Tom Merry & Co., for he has had to leave the school owing to his father being ruined. Crooke and Mellish are also likely culprits, but it is proved that it cannot be them. Who is the secret schemer? You'll find the answer to this problem in next week's gripping long yarn. Don't miss it.

"SAVING LOVELL'S BACON!"

If ever there was a chap who simply asked for trouble, then his name is Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Fourth Form at Rookwood. Gated by the Head for every half-holiday, Lovell yet declares his intention of going with Jimmy Silver & Co. to play a match at

Bagshot. And such is the emphasis with which Arthur Edward makes his statement, that it is soon known all over Rookwood! A master and a perfect keep a watch on him, but does Lovell care? Not he! He's going! But is he? Not if Jimmy Silver & Co. can save their chum from a flogging or worse. You'll read with great enjoyment this latest effort of popular Owen Conquest's, which, with Monty Lowther's fun corner, completes this splendid number. I'll be "seeing" you on this page next Wednesday, chums.

ESCAPE FROM ELECTROCUTION!

Air pilots have amazing escapes at times, but few could have had such a lucky "break" as a young amateur pilot a little while ago. Mr. Avery was flying a new machine to a friend in Switzerland, and when nearing his destination, in the evening dusk, a storm burst. He decided to land, and found a suitable spot. Suddenly, as he was planing down in semi-darkness, he felt a terrific shudder in the plane followed by a splintering of wood. Flying speed was considerably checked, and only clever handling of the machine saved Mr. Avery from a nasty crash. As it was the propeller and under-carriage were damaged. But what was that compared with the young pilot's own escape—for he had struck two 70,000-volt elevated cables, and had come very near to being electrocuted! Had the cables not broken, Mr. Avery would never have flown another plane.

A CAT-ASTROPHE!

Talking about electricity, here's an astonishing story from Ontario of how the current generated by a cat's fur caused an explosion. The poor old puss had been roped in as a stray by an inspector, and his hours were numbered. He was to be "put to sleep" in the lethal chamber; but pussy must have sensed that something was going to happen to him, for he wriggled and writhed and scratched

and clawed as the inspector pushed him into the chamber.

His struggle for life was not without its reward, for the friction of its fur set up static electricity, and the gas in the chamber exploded. The inspector was knocked out by the force of the explosion, and when he came to he found that all the clothing had been burnt off him. Not only that, the lethal chamber was in ruins, and the cat had disappeared! Talk about a cat having nine lives! This one must have had more than his share.

TWENTY INCHES TALL!

"Who is the smallest man in the world?" When I received this question the other day from a reader in Newcastle, I thought that here was a problem that would stump me. But by a stroke of luck I happened to come across the very answer to his question. The world's smallest man is a dwarf living in South Africa. He is a Zulu named Sampire, and, believe it or not, he is only one foot eight inches in height. Usually, dwarfs are ungainly creatures, but Sampire is perfectly developed, and has a keener intelligence than men nearly four times his height. His growth during the last four years has been barely a quarter of an inch. Being a dwarf has its advantages. It only takes three-quarters of a yard of material to make Sampire a suit!

A MONSTER TELESCOPE!

What the naked eye can see clearly at a distance of twenty feet, the monster new telescope being built at Mount Palomar, near San Diego, will bring into view just as clearly a distance of 2,500 miles. This will give you a rough idea (J. Lewis, of Greenwich) of the power of this telescope, which will be the largest in the world. Its lens is 200 in. across, and it is 640,000 times more powerful than the human eye! It is reckoned that the moon, viewed through this telescope, will seem only twenty-five miles away from the earth.

DO YOU LIKE SCHOOL STORIES

with an equal amount of fun and thrills? Yes! Then make a special point of reading "The Greyfriars Diamond-Diggers" in this week's "Magnet." Harry Wharton & Co., the famous chums of Greyfriars, are guests of Jim Valentino, whose uncle has found a fortune in the uninhabited regions of Brazil. Following close on their trail is O Lobo, the "Wolf," who is desperately determined to capture one of Jim's guests and trade his life for the secret. Don't delay—read this grand school and adventure yarn to-day!

TAILPIECE.

Father: "Your teacher, Johnny, has written to say that he cannot teach you anything."

Johnny: "There! I always said he was no good!"

THE EDITOR.

PEN PALS COUPON

7-3-36

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

Miss Gladys Williams, 22, Bruton Street, Moss Side, Manchester; girl correspondents; age 12-13; snapshots, films, camping.

Miss H. Harris, 74, Lawrence Road, Hove, 3, Sussex; girl correspondents; age 17-25; overseas.

Douglas Haig Rynhond, 5, Plumer Road, Woodstock, Cape Town, South Africa; age 15-17; sports, snaps.

Miss Eileen Northrop, East Anglian Children's Sanatorium, Nayland, near Colchester, Essex; girl correspondents; age 14-15.

Miss Peggy Good, 84, Barclay Road, Walthamstow, London. E.17; girl correspondents; age 17-18; films, swimming. (Continued on page 22.)

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to show the white feather, though Bill might be coming with fifty choppers.

"There are othahs who will avengo my death," he said stoutly. "You are a vulgah wuffian!"

His assailant pushed his nose deep into the grass again to stop his utterances.

"You dare not use your gidly choppah!" said Arthur Augustus, when the pressure on his head was released.

"It would be murdah, you wuffian!"

"It will be!" said the ruffian sternly.

"Wats! I wefuse to believe it—"

"Bill!" shouted the fellow. "Buck up with that chopper!"

"Hallo!" came an answering cry from the woods.

"I thought he wouldn't be much longer," said the ruffian confidently.

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy began to struggle desperately again, but that knee in the small of his back was an insurmountable obstacle. He could not shift the ruffian.

"Bai Jove!"

"Say your prayers, young feller," said his captor.

"Not much!" said D'Arcy, a note of hope in his voice. "That was Tom Mewwy!"

"Bill!"

"Wats!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came answering shouts that were unquestionably the voices of the Terrible Three. "What's up? Who's that?"

"Help! Murdah, deah boys—"

"My hat!" came Tom Merry's cheerful voice. "This way! The one and only's in trouble again!"

"Buck up, Bill!" roared his assailant as D'Arcy made really fearful struggles.

"We can do the lot in while we're about it!"

"Tom Mewwy! Help! Murdah! He's goin' to use a choppah!"

"Who is?" came an answering shout as a rustling was heard among the trees and bushes. Three figures burst into the glade where D'Arcy was held a prisoner.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Making one supreme effort, Arthur Augustus managed to get out of the grasp of his adversary.

In a second he was on his feet, and turning to close with the ruffian.

"Seize him Tom Mewwy!" he shouted. "The kidnappah, deah boys! I have him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy!" expostulated D'Arcy, struggling furiously with his assailant.

"You silly ass!"

"But I've got— Bai Jove! Figgy!"

Arthur Augustus stood petrified to find that his assailant was none other than Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 15.

A Shot in the Wood!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stared blankly at Figgins.

Figgins stood with his hands in his pockets, grinning. Kerr and Wynn were with him, and they were grinning, too. Tom Merry & Co. stood round, yelling with laughter. With the exception of Herries and his famous bulldog, the whole party had gathered on the spot, attracted by the sound of the struggle.

The juniors seemed almost in

hysterics, and Arthur Augustus was scarcely able to believe his eyes.

"Figgins!" he gasped breathlessly. "You uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins of the New House nodded cheerfully.

"Yes, here I am!" he said.

"You jumped on me—"

"Yes, I believe I did."

"And you were holdin' me down, and pwetendin' to be a foahful wuffian, and callin' for a choppah, you uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! I—I—I—"

The juniors shrieked with merriment. D'Arcy was cleaning mud from his face and from his clothes. He was too busy, for the moment, even to attack Figgins, but there was a deadly gleam in his eyes.

Figgins nodded blandly to the School House juniors.

"We came out to hunt for the Head," he said. "I suppose you fellows are on the same track?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Good! You can help us, if you like," said Kerr.

"Rats! We'll let you help us, if you're good."

"I shall wefuse to take any furthah steps until I have given Figgins a feahful thwashin'," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He has thwown me into quite a fluttah, and wuined my neektie. I wegard him as an uttah beast!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy brushed down his clothes very deliberately. There was a determined expression upon his aristocratic features, which meant mischief.

Jack Blake slapped him on the back.

"It's all right, Gussy! We've saved your life, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Besides, I don't believe Figgy would have cut your head off really. Would you, Figgy?"

"Couldn't," said Figgins blandly. "I haven't a chopper with me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to listen to these wibald and diswespectful remarks. In the circus, I considah it impewative to give Figgins a feahful thwashin'."

"Order!"

"I wefuse to ordah—I mean—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs.

"Will you kindly put up your hands, Figgins?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell or St. Jim's advanced wrathfully upon Figgins. The long-limbed hero of the New House backed away behind Tom Merry, grinning.

D'Arcy followed him round, and Figgins dodged behind Blake, and then behind Lowther.

"You uttah wottah!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I insist upon your stoppin' immediately so that I can thwash you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are afwaid, Figgins—"

"Of course I'm afraid," said Figgins.

"Can't you see me tremblin'? Can't you hear my voice is sh-shakin'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are wottin', you wottah— Ow!"

Arthur Augustus fell over a foot—he did not see whose foot. He sat in the grass and groped for his eyeglass.

"Bai Jove! Ow!"

"Pax," said Tom Merry. "Make it pax, Gussy old man. I vote that we

join forces to look for the Head, instead of havin' House rows now."

"Agreed," said Figgins. "We came out to look for him, but we haven't had much luck so far."

"Better have some sandwiches before we go on," Fatty Wynn remarked.

"Fortunately, I thought of bringin' some with me."

Arthur Augustus scrambled up.

"In the circus, Figgy, I will not thwash you till aftah we have found the Head—"

"For this relief many thanks!" sighed Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But immediately the Head is found I shall give you a feahful thwashin'."

Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass and jammed it into his eye. "Now I am weady to lead you."

"Go hon!"

"Where's Herries, I wonder?" said Blake. "We're all here now, excepting Herries. I wonder where that blessed bulldog has led him to?"

"A long way away, I twust," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a sniff. "We shall get on bettah without Towsah. Pway do not call Hewwies."

"Hark!" shouted Tom Merry.

He held up his hand.

Crack!

Clearly and sharply through the silence of the wood came that sharp sound.

It was the report of a revolver.

The sound passed and the echoes died away among the trees. The juniors stood petrified gazing at one another in blank alarm.

"Good heavens!" muttered Kerr.

"It was a revolver," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You remember that man who came to St. Jim's had a revolver on him?"

"Can Herries have—?" Tom Merry paused; he dared not frame the terrible thought in words. Was it possible that Herries had met a foe and that—

What did that sudden ring of a revolver shot in the lonely wood mean?

Suddenly there came the sound of a heavy body plunging through the thickets.

"Look out!" muttered Figgins.

A man came dashing through the wood at top speed. He did not see the juniors. He was tearing through the wood in the direction of the moor, his face pale and set, and there was a smoking revolver in his hand.

He dashed past within sight of the group of horrified juniors, but without casting a glance in their direction. It was evident that he did not see them. He had disappeared in a few seconds, but those seconds were enough for Tom Merry & Co. to recognise him.

It was the sunburnt man—the tramp who had accosted D'Arcy on the previous Monday at the gates of St. Jim's, and who had insisted upon seeing the Head.

Why was he running? What had he done?

There was one terrible thought in the minds of all the juniors. Blake made a movement to follow the man, but Tom Merry stopped him.

"Herries!" he whispered. "Let's look for Herries."

Blake nodded without a word. The juniors plunged through the wood in the direction the sunburnt man had come from, peering in the bushes, listening with straining ears and beating hearts, in terror every instant of coming upon a still, inert form in the thickets, of seeing a pale, upturned face—a face they knew.

CHAPTER 16.

Right on the Track!

GR-R-R-R!

It was a low, deep growl. Tom Merry held up his hand. "Towser!" he muttered.

The juniors trotted on more quickly. Tom Merry caught sight of a St. Jim's cap through the thickets and ran forward. It was Herries. He turned his head.

He was kneeling on the grass, a handkerchief in his hand, and a stain of blood was on the handkerchief.

"Herries!"
"Hallo!"
"Hurt?"
"No."
"Thank goodness!"

The juniors came up, panting, their hearts thumping wildly with relief. Herries was unhurt. The blood on the handkerchief was Towser's blood. The juniors of St. Jim's understood now. Herries and Towser had come upon the sunburnt man in the wood, and the man had fired at the bulldog.

"That's a relief, deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy. "We—we feashed—"

"I'm all right," said Herries, with a grunt. "We came on the villain— Have you seen him?"

"Yes; he passed us."

"It was the same chap who was at St. Jim's the other day," said Herries. "We came on him suddenly; he had snared a rabbit, and Towser went for him. It wasn't for the rabbit. Towser wouldn't think of going for a rabbit when he was out on an important scent."

"H'm!"

"You can say 'H'm' as much as you like, but I know Towser!" said Herries crossly. "Towser knows his bisney. He went for the man, and I called on him to give in, and the howling rotter jerked out his rotten gun and shot at Towser. He might have killed him."

"Is Towser hurt much?"

"No; only a scratch along the ribs," said Herries. "Just a bit of skin shot off. But the villain might have killed him—he meant to."

"Bai Jove, I'm not surprised, if Towser was goin' for him!" said D'Arcy.

Herries snorted.

"I'm jolly well going to settle with him for it as soon as Towser's all right," he said, dabbing at the bulldog with the handkerchief. "Towser's not much hurt, and he'll be able to pick up the scent again. I'm going to track that villain down. If the Head has been kidnapped, I'm convinced that that man had a hand in it."

"Why?" asked Kerr.

"Well, because he fired at Towser, for one thing," said Herries. "Besides,

what is he doing in the neighbourhood? Snaring rabbits, too."

"We'll follow on his track, anyway," said Tom Merry. "It's odd his being still in the neighbourhood. Unless he's up to some mischief. And if there's anything in our theory, he must have had a hand in the Head's disappearance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better wait for Towser," said Herries.

Tom Merry smiled.

"You can follow with Towser," he said. "The man was making direct for the moor, and he was crashing through the thickets as fast as he could. He must have thought that Towser was still after him."

Herries chuckled.

"Yes; he was scared out of his wits," he said. "Towser did go after him a bit till I stopped him to see how much he was hurt. You'd better wait for Towser—he'll follow the trail like a bloodhound if you give him a chance."

"Well, if he does, you can catch us up," said Kangaroo.

"Oh, just as you like!" growled Herries. "You'll make a muck of it without Towser, that's all."

And Herries went on attending to his damaged favourite.

Tom Merry & Co. turned in the direction taken by the fugitive, and tramped quickly through the wood. They were keen to get on the track of the sunburnt man again.

Upon that man all Tom Merry's suspicions centred, and the discovery that he was still in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's confirmed his theory that the ruffian had had a hand in the Head's disappearance.

The hurried flight of the ruffian had left plain enough traces in the wood. The soft soil retained traces of heavy footfalls, and the tall thickets showed where the ruffian had crashed through.

Tom Merry & Co. had had a good deal of training as Boy Scouts, and they could pick up a trail that was not very difficult.

The trail in the present case was easy, and they followed it with scarcely a halt to the edge of the wood, where, standing among the thinning trees, they saw the great expanse of Wayland Moor stretching before their gaze.

There the trail was lost. An expert tracker, no doubt, could have followed it farther, but it was lost to the eyes of the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Well, it's certain that he came as far as this," said Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry scanned the moor with his eyes. There was a single column of smoke rising in the distance from a lonely cottage, but no other habitation was in sight. There was a thoughtful frown upon the Shell captain's brow.

"Well?" said Monty Lowther.

"The chap is here somewhere," said Tom Merry. "He came this way to get on the moor—and that looks as if he's digging here."

"That's so!"

"That cottage is the only place in sight," said Tom Merry.

"But—"

"You know that cottage," said Tom Merry. "We've often passed it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There was nobody in the place the last time we came by it—it had been unoccupied for a long time," said Tom Merry. "You can see that there's somebody there now. There's smoke coming from the chimney."

"Bai Jove!"

"The cottage has been taken during the past week, then," said Tom Merry. "And that ruffian, whose name we don't know, has disappeared here. It looks to me as if he's the chap who's taken the cottage. It fits in very well."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What do you chaps think?"

"I think it's very likely," said Kerr. "One thing's certain—and that is that if he isn't in the cottage we've lost him for good, as he's not in sight; so we shall have to investigate at the cottage, or chuck the whole bisney, as far as that fellow's concerned."

Tom Merry nodded.

"We'll investigate at the cottage," he said.

"Come on, then, deah boys."

Tom Merry restrained the eager swell of St. Jim's.

"Hold on, Gussy. If that fellow's in the cottage he's watching from the window to see whether he's being followed. It would be a mug's game to follow him there in the daylight, especially as it gets dark early. It will be dark in an hour."

"Good," said Figgins. "We'll wait for dark, and then creep up to the cottage."

"I'm going to see this thing through," said Tom Merry determinedly. "But there's one thing for you fellows to think of—that man's got a revolver, and doesn't seem to mind if he uses it. There's danger."

"Wats!"

"Yes, rats!" said Figgins. "If the Head's there, we're going to have him out, and the shooter's no more dangerous to us than to you, for that matter."

"Yaas, wathah! And it would be quite impos for a D'Arcy to wetweat and leave anothah chap to face the dangah—quite impos!"

"Then we stick it together?" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

(Continued on the next page.)

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Fatty Wynn was the only one who did not speak. He seemed to be deeply buried in serious reflection. Figgins clapped him on the shoulder, and the fat Fourth Former came out of his reverie with a start.

"Not afraid, Fatty?" Figgins asked.

"Eh? Afraid of what?" asked Fatty absently.

"The revolver."

"Oh, blow the revolver!" said Fatty peevishly. "I was thinking. Tom Merry suggests waiting here till after dark."

"Yes. Isn't it a good idea?"

"It seems impossible to me," said Fatty Wynn.

"Why impossible?" demanded Tom Merry, in surprise. "It seems to me easy enough."

"Because I've only got three sandwiches left. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm jolly hungry now, and I've only got three sandwiches left. I shall have to share out—fair play's a jewel! But how far will three sandwiches go among eleven chaps?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"You shall have them all, Fatty," he said. "I never feel quite safe with you when you're hungry. Bolt the lot, and give us a rest!"

"Oh, really—"

But Fatty Wynn's objections were very faint and half-hearted. The three sandwiches disappeared in record time, and then Fatty Wynn waited contentedly for dark with the rest.

CHAPTER 17.

Tracked Down!

THE dusk was already creeping over the dim, leafless woods. It deepened and darkened, and the wild wastes of the moor were lost in shadows.

From the lonely cottage by the stream a light gleamed out into the dusk, twinkling like a star from afar.

Tom Merry & Co tramped about to keep themselves warm. But they were patient. It was almost dark when Herries came up with Towser. Herries was looking very cross.

"Blessed if I could find you!" he exclaimed.

Monty Lowther chuckled softly.

"Why didn't you make Towser follow our track?" he inquired.

Herries did not appear to hear the question.

"What are you waiting here for?" he asked.

Tom Merry explained. Herries nodded approval.

"Jolly good idea!" he said. "I know perfectly well that that rotter has had something to do with the Head's disappearance. A man who would shoot at a dog would do anything."

"Yaas, watah! And he called me a 'young shaver'!"

"I wonder if there are any more of them there, though?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "There might be a gang of them."

"Well, there are a gang of us," grinned Figgins.

"One of them has a revolver—"

"He wouldn't dare to use it, excepting on Towser. But it would be a jolly good idea to cut ourselves cudgels," said Blake. "They may be useful, and it will fill in the time."

"Good egg!"

It was certainly a good idea. Each of the juniors cut a stout cudgel in the wood, and, thus armed, they felt more

prepared to face the unknown dangers of the lonely cottage.

Tom Merry pointed with his stick towards the lonely little building. It was swallowed up in the gloom now, but two lights gleamed from it, from the upper and the lower rooms.

"More than one man there," he remarked. "The same man wouldn't have lights going in two rooms of the house at once."

"Quite wight, deah boy."

"Dark enough to get on now, I think," said Kerr.

"All serene!"

The juniors, eager to come to close quarters, quitted the wood and stole across the moor towards the lonely cottage.

They knew the ground thoroughly well; many a time in their training as Boy Scouts they had camped and trailed on Wayland Moor.

"Keep that dog quiet, Herries!" muttered Tom Merry, as Towser growled.

Herries sniffed.

"You can trust Towser."

"But he'll give the alarm."

"No, he won't."

"Do keep him quiet, there's a good chap."

"And keep his beastly jaws farthah away from my trowsahs, Hewwies, you ass!" came in muffled tones from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Suppose Herries stays behind with Towser," said Kangaroo in bland tones. "What I'm afraid of is that the rotters may shoot Towser. They wouldn't dare to fire on us, but they would shoot Towser as soon as look at him."

Herries pulled his bulldog to a halt.

"I'll keep Towser here," he said. "If there's a fight, we come on."

"Right you are!" said Tom Merry, grinning in the darkness.

And, thus relieved of the assistance of Towser, the St. Jim's juniors crept on closer to the old cottage.

They reached the fence that surrounded the ragged, unkempt garden, and there Tom Merry called a halt.

"Hold on, you chaps!" he whispered.

"Yaas. What is it, deah boy?"

"We'd better do some scouting before going on. One of us can look round, and—"

"Vewy good. I shall be quite willin'—"

"Ahem! I'm going."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Perhaps I'd better go," murmured Blake.

"Rot!" whispered Figgins. "It would be better to have a New House chap on the job—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn.

"What's the matter, Wynn?"

"Look!"

Fatty Wynn pointed excitedly towards the window of the lower room in the cottage. The glass was uncurtained, and the juniors could see into the room. A form passed the window at intervals as a man moved about.

"What did you see—the Head?" said Manners excitedly.

"The Head—no."

"What, then?"

"That chap's cooking sausages," said Fatty Wynn excitedly. "I can smell them from here. I suppose there's no reason why we shouldn't have those sausages if we raid the place?"

"You—you—you—"

"You fat bouncer!"

"Shut up!"

"Well, you see, I'm frightfully hungry, and—"

"Dry up!" growled Figgins, in disgust.

"Yes; for goodness' sake, get your eyes off the sosses!" grunted Digby.

"Cheese it, you asses!" murmured Tom Merry. "Wait here while I go scouting. Figgie can come with me; you other chaps stay here."

And Tom Merry glided away without stopping for argument.

Figgins followed him into the garden, and the other fellows, growling a little, remained where they were.

Tom Merry and Figgins looked in at the lower window as they drew closer to it. There was but one man in the lower room of the cottage—a man they had never seen before. It was the long-limbed ruffian whom his comrades called the Beetle.

The sunburnt man was not to be seen. Doubtless he was in the upper room.

"Two of them, at least," murmured Figgins.

"Yes. Let's take a look round the back."

"Right-ho!"

They crept round the cottage. Here the garden was longer, stretching down to the reedy bank of the stream. The lower room extended over the whole ground floor of the cottage, but there were two rooms on the second story. The back room was quite dark.

Tom Merry and Figgins peered up at the window, and Figgins caught his companion's arm excitedly.

"Do you see that?" he muttered.

"What is it?"

"There's wire netting nailed over the outside of the window."

"And there are bars across the window, too," murmured Tom Merry.

"By Jove! That shows—"

"There's somebody shut up in that room."

The juniors were greatly excited now. The window was shaded from distant view by a tree, but they stood just below, and it was not too dark for them to see that the window was secured against ingress or egress. There could be but one object in thus securing the window—there was somebody confined in the room a prisoner.

"The Head," muttered Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

"Hush! Look!"

A light glimmered in the window.

The two juniors drew back at once into the cover of the tree, peering out from behind the trunk at the window where the light glimmered. The cottage was so small that the second story window was not eight feet from the ground, and they could almost see into it. All the upper part of the room was visible to them, as the window was unblinded.

A young man came into view—they could see his head and shoulders and the candle he carried. He was a stranger to the juniors, but in his handsome, reckless face they thought they saw something familiar—a likeness to the younger brother of the Head, whom they had seen long ago at St. Jim's.

The sound of a voice came from the upper room, but the juniors could not distinguish the words. The young man was speaking.

A voice answered, in deep and indignant tones, which came audibly from the window, shut as it was, to the juniors outside.

"You may save your breath, you rascal! I will never consent."

Tom Merry jumped.

"Dr. Holmes!" he muttered.

Figgins squeezed his arm excitedly.

"Yes, rather! The Head—we've found him!"

The voices went on, and the juniors caught a word here and there. Then there was silence and the light disappeared.

"Let's get back to the others," muttered Tom Merry.
 And they crept back to where the juniors were waiting impatiently outside the fence.

CHAPTER 18.

The Fight in the Cottage!

"W EALLY, Tom Mowwy—"
 "Hush!"
 "You have kept us waitin' a fearful long time."
 "We've found him!"
 "Whom?" whispered Blake excitedly.
 "Not the Head?"
 "Yes."

"We're going to rescue the Head."
 "Oh, of course! But does he know—"
 Tom Merry chuckled.
 "Know? If we called up to the window, he'd tell us to go and fetch the police, or something like that. And they'd very likely take the alarm and shift him off somewhere else. We're going to carry this thing through ourselves."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "There are three of the rotters whom we've seen; I don't suppose there are any more. There are ten of us, without Towser. We ought to be able to handle them."
 "What-ho!"

behind them, with their cudgels ready in their hands. Kerr had thoughtfully taken a length of whipcord from his pocket, and made a loop in it. Herries had rejoined his comrades, with his hand on Towser's collar. Towser was likely to lend good aid when it came to a fight, and it did not matter if he gave the alarm now.
 Together Tom Merry and Figgins raised the heavy stone in their hands and poised it over their heads. Then they heaved it with all their strength at the door.
 Crash!
 The door shivered and splintered under the impact and flew open. The stone rolled in, and after it polted the



With the other juniors, cudgels in their hands, waiting to charge, Tom Merry and Figgins raised the heavy stone and poised it over their heads. Then they heaved it with all their strength at the door. Crash! It shivered and splintered under the impact and flew open.

"My hat!"
 "Bai Jove!"
 "He's shut up in the back room on the second story," said Tom Merry. "We've heard his voice; he's there right enough. There's a third chap in the gang—a young man, so we have three of them to tackle, at least."
 "What about getting in at the window?"
 "Can't be did," said Figgins. "It's barred, and there's a wire netting over the outside. They've got the Head right enough."
 "The wascals!"
 "What's the programme, then?" asked Kerr.

"I suppose all you fellows are game?"
 "Yes, rather!"
 "Then come on," said Tom Merry. "I don't know whether the front door is locked, but in any case we can bump it open with one of these big stones. Then we'll make a rush. We'll have that long-legged chap a prisoner before the others can get downstairs, for a start. Then it will be a fight."
 "Good!"
 Tom Merry and Figgins selected a large, heavy stone, of which there were numbers scattered on the moor, and stole silently towards the door of the cottage. The rest of the juniors were

juniors in a sudden rush, shouting excitedly.
 The Beetle was engaged in the very prosaic occupation of turning fried sausages out of a frying-pan into a dish. He dropped the dish with a crash in surprise, and the sausages were scattered in the grate. Before he could do anything else, he was collared by half a dozen pairs of hands, and whirled over on the floor of the cottage.
 "Look after him!" murmured Tom Merry, and he dashed for the stairs.
 Kerr was kneeling on the Beetle, and Fatty Wynn and Blake were holding him. In a twinkling Kerr had the whip-

cord noose over the man's wrists and drawn tight and knotted. The Beetle was out of the fight before it started. Tom Merry was up the stairs in a twinkling, Figgins behind him, and then Lowther and Manners.

In the upper room the Kid and Peto Carson had been playing poker. At the crash below they had leaped up in amazement.

Then Tom Merry came dashing into the room.

The sunburnt man gave a yell of rage. "Thunder! What the—"

He dragged a gun out of his hip-pocket. Whether, in his rage and fear, he would have used the revolver cannot be said. He was given no chance.

Tom Merry's cudgel was lifted as he ran forward, and it descended with a terrific crash upon Carson's right arm as he tried to level the weapon.

Carson uttered a shriek of agony, and staggered back against the wall, the gun dropping to the ground. His right arm hung useless at his side, and his face was deathly white with pain.

The Kid cast a wild glance round, and caught up a heavy stool. That his scheme was finished—that his plan for extorting money from Dr. Holmes had come to nothing now—he knew. He was thinking only of saving his liberty. He made a feint of rushing forward, and then dashed at the window. The heavy stool crashed down, breaking through glass and sash, and the Kid flung himself bodily through the opening.

The juniors heard him fall heavily into the garden below.

For a moment they stood open-mouthed in amazement. Then Tom Merry shouted:

"After him!"

There was a savage growl below, and a yell of terror from the Kid.

"Towser!" yelled Figgins.

The juniors crowded to the window, excepting Figgins and Lowther, who were holding the disabled Carson, and scorching him for weapons. In the dim garden a man was rolling over and over, with a dog gripping him. The Kid and Towser were engaged in desperate combat.

"He'll be killed!" gasped Tom Merry. "Herries, call off Towser!"

"Towser! Towser!"

Tom Merry leaped from the window. Herries ran out of the cottage. Between them they dragged Towser off the gasping, exhausted Kid. Three or four more of the juniors piled upon the kidnapper, and he was soon secured. In three or four places his clothing was torn, and stains of deep red upon it showed that Towser's teeth had gone deeper.

There was a sound of knocking above. Tom Merry hurried upstairs again. The Head of St. Jim's was knocking at the inner side of the door.

"All right, sir!" called out Tom Merry.

"Is that you, Merry?"

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry unlocked the door; the key was in the lock. He threw it open, and the Head came out into the room—Dr. Holmes, pale, fatigued, almost emaciated, but Dr. Holmes, the man they had searched for and found!

The Head gazed at the juniors and the signs of conflict in amazement. He seemed to be unable to credit his eyes.

"My dear boys," he exclaimed, "I heard your voices! I could not believe it was real. How did you come here?"

"We—we guessed something had happened, sir, and that the telegram from London was a fake, sir," said Tom Merry. "We—we took the liberty of looking for you, sir, and here we are."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I shall not forget this, my boys,"

said the Head, in a voice tense with emotion. "I shall not forget what I owe you. I was kidnapped on Monday night by these villains, and they demanded five hundred pounds as the price of my freedom. What has become of them?"

"They're prisoners, sir—all three."
"Bless my soul! I hope and trust that none of you are hurt, my dear boys."

"Not at all, sir," said Figgins cheerily.

"Thank Heaven for that! You have run terrible risks," said the Head softly. "I thank you from my heart for your gallant conduct!"

A voice came up the stairs—the voice of Patty Wynn.

"I say, you chaps, you'd better come and try some of these sausages. They're prime!"

The juniors laughed, and Dr. Holmes' face broke into a smile.

The juniors remained on guard over the prisoners at the cottage, while Figgins sprinted to Rylcombe Village to warn the police.

Inspector Skeat had the kidnappers in charge in less than an hour, and then the juniors returned to St. Jim's, triumphant.

Dr. Holmes had already returned there, and the school had heard with amazement of his strange adventure. All St. Jim's knew of the rescue by the time Tom Merry & Co. arrived, and all the school turned out to meet them.

The Sixth and the Fifth joined with the juniors in doing honour to the rescuers of the captive schoolmaster.

Tom Merry & Co. were marched across the quadrangle in the midst of a cheering crowd, and Mr. Railton greeted them very warmly as they came into the School House.

(Continued on page 28.)

PEN PALS.

(Continued from page 17.)

Jimmy Thomas, Church Farm, Pinner, Middlesex; age 10-13; riding, sports, engineering; England and overseas.

Jack Manning, 103, Elm Park Road, Reading, Berks; age 13-15; stamps, sports, films; Africa, Malta, U.S.A.

Jack M. Marks, 6, Methley Drive, Chapeltown, Leeds, 7; age 15-16; swimming, rugby; France, Belgium, America.

Duncan Dakers, 14, York Place, Dunedin, C.2, New Zealand; age 13-15; amateur theatricals, films.

Miss Ethel Stephens, 16, Dunblane Street, Roslyn, Dunedin, N.W.1, Otago, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 15-17.

H. J. Davys, Kirkwood Street, Cambridge, Waikato, New Zealand; stamps, sports.

Miss Vera Forster, 15, Lingfield Gardens, Lower Edmonton, London, N.9; girl correspondents; age 14-17; art and cycling.

Donald A. Burbidge, 97, Milton Road, Hanwell, Middlesex, W.7; age 15-16; swimming, cycling, photography.

Eric Harris, 40, Wentworth Gardens, Palmers Green, London, N.13; geology, mining, camping.

W. M. Creighton, Invergie, Mons Avenue, Newlands, Cape Town, South Africa; films, football, wild birds.

Rupert Dixon, 4, Norfolk Road, Observatory, Cape Town, South Africa; age 14-16; stamps, sports.

Miss Hazel West, Balcarras, Main Road, Muizenberg, Cape Town, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 17-19; sports, films.

Miss Beryl D. West, Balcarras, Main Road, Muizenberg, Cape Town, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 17-19.

H. T. Wyldbore, 125, New England, Peterborough, Northants; Belgium; Charleroi pen pal if possible.

Eric V. Williams, Bronllyn, Caradog Road, Aberystwith, Wales; stamps; overseas.

Edgar H. Porrin, 217, Eastern Avenue, Ilford, Essex; age 16 up; Isthmian League football.

G. B. J. Bridge, 107, Elm Avenue, Ruimsip, Middlesex; age 15-16; Germany, France; seamanship, model railways.

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A. S. Russell, 41, Jellicoe Avenue, Belfast, Ireland; age 18-22; stamps, painting; overseas.

Bob Wales, 652, Beresford Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; British Empire; Pacific Islands; age 11-13.

Victor Haynes, 270, Holloway Road, London, N.7; age 17-18; stamps, views.

Eustace Netscher, 2, Convent Road, Bangalore, South India; age 15-16; England, U.S.

Edwin Tribble, 18, Spurstowe Terrace, Dalston Lane, London, E.8; age 18-30.

Miss Barbara Ives, 1, Shaakys, King Street, Combemartin, North Devon; girl correspondents.

Leslie Morrish, 46, Talbot Road, Dagenham, Essex; age 11-13; overseas; stamps, cigarette cards.

Bob Reindorf, Palm House, 32, Commercial Road, Winneba, Gold Coast, West Africa.

Miss Jean Harris, 9, The Meadow, Highland Road, Amersham, Bucks; girl correspondents; at home and overseas; age 14-17.

W. J. Prentice, 38, Elgin Street, Hawthorn, Melbourne, E.2, Australia; match brands.

Miss Margaret Pateman, 11, Kendale Road, Hitchin, Herts; girl correspondents; age 14-15.

Douglas Griffin, 40, Otley Drive, Ilford, Essex; age 11-12; Kenya; cigarette cards.

Edward Tranter wants to hear from correspondents who wrote to him; addresses lost; c/o Rector, St. Mary's School, Nesbit Road, Bombay, 10, India.

Miss Pamela Hitchonough, Talbot House, Parkgate, Wirral, Cheshire; girl correspondents; London; sports, films, pets.

S. C. Brimfield, Grove Estate, Glenorchy, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia; age 16-19.

George W. Burdett, 45, Beatrice Road, Newfoundpool, Lelcester; age 15-20.

Miss Marion Buntin, 27, De Waal Street, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa; girl correspondents; age 15-20; stamps.

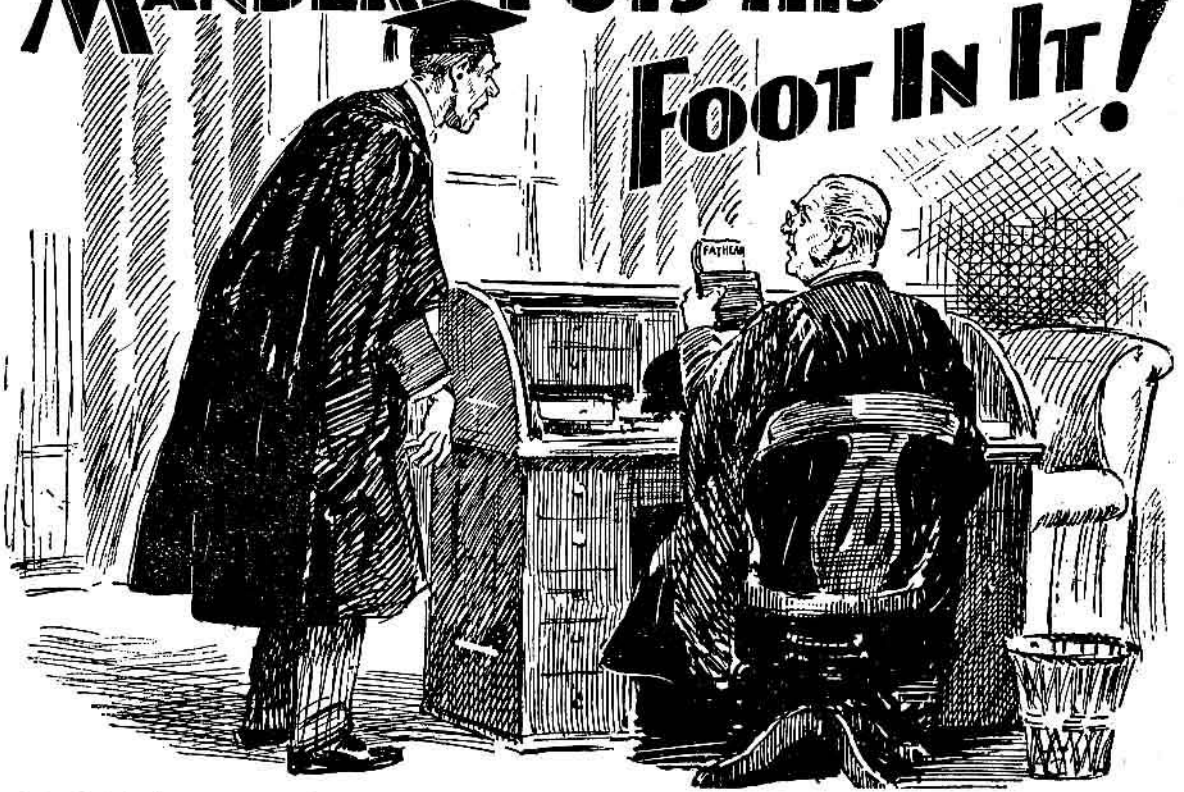
Owen Williams, 64, Bedford Road, Bootle, Liverpool; 20; age 14-16; lawn tennis, stamps, autographs, photos, drawing.

Wesley W. Taber, 12, Lee Park, Blakheath, London, S.E.13; age 12-15; wireless, stamps, model planes; overseas.

Miss Joan Foreman, 75, Huddersfield Road, Moltham, near Huddersfield, Yorks; girl correspondents; age 18-21; dancing, tennis, music, films.

THE MASTER WHO MADE HIMSELF THE LAUGHING-STOCK OF ROOKWOOD!

MANDERS PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT!



Instead of banknotes the Head pulled out from the notecase a wad of slips cut from impot paper. His eyes fixed on the top slip, on which was written in capital letters the word: "FATHEAD!" "Mr. Manders," said Dr. Chisholm, "have you taken leave of your senses?"

By OWEN CONQUEST.

A Modern Jape!

"WHAT'S the joke?" Tommy Dodd, standing at the window of his study in Manders' House at Rookwood, chuckled.

His chums, Cook and Doyle, were sitting at the study table, writing lines. Mr. Manders, their Housemaster, had handed out impots that day—as he too frequently did.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, therefore, were in no chuckling mood. They were looking grim and glum. They glanced up as Tommy Dodd exploded into merriment. Something he could see in the quadrangle, apparently, amused Tommy Dodd. So they asked him what was the joke.

"Lovell," answered Tommy Dodd. "Come and look."

"Blow Lovell!" granted Cook. "We've got to get these rotten lines done for Manders—blow him, too!"

"I'm getting fed-up with Manders," growled Doyle. "His temper's getting worse and worse. Ever since that tramp pitched into him—"

"Never mind Manders!" interrupted Tommy Dodd. "Come and look at that Classical ass. He's at it again."

Leaving their lines, Cook and Doyle joined the captain of the Modern Fourth at the window.

It was a bright spring afternoon, and plenty of fellows were to be seen in the quad. Among them, Arthur Edward Lovell, of the Classical Fourth, was quite near Manders' House.

With a set and serious expression on

his face, Arthur Edward was rooting through a shrubbery beside the House, evidently in search of something.

Cook and Doyle, much as they were worried by lines and Manders, grinned. It was the umpteenth time they had seen Arthur Edward Lovell rooting in the vicinity of Manders' House. They knew what he was after.

"He's a stickler, isn't he?" said Tommy Dodd. "It's weeks since Dr. Chisholm's wallet was lost, but Lovell

Mr. Manders was never one for minding his own business. But never has the Modern master's inquisitiveness placed him in such an unhappy position as when he interfered in a jape intended for another!

is still after it. I've seen him at it twenty times at least."

"Silly ass!" said Cook. "It will never be found now."

"That," said Tommy Dodd, "is where you are mistaken. Lovell's going to find a wallet this afternoon."

"Eh! How?"

"I'm going to help him," explained Tommy Dodd.

Cook and Doyle stared at their leader. "You?" said Tommy Cook. "What

good will that do him? The wallet can't be found. That pickpocket, Poggers, who pinched it from the Head, chucked it away somewhere before he was nabbed. Goodness knows where it went. I believe every inch of Rookwood has been searched for it. Might have chucked it over the wall into the road. It can't be found."

"Look here."

Tommy Dodd slipped his hand into his pocket. He drew it forth with an article in it that made his chums jump as they saw it.

That article was a small wallet, which looked—at the first glance—as if it were made of Russia leather. At the second glance, it could be seen to be made of imitation leather.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Cook. "You've found it?"

"The Head's notecase!" exclaimed Doyle.

"Not exactly," said Tommy Dodd, grinning. "I found it—in a shop at Latham. I gave two bob for it. I thought a jape on that Classical ass was worth two bob." He chuckled.

"You see, we've all had a description of that jolly old wallet, so I was able to pick out one exactly like it to look at. The Head's notecase was full of banknotes—and this is going to be full of impot paper—can't afford banknotes."

"Oh!" ejaculated Cook and Doyle together.

"Any fellow seeing this wallet lying around would jump to it that it was the Head's," explained Tommy Dodd.

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"Even a bright fellow would—and is Lovell bright?"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" grinned Cook.

"That's how I'm going to help him. If I drop this wallet fairly under his nose, even Lovell will spot it. Fancy his joy when he picks it up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Tommies of Manders' House chuckled in chorus.

Nobody at Rookwood expected the headmaster's lost wallet ever to turn up again, excepting, perhaps, Lovell of the Fourth. Dr. Chisholm had given up hope of ever seeing that wallet and the forty-five pounds ten shillings it contained. If it was still within the walls of Rookwood School, it was hidden so deep that no eye was likely to fall on it.

But Lovell frequently put in an hour or so of his leisure time in rooting after it. He had a special reason. Being "gated" for all half-holidays that term, Arthur Edward hoped to placate his headmaster by performing such a signal service as finding the lost wallet.

Turning from the window, Tommy Dodd picked up sheets of impot paper from the table, and a pair of scissors, and cut slips to the size of currency notes. These he packed carefully inside the two-shilling wallet. When it was shut and fastened, it had all the appearance of being stuffed with notes, as the Head's wallet was well known to have been.

"Natural as life, what?" grinned Tommy. "Lovell will jump for joy. And his face will be worth watching when he looks inside. By gum, I'll put a message for him inside."

Opening the notecase again, Tommy Dodd spread out the wad of "notes," and on the top one wrote, in large capital letters:

"FATHEAD!"

Cook and Doyle yelled. Obviously such a jape on a Classical man was well worth two shillings of anybody's money.

They looked out at Lovell again. He was stirring among the shrubbery, in earnest search for what it was pretty certain was not there.

Suddenly he gave a bound. His voice, raised in surprise and anguish, floated to the ears of the three Tommies.

"Yarooooh!"

"What the dickens——" ejaculated Tommy Dodd.

Lovell straightened up, and pressed his hand to his neck, as if he had felt a sting there. He stared up at the windows of Manders' House, and seemed puzzled.

The three Tommies watched him in surprise. What was the matter with Lovell, they could not guess. He acted like a fellow who had been stung by a wasp. But there were certainly no wasps about so early in the year.

However, he stooped again, and resumed rooting.

A few moments later there was another wild yell, and Lovell fairly bounded.

"Whoop!" came his wild howl. He pressed a hand to his leg, and glared round him in amazement and rage.

Then the three Tommies spotted the face of Leggett, of the Modern Fourth, at another study window. There was a catapult in Leggett's hand. Evidently Albert Leggett was giving himself a little entertainment by catapulting Lovell, who was within easy range.

As Lovell glared, another pellet landed on his chin, and he roared.

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Then, shaking his fist at Manders' House, the Classical junior stalked away towards his own side of the quadrangle.

"That tick Leggett!" grunted Tommy Cook. "He ought to be scragged for catapulting a fellow!"

"He's going to be!" said Tommy Dodd.

Leaving his chums at work on their lines for Manders, Tommy Dodd left the study and went along to Leggett's.

He kicked the door open, and Leggett spun round from the window, and stared at him.

Tommy held out his hand.

"Catapult, please," he said tersely.

"I've got no catapult!" growled Leggett. Albert was not a truthful youth. It was strictly against the rules of Rookwood for any fellow to possess such a dangerous implement.

"Isn't there one in this study?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"No."

"I wonder if you could find one if I banged your head till you did?"

"Look here——" began Leggett.

He backed round the study table as Tommy Dodd came at him, then he made a rush for the door, but Tommy's grasp was on him before he could reach it.

"Leggo!" roared Leggett. "I've not got a—— Whooooooop!"

Bang!

Leggett's head smote the wall; he wriggled and roared.

"Have another?" asked Tommy Dodd affably.

"I tell you I've not—— Yooooop!"

Bang!

"Oh, you rotter, here it is!" gasped Leggett, and he jerked the catapult from under his jacket and handed it over.

"I thought you'd be able to find one if you tried," grinned Tommy Dodd. He put his foot on the implement and broke it into pieces. "Now I'm going to shove these bits down your back."

Leggett wriggled and howled as the fragments of the catapult were stuffed down inside his collar. Leaving him wriggling and howling, Tommy Dodd walked out—and, with the imitation leather wallet in his pocket, went to look for Arthur Edward Lovell.

Found!

"HE, he, he!"

Tubby Muffin chuckled. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome grinned; so did other fellows.

Arthur Edward Lovell at the moment was rather calculated to provoke hilarity in the observer.

Coming away from the Modern side, Arthur Edward approached the Head's House with one hand pressed to his neck and the other to his leg.

He seemed to have a pain in either spot, and those two pains seemed to fill his thoughts, and it did not seem to occur to him that a fellow looked a little unusual walking along with one hand to his neck and the other to his leg.

"What's that game, Lovell?" called out Mornington. "New sort of physical jerks?"

"Think it's funny?" grunted Lovell, glaring at the smiling juniors.

"Well, a little," admitted Jimmy Silver. "What are you doing it for?"

"I've been catapulted!" hooted Lovell. "A tick in Manders' House got me with a catapult from a window! And if a fellow had friends who could do anything but grin like a lot of potty hyenas they'd back him up in getting hold of that Modern cad and giving him jip!"

"Who was it?" asked Raby, as Lovell stood rubbing the injured places.

"I don't know; but I saw Dodd, Cook, and Doyle at their study window grinning like monkeys."

"It wouldn't be them," said Newcome. "Catapulting's a rather dirty trick; they wouldn't do it."

"Perhaps you think I fancied it!" hooted Lovell. "I'm jolly well going to bash Tommy Dodd, and chance it!"

"What's the good of bashing him if he didn't do it?" inquired Jimmy Silver mildly.

"Well, he's a Modern tick, anyhow!"

"What about tea, old chap?" asked Jimmy Silver soothingly. "We've been waiting for you——"

"Blow tea!" growled Lovell. "I'm going to bash Tommy Dodd before tea. You fellows can come with me if you like."

"I think I'd rather have tea," grinned Raby.

"Have tea, then—and be blowed to you!" snapped Lovell. Evidently those stings from the catapult had ruffled Arthur Edward's temper considerably.

He rubbed his neck and he rubbed his leg, and his eyes glamed in the direction of Manders' House. He wanted to punch a catapulter's head, but any Modern head would have served his turn in his present irate mood.

So it was with considerable satisfaction that he spotted Tommy Dodd strolling along from Manders' House, with his hands in his pockets, and a cheery smile on his face.

Lovell cut across to intercept the Modern junior. He was not in the least aware that that was exactly what Tommy Dodd would have asked him to do. Arthur Edward, quite unconsciously, was playing into the hands of the japer.

Tommy, to his surprise, showed signs of alarm at his advance. Nobody had ever suspected Tommy of funk before. He stared at Lovell, stopped, turned, and ran.

"Here, hold on!" roared Lovell, charging after him.

Tommy scudded on. He did not head for Manders' House, which would have been a safe refuge; he cut away by a path under the beeches.

"Funk!" roared Lovell.

He raced in pursuit. Evidently—to Lovell's mind—Tommy had been the catapulter.

But, as a matter of fact, Tommy was looking for a likely spot to drop the spoof notecase. Dropping it in the middle of the quad would not have served his turn; it would have been rather too palpable. It had to be somewhere more or less out of sight if Lovell's leg was to be pulled according to plan. Under one of the old benches by the beech-trees seemed to Tommy a good spot.

On one of those benches sat Tubby Muffin. Tubby had sat down there to dispose of the contents of a packet of toffee.

Busy with the toffee, Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin did not heed the Modern junior as he came scudding by, with Lovell racing behind.

But he had to heed them when Tommy Dodd, coming to a breathless halt, dodged round the long bench and playfully tipped off Muffin's cap as he did so.

"Oh!" ejaculated Tubby.

Lovell came panting up.

"Now, you Modern rotter!" he gasped.

Tommy Dodd, behind the bench, grinned at him breathlessly. Lovell charged round the bench, Tommy

Dodd retreated round it, and they changed places.

"You rotten Modern funk, I'm going to lick you!" hooted Lovell.

"You couldn't lick a postage stamp!" answered Tommy.

That was enough for Lovell. He charged round the bench again.

This time Tommy did not dodge.

Suddenly catching Tubby Muffin by the collar, he jerked him off his seat, and with a swing of his arm sat him down just in front of the charging Lovell.

"Whooop!" roared Muffin.

He had reason to roar. Lovell, unable to stop in time, stumbled over him and sprawled. Muffin, flattened out, roared and howled and squealed; Lovell, breathless from the shock, sprawled on him and gasped, while Tommy Dodd, grinning, cut off at top speed and vanished. Unseen by either Muffin or Lovell, he had now parted with the two-shilling notecase stuffed with slips of

Then both of them dived at it and clutched.

Thud!

Two heads came together with a terrific concussion.

Rival Claimants!

OH!" roared Lovell.
"Ow!" squealed Tubby Muffin.

Lovell staggered, nearly falling. Tubby Muffin staggered, and sat down on the notecase.

"You clumsy ass!" gasped Lovell, rubbing his head. "You silly chump! You—you—Get up! Get out of the way! Do you hear?"

Tubby Muffin, also rubbing his head, sat tight. He was sitting on the lost wallet—now found—and he continued to sit on it. Lovell might fancy that he had found that wallet, if he liked. Tubby's idea was that he had found it.

Lovell glared down at him.

"Keep him off!" yelled Muffin. "I say, Jimmy, I found it!"

"I found the Head's wallet!" bawled Lovell.

"Wha-at?"

"It was stuck in this gravel, and got turned up here—that fat idiot's sitting on it."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I found it!" yelled Tubby indignantly. "I say, Jimmy, that man Poggors must have shoved it out of sight under the gravel—it turned up when that fathead Lovell sprawled over. I saw it, and I've got it."

With the three juniors holding Lovell back, Tubby shifted his position, grabbed hold of the notecase, and rose to his feet.

The chums of the Fourth stared at it. "My hat! It's found, then!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

"Yes, and I jolly well found it!" Lovell wrenched himself loose, and



For an instant Lovell and Tubby Muffin gazed at the notecase lying in the gravel. Then both of them dived at it and clutched. Thud! Two heads came together with terrific concussion. "Oh!" roared Lovell. "Ow!" squealed Tubby.

impot paper; it was left for Lovell to find on the gravel path under the beeches.

"Ow! Gerroff!" squealed Muffin. "Ow! You're squish-squish-squashing me! Will you—Ooogh! Gerroff!"

"You fat ass!" panted Lovell.

He wriggled off Muffin and staggered to his feet; he stood gasping for breath as Tubby scrambled up, also gasping.

"You silly fathead!" gasped Tubby.

"You fat blitherer!" panted Lovell.

Both of them broke off suddenly.

In the gravel of the path, considerably kicked up at that spot, lay a small object on which their eyes fell at the same moment.

It was a notecase.

It was—or looked—an expensive notecase of Russia leather, exactly like the Head's lost wallet.

It looked as if it might have been buried in the gravel and kicked up by the scramble that had taken place.

They gazed at it—for an instant.

"Will you shift, you fat idiot?" he roared.

"Ow! No; I won't!" gasped Muffin.

"That's the Head's notecase, you fat chump! You're sitting on it!" howled Lovell.

"I know that. I've found it!"

"I've found it!" roared Lovell.

"You haven't—I have!"

"Why, you silly, cheeky, blithering podgy, piffing fat rabbit—"

"You can call a fellow names," gasped Muffin, "but you jolly well ain't bagging that notecase! I've found it! I'm going to take it to the Head."

"You're not!" shrieked Lovell. "Get up, or I'll kick you!"

"Hold on, Lovell!" Jimmy Silver, Baby, and Newcome came running up and grasped Lovell.

Instead of going in to tea, they had watched Arthur Edward's wild and whirling proceedings, and now it seemed to them time to weigh in.

made a jump at the fat Classical. Tubby Muffin promptly shoved the notecase into his pocket.

"Hand it over, you fat snail!" roared Lovell.

"Shan't!" retorted Muffin.

"I tell you I found it—"

"And I tell you I jolly well did!"

Arthur Edward Lovell breathed wrath.

How many hours of his leisure he had spent hunting for that lost wallet he could hardly have counted.

Now it was found—and there was a rival claimant.

A crowd of fellows began to collect on the spot, to see what was up. There was a buzz of excitement at the news that the Head's notecase was found.

"Look here, Muffin," said Jimmy Silver. "You seem both to have spotted it—but it's no use to you. Lovell may get off his gating if he hands it over to Dr. Chisholm. So hand it out."

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"Blow Lovell!" retorted Tubby Muffin. "There's over forty pounds in this notecase, and—"

"There'll be less by the time the Head gets it if it stays in your hands!" chuckled Mornington.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Muffin indignantly. "Think I'm going to pinch the Head's currency notes? He's bound to hand out a reward to the finder."

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

"He can't do less," argued Muffin. "According to the description, there's forty-five pounds ten shillings in this wallet. Well, if the Head gets that back, a fiver wouldn't hurt him."

"You fat boulder!"

"Look here, Muffin, you slug—"

"You can jaw!" said Muffin disdainfully. "I fancy you'd be after a reward fast enough if you'd found it. You jolly well keep off, Lovell. I found this wallet, and I'm keeping it till the Head goes to his study after tea, and then I'm going to take it to him."

Arthur Edward Lovell clenched his hands. He was strongly tempted to grasp Cecil Reginald Muffin and take the wallet away by main force.

But, angry and disappointed as he was, Arthur Edward had a sense of justice. Muffin's claim was at least as good as his.

Both of them had seen the wallet at the same moment, and it was Muffin who had got hold of it. Muffin's claim was, if anything, a little better than Lovell's.

Lovell stood uncertain, and Tubby Muffin, with a wary eye on him, backed away, the wallet safe in his pocket.

"Look here—" began Lovell.

"Nothing doing," grinned Leggett. "You're done, Lovell. You won't be able to stick the beak for a reward."

Lovell gave the oad of Manders' House a glare.

"Do you think I'd do it?" he roared.

"Do you think I'd take anything for finding it—except getting off a gating?"

"Well, that's a reward, isn't it?" grinned Leggett.

Lovell did not answer that question in words. He grabbed Albert Leggett by the collar and banged his head on a beam.

The malicious grin departed from Leggett's face at once. He wriggled and roared. Lovell was about to deliver another bang, apparently finding solace in the process, when Jimmy Silver dragged him away from the Modern junior.

"Chuck it, Lovell—"

Lovell snorted.

"I'm jolly well going to have that wallet!" he snapped, and he started at a run for the House, the direction in which Tubby Muffin had retreated with his prize.

Muffin looked back over a fat shoulder. One glimpse of Lovell was enough. He dashed into the House and scudded up the stairs. Lovell, in hot pursuit, had a glimpse of a fat figure vanishing into Study No. 2 in the Classical Fourth passage. The key turned in the lock as Lovell reached the door.

He banged on the door.

"Muffin, you fat scoundrel!" he roared.

"Yah!"

"I'll spifficate you—"

"Yah!"

"I'll kick you all over Rookwood—"

"Yah!"

Arthur Edward Lovell gave it up.

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Muffin the Magnanimous!

JIMMY SILVER & CO. sat down to tea in the end study in a rather less cheery atmosphere than was customary in that celebrated apartment.

Lovell's face was gloomy and glum. It was all through Lovell's fatheaded intervention that the pickpocket, Poggers, had escaped after being caught; hence the 'gating' that had been awarded Lovell by his incensed headmaster. Matters would, no doubt, have been set right had Lovell found the wallet and restored it to its owner. And, against all probability, he had found it at last—only to see it found and snaffed by another fellow at the same moment!

It was enough to make a fellow glum. "I'll smash him!" said Lovell, for the tenth or eleventh time.

"Well, after all, he found it, as much as you did," remarked Raby. "You really can't bag it off him, old chap."

"I know that. But I'm going to smash him!"

The door of the end study opened.

A fat face looked in.

The Fistical Four stared at Cecil Reginald Muffin in surprise. Arthur Edward Lovell rose to his feet, with quite a deadly look on his face.

"I—I say, I—I've come to tell you you can have it, Lovell," said Tubby Muffin just in time.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"You—you see," gabbled Tubby, "I—I've been thinking it over. I—I don't want a reward from the Head. On the whole, don't you fellows think it would be rather mean to stick the Head for a reward?"

"Rotten!" said Jimmy.

"Well, there's nothing mean about me, I hope," said Tubby.

"What a hopeful chap," remarked Newcome.

"Well, I mean it. I'm not going to take it to the Head. Why shouldn't Lovell, if he wants to?" said Tubby.

They gazed at him.

Had they been aware of the true contents of that wallet, they might have guessed that Tubby Muffin had looked into it while he had it safe in his study, and discovered that a reward was likely to receive for taking it to the Head.

"If Lovell can get off his gating, let him," said Tubby. "But, look here! One good turn deserves another. I haven't had my tea."

"Oh!"

Tubby blinked at the table in the end study. The Fistical Four had nearly finished tea, and there was little remaining in the way of provender.

"I found that wallet," said Muffin. "I'm going to let Lovell have it if he likes. I say, Mrs. Kettle has got some new cakes in. I think a fellow might stand a fellow a tea, if a fellow lets a fellow—"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"Right as rain!" he said. "Let's go and see Mrs. Kettle's new cakes."

"Where's the wallet?" asked Lovell.

"In my pocket," answered Tubby.

"I—I'll let you have it after—after tea."

"Oh, all right!"

Tubby Muffin's fat face, which had been rather overcast, brightened as he rolled away with Jimmy Silver & Co. He, like Lovell, had been disappointed, though in a different way. There was not going to be any reward from the Head. But a spread in the tuckshop was grateful and comforting.

Lovell's face was brighter, too, as he walked into the school shop with his friends. All was serene now. He had found that wallet, just as much as Muffin had—and he could truly state to the Head that he had found it. Dr. Chisholm could not do less than let him off the gating in consequence. Prospects were good.

Tubby Muffin beamed as he sat down to cake in the tuckshop.

He liked cake, and even Tubby Muffin was satisfied, or almost satisfied, with a five-shilling plum cake all to himself!

He gloated over it, and he gobbled! Jimmy Silver & Co. had a doughnut each, to wind up their tea. The cake was wholly left to Tubby.

Having finished their doughnuts, and settled Mrs. Kettle's bill, Jimmy Silver & Co. saw no reason for delaying till Tubby had finished.

"Trot it out, Muffin," said Uncle James.

"I said after tea," objected Muffin. "I haven't finished yet." Possibly Tubby dreaded that, when the wallet was handed over, a discovery would follow that might interrupt the cake on its downward path. Obviously, in the peculiar circumstances, it was prudent to finish the cake before handing over the wallet.

But Lovell was impatient.

"Look here! The Head's in his study by this time!" he exclaimed. "Chuck that wallet over, fathead, and let a fellow out."

Tubby gobbled.

"Look here, you fat ass!" exclaimed Lovell warmly.

Gobble, gobble!

"Do you want us to stand here watching you parking cake?" demanded Lovell, exasperated. "Why can't you hand it over now, you silly ass?"

Gobble, gobble!

"Well, Muffin said after tea," said Jimmy Silver. "Hang on, old chap—it won't take him long at the rate he's going. Muffin can't be expected to leave off eating, even for a second, so long as there's anything left."

It was quite a large cake. Muffin finished it to the last crumb and the last plum. But he was finished at last. He sat looking very shiny, and breathing rather hard.

"Now!" snorted Lovell.

Tubby Muffin slipped a fat paw into his pocket. He was not feeling wholly easy in his mind as he drew out the notecase. He wondered how Lovell was going to take it when he found what was in it. Anyhow, he had had the cake.

"I—I say, I—I haven't opened it, you know," murmured Tubby, as he produced the wallet. "I—I don't know what's inside."

"We all know what's inside—we've had that from the Head," answered Lovell. "I never supposed you'd opened it, you young ass!"

Tubby stared at him.

"Aren't—aren't you going to open it?" he asked.

"Of course not!" snapped Lovell. "Think I'm going to pry into the Head's notecase? What do you mean?"

"Oh!" gasped Tubby. "You're—you're going to—to take that notecase to the Head without opening it?"

"Of course I am, fathead!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Tubby. "I—I'd have let you have it sooner if you'd told me that. I—I mean—"

"What the dickens do you mean?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Oh, nothing!" said Tubby.

Lovell walked across to the door. Ho

was anxious to get it safely handed over to the Head. Tubby blinked after him, with an expression on his fat face that caused Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome to stare at him dubiously and suspiciously. It was clear to them that something was amiss, though they could not guess what.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Tubby. "I—I say, is—is— Lovell really going to take that to the Head—without looking into it?"

"Why shouldn't he?" asked Jimmy. "Oh scissors!" mumbled Tubby.

It had never occurred to Tubby's fat mind that Lovell would hand over the wallet to the Head without looking inside—any more than it had occurred to Tommy Dodd when he planned that remarkable jape.

Remembering what the wallet contained, and what was written on the top slip of paper, Tubby fairly gasped at the idea of its being handed to the stern and severe headmaster of Rookwood.

"I—I say! Call him back!" he stuttered.

"He's gone now," said Newcome.

"But why—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Look here, Muffin—"

"Oh crumbs! He'll get into a row!" gasped Muffin. "I—I don't know who fixed it up, unless it was that Modern fathead, Tommy Dodd. I can't make it out. But—but—but—I mean, I don't know what's in that notecase. I don't know anything about it. But—but, I say, Lovell will get into a fearful row if he lands it on the Head. The Beak will think he did it on purpose."

"That he did what?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Tubby. "I—I never knew it was spoof, of course, when I offered to let Lovell have it. Nothing of the kind, you know. I—I really thought it was the Head's notecase all the time."

Jimmy Silver jumped.

"Isn't it?" he gasped.

"Oh, yes—no! I—I mean—I—I think, if I were you, I—I'd call Lovell back," stammered Tubby. "I—I— Oh lor!"

Jimmy Silver ran to the door of the tuckshop to call Lovell back. It was very right and proper, of course, on Arthur Edward's part to hand over the wallet without having opened it. But, after Tubby's extraordinary gabblings and stammerings, Jimmy considered it only judicious to make sure what that wallet really contained before passing it on to the Head.

But he was too late. That wallet was no longer in Lovell's hands.

Mr. Manders Asks For It!

MR. MANDERS barked: "Lovell! Stop!"

Lovell stopped unwillingly.

He was half-way to the House when the Modern master barked at him. Mr. Manders was coming away from the Head's House, and he met Arthur Edward face to face, and his sharp, glinting eyes fastened at once on the notecase in Arthur Edward's hand.

"Yes, sir," grunted Lovell. "I'm in rather a hurry, sir."

"I have told you to stop!" snapped Mr. Manders acidly. "Answer me, Lovell! I have heard talk among the juniors that the headmaster's wallet, lost several weeks ago, has been found. Is that the case?"

"Yes," grunted Lovell.

"When was it found?" snapped Mr. Manders.

"About an hour ago."

"Then it should have been handed over at once," said the Modern master. "I have just inquired of Mr. Dalton, and he has told me that he has heard nothing of it. Is that in your hand?"

"Yes," muttered Lovell.

"Give it to me," said Mr. Manders.

Lovell's fingers closed more tightly on the well-stuffed wallet. It had to go to the Head; but Lovell was the man to take it to him. Lovell had good reasons for wishing to be the man to deliver the goods.

"Do you hear me?" rapped Mr. Manders. "The wallet should have been given up at once. I will take it to Dr. Chisholm."

"I'm taking it to him now, sir." Mr. Manders' narrow eyes gleamed. He was never patient of contradiction, and he was an interfering gentleman. Moreover, a wallet containing money certainly should have been handed over to the owner immediately.

"Why did you not take it at once, Lovell?" he rapped.

"Another fellow found it at the same time, and we had rather an argument about it," explained Lovell. "But I'm going now."

Mr. Manders held out a thin, claw-like hand.

"Nonsense!" he snapped. "I shall certainly not allow an article of such value to remain in the hands of a careless, thoughtless boy for one moment longer. I command you to hand it to me!"

Lovell looked at him. Manders, as a Modern master, had no right to give

orders to Classical fellows. Still, he was a Housemaster, and it was difficult to refuse obedience.

Arthur Edward hesitated a moment or two, and then, with feelings that could not have been expressed in words, handed the notecase to Mr. Manders.

Mr. Manders whisked back into the House with it.

He hurried to Dr. Chisholm's study.

Mr. Manders was very pleased to be the man to restore the long-lost wallet to its owner. Dr. Chisholm, it was certain, would be extremely gratified by the recovery of a considerable sum of money which he had given up as hopelessly lost. Manders, it was true, could not claim to be the finder; but he had, at least, taken the wallet from the careless hands of a thoughtless boy, who had delayed to hand it over, and might have lost it again. It was a chance for Manders to ingratiate himself with his chief; and Manders never lost such a chance.

He tapped at the Head's door and entered.

Dr. Chisholm, busy with papers at his desk, glanced up as the Modern master stepped in.

"Mr. Manders—" He did not seem pleased by the interruption.

The Modern master hastened to explain.

"I am glad, sir, to be able to tell you that your lost wallet has been recovered."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Head, with very lively signs of interest. "I had quite given up expecting—"

"Here it is, sir."

Mr. Manders laid the wallet on the Head's writing-table.

Dr. Chisholm's face, generally rather

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expressionless, expressed animated satisfaction as he picked it up. Forty-five pounds ten shillings was not a small sum. Undoubtedly, the headmaster of Rookwood was extremely gratified—for the moment!

His first glance at the leather wallet expressed sheer satisfaction—his second doubt—his third perplexity.

"That, sir, is your wallet," said Mr. Manders. And he waited for thanks.

He waited in vain.

"That, sir," said the headmaster, with a return of his habitual cold and formal manner, "is not my wallet. It resembles it very closely, in superficial appearance, but it certainly is not the wallet I lost. However—"

He opened the wallet.

His puzzled expression gave place to the grimest of looks as he hooked out, not a wad of banknotes and currency notes, but a wad of slips cut from impot-paper.

His eyes fixed on the top slip. There he read a word, written in capital letters, that made him doubt the evidence of his eyes:

"FATHEAD!"

Dr. Chisholm gazed.

Mr. Manders gazed.

There was an awful silence in the Head's study. It lasted only a moment—but it was a long moment. The Head broke it:

"Mr. Manders, may I ask whether you have taken leave of your senses?"

"Sir!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"I repeat, sir, have you taken leave of your senses? Such a trick—such an absurd trick as this—"

"Tut-tut-trick, sir!" gasped Mr. Manders.

"Such a foolish, insensate practical joke as this—unworthy of a thoughtless boy in the Second Form, and perpetrated by a Housemaster—"

"Dr. Chisholm!"

"I am amazed, sir!" Dr. Chisholm rose to his feet. "Amazed—astounded—outraged—dumbfounded! If you are in your senses—"

"I—I—I—What—I—I—I—I never—I was not—I—I—I—" Mr. Manders babbled helplessly.

"If you are in your senses, sir," exclaimed the Head, "this is an insult! An insult, sir! You may regard it as a practical joke. You may regard a headmaster, sir, as a proper subject for practical jokes. I am bound to say that I do not agree with you!"

"I—I—I—"

"Take this absurd rubbish away!"

Needless to say, I shall expect your resignation!"

"Sir, I—I—I—"

"You need say no more, sir! I shall be obliged if you will leave my study!"

"I—I—I never—"

"There, sir, is the door!"

"Allow—allow me to explain—"

"I will allow you to leave my study, sir," said Dr. Chisholm, pointing to the door. "Kindly go!"

"But I—I—I—"

"Will you go, sir?"

Mr. Manders went.

He went in quite a dizzy state. He almost tottered as he went. Mr. Manders had a perfect genius for interfering in matters that did not concern him, and it had often led to trouble. But never had he put his foot in it to this extent. Never had Mr. Manders so deeply and sincerely repented that he had not minded his own business!

Rookwood roared over it.

Of course, the facts came out. First of all, Jimmy Silver & Co. shook them out of Tubby Muffin.

Muffin knew what was in that wallet; that was why he had so generously let Lovell have it. That was why he had been so dismayed at the idea of Arthur Edward taking it to the Head unopened.

What would have happened had Arthur Edward done so hardly bore thinking of. Luckily, Manders had saved him by his genius for interfering.

Manders, of course, did not send in his resignation; he sent a note to the Head, instead, explaining the matter. Manders explained that he had not perpetrated that absurd practical joke, but had been the victim of it. He demanded an inquiry.

Which, of course, apprised the whole school of what had happened, and caused Rookwood to roar.

Lovell was called on the carpet; but he had innumerable witnesses to prove that he really had picked up that spoof notecase under the beeches; it was clear that Lovell was not the japer.

Who was?

The Head never knew, and Mr. Manders never knew. And it was extremely lucky for Tommy Dodd that Manders never knew. Had he known, Tommy's life would hardly have been worth living in Manders' House afterwards!

(Next week: "SAVING LOVELL'S BACON!" Look out for this humorous yarn of the chums of Rookwood, starring Arthur Edward Lovell.)

THE KIDNAPPED HEADMASTER!

(Continued from page 22.)

Clifton Dane, Reilly, and Lumley-Lumley, and Glyn, and some more of the fellows had prepared a feast of honour in Tom Merry's study, ready for the return of the rescuers. And, needless to say, the heroes of the hour were fully prepared to do it justice.

School House and New House juniors sat down to tea in a crowded study on the best of terms, very well pleased with themselves, and one another.

Herries looked the most cheerful of all. He regarded the rescue of Dr. Holmes as a tribute to the wonderful powers of Towser, and he was not slow in saying so.

"I suppose you'll all admit that Towser can follow a scent now," he remarked, with a glance of challenge round the table.

"Yes; anything from a red herring to a rabbit," said Blake.

"He found the Head—"

"Didn't he follow the track right to the wood, and put us upon the track of that rotter who shot at him?" demanded Herries excitedly. "If Kangaroo hadn't shown Towser that old hat belonging to the Head, and put him on the trail, then Dr. Holmes wouldn't have been found yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kangaroo.

Herries stared at him.

"What are you cackling at?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha! That old tile didn't belong to Dr. Holmes."

"What!"

"You said I was to get something belonging to the head," said Kangaroo blandly, "so I got a hat. A hat belongs to the head."

"You—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

Tom Merry held up his hand.

"Gentlemen, order! Towser is a wonderful dog. Fill up your glasses to Towser."

"Hear, hear!"

And Towser's health was drunk in ginger-beer, and Herries was satisfied.

And no one ever shook Herries' firm conviction that to Towser, and Towser alone, was due the rescue of their respected headmaster when he was kidnapped.

(Next Wednesday: "ST. JIM'S MISCHIEF-MAKER No. 11" Who is the mystery man of St. Jim's whose cunning scheming makes trouble among the juniors? Don't miss this great yarn—order your GEM early.)



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