

"THE TOFF AT THE CROSS-ROADS!" "BUNTER THE ATHLETE!"
AND
STAR STORIES OF ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS INSIDE.

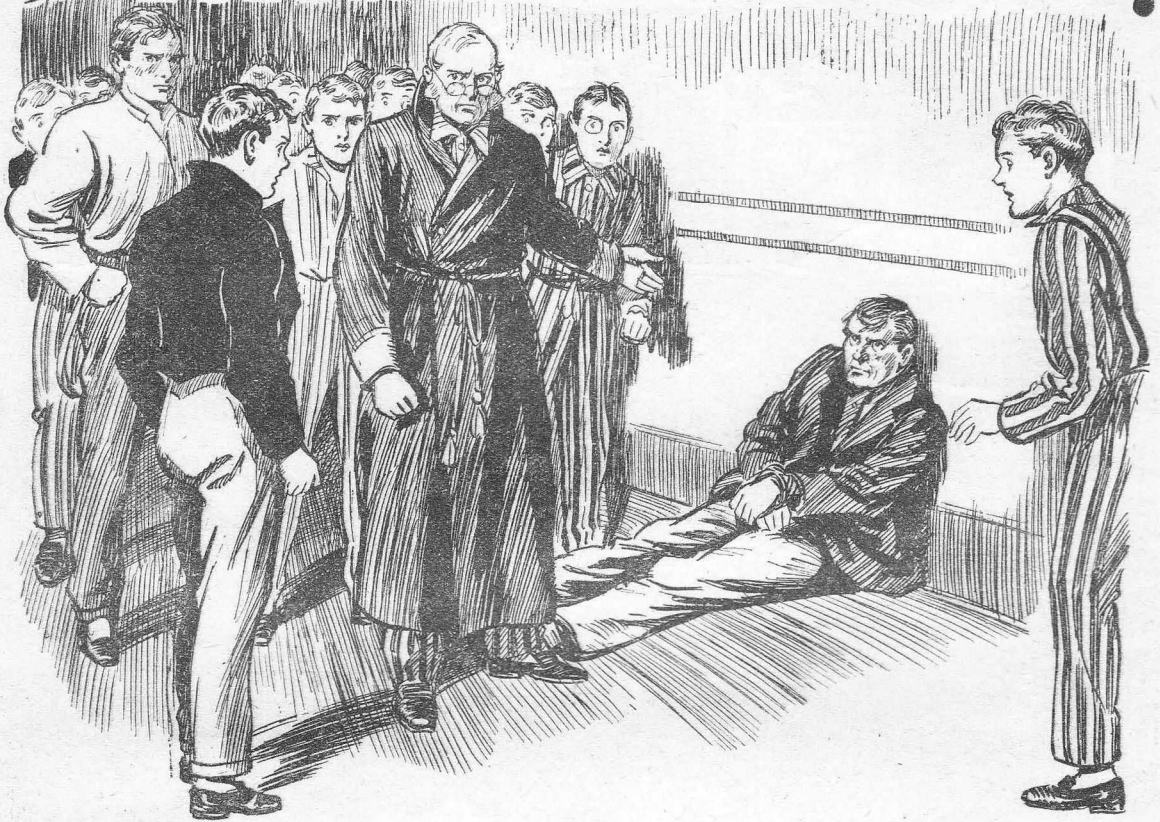
The GEM 2d



A SHOCK
for the
SCHOOLBOY CRACKSMAN!

THE CRACKSMAN WHO PREVENTED ST. JIM'S FROM BEING BURGLED!

The Toff at the Cross-Roads!



"Send for the perlice!" sneered Hookey Walker. "And the Toff can go along with me. We'll be company for one another, Toff!" "What does this man mean?" asked Dr. Holmes in surprise. "Do you know him, Talbot?" "Yes, sir," said Talbot quietly.

CHAPTER 1.

Taken to Tea!

"WHAT'S the mattah with old Talbot?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's propounded that question suddenly in Study No. 6.

There were six other fellows in the study, and they were discussing tea and the start of football activities at the same time. But Arthur Augustus was not joining in the chat. There was a thoughtful expression upon his noble countenance.

The fellows in the study were Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth, who shared that famous apartment with D'Arcy; and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, who had come to tea.

"What's the matter with Talbot?" Tom Merry repeated.

"Nothing that I know of," answered Herries.

"I'm sure there's somethin' the mattah with old Talbot," said Arthur Augustus. "You fellows don't notice things. I suppose it is only natuwal for you youngstahs to be wathah thoughtless."

The youngsters glared at Arthur Augustus. As he was almost the youngest person in the study, it was ather cool; but Arthur Augustus had

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always a fatherly manner when he was serious and in great earnest.

"Ass!" said Blake.

"Fathead!" said Herries.

"Chump!" remarked Digby.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther did not express their opinion, being guests in the study. But they nodded assent to the remarks of the Fourth Formers.

But Arthur Augustus went on. He had been thinking it out, and he was determined to communicate the result of his cogitations.

"I'm wathah a keen chap," he said. "I notice things. Talbot has been in a state of w'etched low spiwits for days. He hardly speaks a word. Somethin' is wowwyin' him. As he is a pal of ours, I think we ought to see about it. He's only a new fellow, I know, but you chaps all know he's the wight sort."

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, what's the matter with him?" yawned Blake. "Perhaps Linton's been down on him, or Levison may have been chipping him again. Pass the jam!"

"I have asked him to come to tea—"

"Well, isn't he coming?"

"He declined the invitation with thanks. He said he wasn't feelin' cheerfule enough for comin' to tea. The chap is wowwied about somethin', and is suffewin' f'rom depression of spiwits. I weally think it is up to his fwiends to look aftah him a bit, in the circs."

"Go and talk to him like a Dutch uncle, Gussy," suggested Digby. "Sit beside him, and take his hand in yours, and smooth his gentle brow with a gentle hand—"

"And then bring him to tea," said Blake. "Tell him we've got ham, and poached eggs, and sardines, and two kinds of jam."

"I have told him."

"And won't he come?"

"No. He is alone in his study, and lookin' as if he had all the twoubles of the world on his shouldahs."

"Blessed if I understand it!" said Tom Merry. "Now you speak of it, I've noticed that old Talbot has been a bit off colour the last few days. It's since Levison started that yarn about his being sech going into the Blackbird Inn at Wayland. I don't see why that should worry him, though. He explained about it, and he knows we believe him. And we all know that Levison is a cad and an Ananias."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, it isn't good for a fellow to be moping in his study," said Blake, rising to his feet. "It's bad, in fact. Talbot's a good sort, and he's not going to miss a good feed. Let's go and fetch him."

"But he w'efuses to come, deah boy."

"He can't refuse the lot of us," grinned Blake. "If two of us take his head, and two his feet, and the rest lend a hand he can't refuse to come."

YOU CANNOT FAIL TO BE ENTHRALLED BY THIS GRIPPING YARN OF THE SCHOOLBOY WHO HAD TO CHOOSE BETWEEN HONESTY AND CRIME!

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD**

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good ideah!" said Arthur Augustus heartily. "Follow me, deah boys!"

And the tea-party quitted Study No. 6.

They made their way to Talbot's study in the Shell passage. In spite of Arthur Augustus' concern, they did not believe there was anything seriously the matter with Talbot of the Shell. Talbot was a new fellow, but he had jumped into popularity at once in the School House at St. Jim's.

He was a good cricketer, and had helped Tom Merry's team to win some hard matches. He was well up in his class, and his Form-master looked on him with a kindly eye. He was in the good graces of the Head, and he had made a host of friends in both Houses during his few weeks at the school.

So far as Tom Merry & Co. could see, he oughtn't to have a trouble in the world.

The juniors arrived at Talbot's study, and Herries kicked the door open with a heavy boot.

Talbot was there. He was alone in the study, Gore and Skimpole being out just then. The handsome, athletic-looking fellow was standing by the table, with a letter in his hand. He thrust the letter into his pocket as the juniors crowded in. There was a cloud upon the handsome, clear-cut face, a troubled look in the clear dark eyes.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Same to you, and many of 'em!" said Blake affably. "Had your tea?"

"No, not yet."

"Good! We've got a feed going in Study No. 6, and we specially commissioned our tame lunatic, Gussy, to fetch you—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gussy came back without you, so we've all come," said Blake. "This way to the feed! March!"

Talbot smiled faintly.

"You're awfully good," he said, "but—I'm feeling a bit rotten just now, and, if you'll excuse me, I won't come to tea."

"That's just it. We won't excuse you," said Blake cheerfully. "You've got to come."

"I—I'd really rather not come," said Talbot. "To tell you the truth, I'm not feeling up to any kind of company just now. I'd really rather be alone a bit, if you don't mind."

"You'd rather be alone?" said Blake thoughtfully.

"Well, yes. Excuse me, you know!"

"And you're going to mope here on your own?"

"Well, I—"

"And you won't come?"

"Thanks, no."

"That's all right!" said Blake.

"Collar him!"

"Here, hold on! Don't play the giddy goat! Let go—"

"March him along!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Manners had seized Talbot by the shoulders, and Blake and Herries grasped his legs, and he was swung off his feet. He struggled a little in the grasp of the juniors, but they did not heed him. He was rushed out of the study into the passage.

"Let me go, you fellows!" gasped Talbot. "I tell you—"

"That's all right! You're not going to mope! We'll cure you. We've got a ripping tea."

And the laughing juniors rushed Talbot along the passage and into Study No. 6, and plumped him down on the study carpet. Talbot jumped up rather breathlessly.

"Really, you chaps—"

"Sit down!" said Blake, pushing him into a chair. "That's right. Pour out Talbot's tea, Dig. Pass the ham, Herries. How many lumps, Talbot?"

Talbot laughed; he could not help it.

"That's better," said Tom Merry approvingly. "You see, when you get the blues, you have to drive 'em out—no good giving way to them and moping. Now talk!"

"Yaas, wathah—talk away, deah boy."

It was impossible to avoid catching the infection of good spirits in Study No. 6. Talbot laughed again, and his clouded brow cleared, and he was soon chatting away as cheerily as anyone over the hospitable board. Tea in Study No. 6 was a merry meal that afternoon, and Talbot seemed the merriest of the crowd of juniors there.

And when tea was over, and the

Ever since the schoolboy cracksman came to St. Jim's and found cheerful associations in a pleasant environment, his guilty secret has preyed more and more on his conscience. And now comes the time when the "Toff" reaches the cross-roads, when he finds himself compelled to decide between the wrong road and the straight and narrow path!

Shell fellows departed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled the smile of complete satisfaction.

"We've cheered old Talbot up, aftar all, deah boys—what?"

"What-ho!" said Blake.

But if they could have seen Talbot when he was alone once more, the cheery juniors might have had their doubts. Talbot had gone out into the quadrangle, and he was pacing under the old elms, with his hands thrust deep into his pocket, and his brow wrinkled in a deep frown. He muttered to himself inaudibly as he paced.

"If they wouldn't be so decent to me—if only they wouldn't be so decent, then I could stand it better! What's come over me? This can't go on—it can't! I shall have to chuck up St. Jim's—or chuck the—the other. And what then?"

And the cloud upon the handsome face grew blacker and blacker.

CHAPTER 2.

The Woes of Wally!

TOM MERRY! I've been waiting for you."

Wally D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor of the Third—was in Tom Merry's study when the Terrible

Three came in after tea with Blake & Co. They came in looking very cheerful, feeling quite satisfied with the good service they had rendered Talbot. But the sight of the fag somewhat changed their expression. Wally, who was generally the most cheerful and cheeky fag in the Third Form at St. Jim's, was looking utterly woebegone. His face was pale, and his looks expressed a strange mingling of anxiety and suppressed fury.

"What's up, kid?" asked Tom Merry. "More trouble with Selby?"

Mr. Selby was the Form-master of the Third, and Wally had had many rubs with him.

Wally shook his head.

"I'm all right," he said.

"You don't look all right," said Tom, scanning his pale and troubled face.

"It's about Joe," said Wally desperately. "Old Selby is a rotten beast! You chaps know what a straight kid he was, don't you? You know he'd never touch anything that wasn't his own. Yes, I know you found him in a London slum, Tom Merry, and before you took him up, I dare say he did things—he didn't know any better then. But he's been as straight as a die ever since he came to this school, I know that. A chap never had a better pal than Joe. I don't know why he ran away from school; but—I know it wasn't that!"

"Wasn't what?"

"What old Selby says," said Wally. "You remember his collection of coins—a lot of silly rot, I call it—dashed Roman and Greek coins and things—somebody took them out of his room, and hid them for a joke on him, two or three weeks ago. It turns out that the rotten things are worth five hundred pounds, though nobody would have thought it—so they'd be worth stealing. Well, you know they haven't turned up, and Selby has had his hair off about it ever since."

"It was a bit of a loss," said Tom. "Selby has been collecting those coins for twenty years, they say, and he must have spent a lot of money on them."

"Well, why can't he be decent? It was some chap he's been ragging who's taken them away and hidden them," growled Wally.

"I suppose so. But now—"

"Well, now Joe Frayne's cleared off. Selby's got the idea into his silly head that Joe was the chap who boned that numismatic collection, and that he's cleared off with it."

"Phew!"

The Terrible Three looked very grave.

They had not thought of it before; but now that it was put into these words, they could not help seeing that it looked likely enough to anyone whose faith in the missing fag was not so loyal as Wally's.

And poor Joe's past told against him. Tom Merry had found that unhappy little waif in a London slum, and in the kindness of his heart he had befriended him. Tom Merry's uncle had induced the Head to give the lad a chance at St. Jim's, and paid his fees there.

There was no doubt that in his earlier days Joe had earned a precarious living by "ways that are dark." He had been brought up to it in vile surroundings, and knew no better. But after he had come to St. Jim's he had changed

utterly in that respect. He had learned honesty—and never forgotten the lesson. In that new world the best in little Joe's nature had come to light.

Mr. Selby did not like the waif in his Form; but the other fags took to him very well, especially D'Arcy minor. Joe Frayne had seemed happy enough at St. Jim's; and certainly he had seemed "straight" enough. His sudden unexplained flight from the school had puzzled everyone. But no one had thought of connecting it with the disappearance of Mr. Selby's valuable collection until now.

Wally looked with almost haggard eyes at the grave faces of the Shell fellows.

"You don't believe it, too?" he asked.

"No, no; of course not," said Tom Merry hastily.

"Of—of course not," said Manners, rather haltingly. "But—it does look rather queer. The collection disappeared, and it's never turned up—and a few days afterwards Joe Frayne cleared off without a word."

"He wrote to me," said Wally. "He told me that something underhand was going on here, and he couldn't stay to be a party to it."

"Yes, I know; but that sounds awfully lame. Why couldn't he say what it was?"

"Because he'd have to give somebody away—somebody who had done him a good turn," said Wally. "You know what a grateful little ass he was for the least little thing. He almost worshipped Talbot because Talbot saved me from breaking my neck at Glyn House—you remember. He was grateful for the least thing. His explanation was good enough for me."

"It wouldn't be good enough for Mr. Selby," said Tom, with a shake of the head. "And—and I'm surprised this hasn't been thought of before, as a matter of fact. It's weeks now since Selby's coins were taken away, and it was believed that some fag had hidden them for a joke on Selby. But they haven't turned up, Wally—and it really looks as if they've been taken clean away."

"But Joe hasn't taken them."

"No; I feel sure of that; but I must say it does look suspicious."

Wally clenched his fists.

"Old Selby was always down on Joe," he said, between his teeth. "He never liked having him in the Form, because he came from a slum—the snobbish old brute."

Wally was the youngest son of Lord Eastwood, who was one of the governors of St. Jim's. And Wally had "palled" on with Joe Frayne without a single thought of any inequality existing between them. He had punched Joe's head for addressing him as "Master Wally." But Mr. Selby was more snobbish than the son of Lord Eastwood.

"What is Selby going to do about it, Wally?" asked Monty Lowther.

"He's seen the Head about it. The Head's had me in his study, asking me questions about Joe—about his character, and so forth. I gave him the straight tip, I can tell you. I said that only a rotten beast would suspect Joe of being a thief."

"My hat!"

"But—but Selby has asked him to have the police search for him—for Joe, I mean. He wants to have detectives hunt for Joe, to get his rotten collection back—a lot of grimy old, silly Roman coins and things. Joe doesn't

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know anything about them. But—but, you see, it will all tell against Joe. He was up against Selby, and he was—was rather shady before he came here, and—and he ran away from school. They'll find him and send him to a reformatory if they can't find the coins.

"The police will be down on him at once, of course. As soon as they know he came from Angel Alley, and was brought up among pickpockets, they'll jump to the same conclusion as Selby at once. And—and Selby's rotten, silly coins are hidden somewhere about St. Jim's all the time."

"I suppose they are," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But what do you want us to do, Wally?"

"Go to the Head. Tell him Joe is straight—you do know it, don't you?"

"Yes; but—"

"If you fellows speak up for him, it may make some difference. He hasn't decided about the police. Go to him, and tell him what you know about Frayne."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. They were concerned about poor Joe; but they did not think a visit to the Head would be likely to have much result. But Wally was so anxious and agitated that they were willing to risk it to satisfy him.

"You'll go?" asked Wally. "I tell you it may make a difference, and I'll ask my major to go, too. All the fellows ought to go—they all know Joe was straight. Why, if he wanted to steal, he could have stolen dozens of times, couldn't he?"

"There's something in that," agreed Manners. "Let's make up a deputation to the Head, Tom. All the fellows who believe in Joe Frayne to go in a body and put it to him. It can't do any harm."

Tom Merry nodded.

"It's a go!" he said. "We'll gather the chaps, and go in a crowd. After all, it ought to have some effect on the Head, if he sees that everybody in the School House believes that Frayne was the right sort."

"It's sure to," said Wally eagerly. "Anyway, it will show that we don't take Selby's word for it. Get all the chaps together, and make a deputation of it."

"Right-ho!"

And the Terrible Three set to work at once. Study No. 6 joined them heartily as soon as they knew what was "on," and Kangaroo, Clifton Dane, and Glyn of the Shell, and Reilly, Kerruish, and Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth, and several other fellows, joined in, and Talbot was looked for and found, and the matter hastily explained to him.

Talbot looked more concerned even than Tom Merry, though he had known very little of Frayne at the school.

"Is it much use my going, when I'm a new fellow?" he asked dubiously.

"Yes, you most of all," said Tom Merry. "You knew Frayne before he came here, you know."

Talbot reddened a little.

"I hardly knew him," he said. "When I was slumming in London with my uncle, I happened to come across him and helped him a bit."

"Yes; he knew you when you came," said Lowther. "He called you by some queer name—the Toff."

"Yes, that's right," said Talbot carelessly. "I suppose they called me the Toff in Angel Alley, because I handed out some money to the poor brutes there. But what I knew of Frayne at that time wouldn't do him much good with the Head. I'm afraid he was

something in the line of a kid pick-pocket then."

"Ahem! Then you needn't mention his early days," said Tom hastily.

"Wathah not! He'd nevah had a chance, you know."

"I agree," said Talbot. "But, in the circumstances, it would be judicious not to mention to the Head that I saw him before I came to St. Jim's. It would come out that he was—well, not exactly honest at the time, and it wouldn't do him any good now."

"Quite right, and it's thoughtful of you," said Tom. "You always do think of things, old chap. Just come along with the deputation, and don't mention anything about having known Frayne before he came here."

"Right-ho!"

And the deputation being now considerable in numbers, Tom Merry led the way to the Head's study and knocked at the door.

CHAPTER 3.

Talbot Has An Idea.

DR. HOLMES, the reverend Head of St. Jim's, was talking to Mr. Selby when the knock came at his door.

Mr. Selby was very earnest and very angry, though he tried to keep his anger under control.

The Head had an objection to having any of the affairs of St. Jim's mixed up with the police in any way; but the master of the Third was thinking only about the loss of his numismatic specimens. Certainly he could not be expected to pass over such a serious loss in silence.

For twenty years the Third Form master had been adding to his collection, and he had spent four or five hundred pounds upon it in that time. It was not surprising that the numismatist was angry and exasperated, and that he had come to the conclusion that his collection had not, after all, been hidden for a practical joke upon him, but had been stolen. Nor was it surprising that Joe Frayne's flight from St. Jim's had turned his suspicions upon the waif of the Third, especially with what he knew or suspected of Joe's early life in Angel Alley.

"Come in!" called out the Head; and Mr. Selby looked round impatiently.

The door opened, and Tom Merry & Co. walked in, or, rather, crowded in.

The Head looked at the juniors over his glasses in surprise. Mr. Selby frowned darkly. He glanced at Wally with a far from amiable look. Wally had followed the deputation in.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "What does this mean? What do all you boys want?"

"We're a deputation, sir," said Tom.

"Dear me!"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We've come—"

"Leave it to Tommy!" whispered Blake.

"Wats! I'd bettah put it to the Head—ow!—wow!—What beastly wottah is that tweadin' on my foot? Ow!"

"It's about Frayne, sir," said Tom Merry, plunging into the subject. "We've heard that Mr. Selby suspects him of having taken the collection of coins away from St. Jim's, sir."

"That is true!"

"As fellows who knew Joe Frayne jolly well, sir, we think it's our duty to speak up for him."

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We considah—"

Dr. Holmes raised his hand.

"Does any boy here know what has become of the coins that were taken from Mr. Selby's study?" he asked.

"Well, no, sir. They're hidden about the school somewhere, I suppose."

"The strictest search has been made," said the Head. "They have not been discovered. Mr. Selby concludes that they have been taken out of the school."

"I have not the slightest doubt upon the point!" snapped Mr. Selby.

"Then came the disappearance of Frayne, without any adequate explanation, and his curious refusal to let his present address be known," said the Head. "I am afraid, my boys, that it looks very black against Frayne, though I commend you for your faith in the boy."

"He couldn't have done it, sir," said Wally.

"We all think—we all know he was perfectly honest, sir," said Tom Merry. "But if the police get on his track, sir, and find some things about his early life in the slums, they'll take it for granted he's guilty. That's what we're afraid of. And we're all sure that the coins are hidden somewhere about the place all the time. But Joe might be sent to a reformatory, all the same."

"My boys, your faith in this unfortunate lad does you credit," said the Head slowly. "But I'm afraid there is nothing to be done but what Mr. Selby requests. I am very reluctant to call in the police, but Mr. Selby cannot be expected to submit to such a very considerable loss while a chance remains of recovering his property."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?" said Talbot.

"Certainly, Talbot, if you can suggest anything that would throw light upon this subject," said the Head, with a kindly glance at the junior.

"We all think, sir, that Mr. Selby's property is hidden about the school somewhere by someone who wished to worry him. We think that the fellow, whoever he is, is afraid to own up, now that the matter has gone so far. May I suggest that Mr. Selby should allow the matter to stand over for twenty-four hours, before the police are communicated with, and in that time all Joe Frayne's friends will search for the missing articles—"

"But the search has already been thorough, Talbot."

"Yes, sir; but there are many nooks and crannies where such small articles might be hidden. If a hundred fellows thoroughly ransacked the place, they might be found—if they are here. We are all willing to take any amount of trouble, and spend every spare minute in helping."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Dr. Holmes glanced at Mr. Selby.

"There is something in what Talbot suggests," he remarked.

"I do not think it would be of the slightest use, sir," said the master of the Third. "I do not believe the coins are still within the precincts of the school."

"But twenty-four hours would not make much difference," said the Head, in a somewhat decided manner. "I think the boys are entitled to a chance of proving that their faith in Frayne is not misplaced."

"It is as you please, sir, of course," said Mr. Selby, not very graciously; but he could see that Dr. Holmes had made up his mind.

"Very well. My boys you may do as Talbot suggests, and twenty-four hours' delay will be granted. But if by this time to-morrow Mr. Selby's property has not been recovered, I must accede to Mr. Selby's desire to call in a detective to search for Frayne."

"Very well, sir," said Tom Merry. "Thank you, sir!"

And the deputation retired from the study.

In the passage outside they looked at one another rather doubtfully. Talbot had made his suggestion "on his own," and the other fellows were very doubtful whether it would make any difference in the long run.

"I don't see much use in it," said Kangaroo. "The whole blessed place has been ransacked for those giddy coins!"

"We've gained time," said Talbot quietly.

"Yes; but—"

"You see, we all believe Joe Frayne to be innocent. Well, then, somebody else must have taken the collection and hidden it. He's afraid to own up now.

joker doesn't want them to. Talbot's right, you fellows!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll have all the Third out to help," said Wally. "If the rotten things are inside the walls of St. Jim's, we'll find them!"

"We'll ransack every corner," said Blake. "But if they're not found after that, it will look jolly black against Frayne, and no mistake."

"They must be found!" said Wally, between his teeth.

And the juniors did not lose time. They started the search at once. In the quad, and the old tower, and the clock-tower, and the ruined chapel, in the box-rooms and the lumber-rooms, the search went on indefatigably. The news spread over the school, and a hundred fellows joined in the hunt. Nobody



"What the deuce do you mean by coming here in the middle of the night and turning on the light, Levison?" said Tom Merry. "Look at Talbot's bed," said Levison grimly. "He's gone out, and it's a chap's duty to keep his eyes open when there's a criminal skulking in the house!"

But as soon as it spreads through the school that Frayne is to be hunted for by the police, on suspicion of having stolen the coins, don't you think the joker, whoever he is, will let the coins be found? My idea is that he won't own up, for fear of getting Selby down on him; but he may trot out the coins where they can be found by somebody else. Unless he's an utter rotter, he won't let Frayne suffer simply to keep old Selby wriggling over his loss."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Talbot, old man, you're a giddy genius," said Tom Merry. "It's jolly likely. And, anyway, we can hunt for the coins. There has been plenty of searching, but the fellows haven't done any—nobody cares for old Selby, and nobody cares twopence whether he finds his coins or not. But now it will be a search in dead earnest, and very likely they will turn up, even if that practical

had cared very much for Mr. Selby, whose bad temper made him very unpopular; but when it was a question of saving an innocent lad from an imputation of theft, the fellows joined in the search with the utmost zest.

Figgins & Co. searched in the New House with great assiduity, and Tom Merry & Co. in the School House, and parties of both juniors in every corner of the buildings and the grounds. The search was thorough; but so far as that evening was concerned, it was in vain.

But the juniors were not going to be beaten. When they gave up the hunt for the night, it was with the intention of renewing it with more energy on the following day.

Certainly, if the collection was still within the precincts of St. Jim's, it was not likely to escape so many searching eyes.

CHAPTER 4.

Levison's Suspicions.

LEVISON of the Fourth sat in his study.

Levison knew that the search was going on, but he did not join in it. His study-mates, Lumley-Lumley and Blenkinsop, and even Mellish, had joined in the search. Levison remained alone in the study.

Levison of the Fourth was busy.

He sat at the table with a pen in his fingers and a sheet of paper covered with writing before him. If anyone else in the House could have seen that paper as it lay before Levison, the contents would have caused very great astonishment.

Levison read it over with a glint in his eyes. Dark suspicions were brooding in the mind of the cad of the Fourth.

It was his dislike of Talbot that was at the bottom of it. Why he disliked Talbot, in the first place, he hardly knew himself. Perhaps because he seemed to be open and frank and above-board—qualities that did not commend themselves to the cad of the Fourth. And then Talbot was very "thick" with Tom Merry & Co., with whom Levison was on the worst terms. And Talbot had replied to Levison's first insinuations against him by giving him a sound licking. And he had caught Levison spying in his study, and had thrashed him with a cricket stump with such effect that Levison had ached for days afterwards.

A vague dislike had turned to the bitterest hatred in Levison's breast. But he would not admit to himself that it was merely hatred for Talbot that actuated him now. He represented it to himself as a sense of duty and a love of justice. And a desire to prove that he was right, and the other fellows wrong, was strong in his breast. And he would prove that he was right thoroughly enough if he could prove that Talbot of the Shell was a "wrong 'un." But the proof—that was what he wanted. Suspicions he had in plenty—circumstances that favoured his theory;

but proof—actual proof—was lacking. And yet the circumstances, as he had written them down on the paper before him, pointed infallibly to the correctness of his dark suspicion.

The paper ran:

1. Talbot comes to St. Jim's. Nobody knows where he comes from. Supposed to have lived in Australia, but avoids talking about Australia to any of the Australian fellows here and at the Grammar School. Got the Head to have him here by helping the Head when attacked by footpads—possibly a put-up job.

2. Was recognised by Frayne of the Third, who called him the "Toff." Frayne came from a slum, from living among criminals. Talbot explains that he met him when slumming in London with his uncle during a visit from Australia. Frayne never said anything on the subject, and refused to answer questions. Why?

3. Some footpads who tried to rob D'Arcy called Talbot the Toff when he chipped in and stopped them. Looks as if he is well-known among Angel Alley sort of people.

4. Has no relations or connections—never receives visits and hardly ever letters.

5. Was called away one Saturday to meet a friend in Wayland. Was seen going into the Blackbird—the lowest pub in the place. Explained that his friend didn't know the place was that sort, and arranged the meeting there by telegram. I have seen the telegram, and know there was no mention of the Blackbird in it. Meeting evidently arranged with perfect knowledge of the character of the place. Talbot lied.

6. Epidemic of burglaries immediately after Talbot's coming here. Mr. Selby's collection of coins disappear; supposed to have been hidden by some fag for a joke on Selby. Not turned up after several weeks. Collection worth £500. Followed by burglary at Glyn House. Talbot sleeping in the house at the time, as guest of Glyn of the Shell. Followed by burglary at Rylcombe Grammar School. Talbot there at the time, on a

rag with Tom Merry and a crowd of fellows.

7. Talbot has a desk with a patent lock in his study. Secret place in it. Saw him open it and take out something made of steel. Query: Was it some kind of burglar's tool? If all above-board, why the patent lock? Cracksmen use steel implements for cracking safes.

8. Frayne of the Third bolts from the school soon after the burglary at Glyn House. Writes to D'Arcy minor that something underhand is going on, and he can't be a party to it, but can't give the unknown rotter away, because of a debt of gratitude to him. Frayne overflowing with gratitude towards Talbot for having saved D'Arcy minor's life.

9. Frayne suspected of having bolted with Selby's coins. Talbot suggests delay of twenty-four hours before calling in the police, to give the fellow a chance of finding the stuff. Query: Does he know where it is, and intends to let it be found to save young Frayne from being arrested—to keep the police out of the school at any price?

So ran the paper Levison had drawn up.

It was circumstantial evidence, and until he had something more than that to go upon, he dared not make it public. He knew how Tom Merry & Co. would have handled him if he had accused the chum they liked and trusted of being a thief and a secret criminal.

"I'll get the proof!" Levison muttered, setting his lips. "I'll show him up; I'll make him sorry for laying that cricket stump about me. And I can get proof. It was Talbot suggested the delay for searching for the collection, and that means that if he took it he means to make it turn up. He must do it to-night after lights-out; he couldn't risk it in the daytime. He will have to get out of the dormitory to take the coins from where he's hidden them, and put them where they can be found. If he does get out, that's proof positive. And I'm going to keep an eye on him to-night. Rotten bad luck that we're in different dormitories, but I'll manage it, and bring the scoundrel to book!"

The study door opened, and Lumley-Lumley came in. Levison caught up his paper and thrust it hurriedly into his pocket.

Lumley-Lumley eyed him curiously. "Hallo! Some more of your horsey calculations?" he said.

Levison scowled.

"It's nothing of that sort," he said. "Some little calculation I'm making, that's all. Mind your own business!"

"You haven't been helping in the search," said Lumley-Lumley.

"No," said Levison, yawning. "I fancy the coins will turn up without my assistance."

"You think they'll turn up?"

"I fancy so."

"I guess you're talking out of your hat!" said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. "I don't see how you can know anything about it! Rats!"

Levison would have been glad enough to explain his reasons, but he knew that he would receive no belief or sympathy from Lumley-Lumley. The latter would have laughed at his suspicions, and immediately told the other fellows of them. And that would not have suited the plans of the cad of the Fourth. Levison kept his own counsel and walked out of the study.

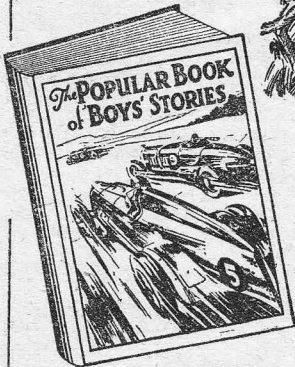
He met a crowd of tired fellows coming in after a vain search.

"No luck?" asked Levison, as Blake & Co. came along the passage.

"No," grunted Blake. "Try again to-morrow."

"Yaas, wathah! I feel pwetty sure we

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shall find the wotten things to-morrow," said Arthur Augustus. "It would be only decent of you to help, Levison."

Levison shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps I have been helping," he said coolly. "There are more ways than one of showing up a thief than routing round in dusty corners, looking for things that aren't there."

"There's no question of theft in the case," said Blake warmly. "The rotten things have simply been hidden somewhere, and we've got to find them."

"I'll bet you ten to one in bobs that they're found easily enough to-morrow," said Levison.

"Rats! I don't make rotten bets!" And Blake & Co. went into the study.

Levison shrugged his thin shoulders again and walked on. All the fellows who were friendly with Talbot were down on Levison, since his insinuations against the new junior, on the score of that visit to the Blackbird. But it was something worse than "pub-haunting" that Levison suspected him of now, and he consoled himself with the reflection that when his proofs were complete the juniors would have to sing a very different tune. And Levison was determined that before long those proofs should be complete enough.

CHAPTER 5.

The Accusation!

THERE was sound slumber that night in the junior dormitories.

Tom Merry & Co. did not do things by halves, and they had searched for Mr. Selby's missing numismatic collection until they were tired out. Tom Merry & Co. slept the sleep of the just, and in the junior dormitories in the School House only two were wakeful—one fellow in the Shell, and another in the Fourth.

In the Shell dormitory it was Talbot whose eyes remained sleeplessly open while the hours passed slowly, ten and then eleven striking out and finding him still awake. The hour of midnight boomed dully from the clock tower, and Talbot was still awake; another half-hour he lay silent, and then he moved.

It was very dark in the room, with hardly a glimmer at the high windows, and even if any of the juniors had awakened they would hardly have discerned Talbot as he dressed himself, and certainly they would not have heard him; his movements were as quiet as a cat's.

The dormitory door opened soundlessly under his cautious hand. His rubber shoes made not the slightest sound. He slipped out into the passage and closed the door gently behind him.

The passage was intensely dark. All lights had long been turned out in the School House. Talbot felt his way to the stairs, and then for a moment he paused, his eyes glinting in the dark, his head bent, his ears strained to listen.

His quick ear had caught a sound in the blackness that surrounded him.

For several minutes he stood listening, but that sound was not repeated. He stepped cautiously on down the stairs. At the foot of the stairs he paused and listened again; then he went to the hall window. The window, being on the ground floor, was locked, and the key taken away. But that seemed to present no difficulties to the junior; his hand glided over the lock, and the casement came open under his touch.

Talbot lifted himself out of the window and dropped to the ground beneath and closed the window after him.

A minute later a dark shadow stood within the window, feeling over the lock.



Levison of the Fourth ground his teeth.

"Locked, by gum! But he went out that way. Hang him! How did he get it open, then? Has he got a key?"

If Talbot had known that the cad of the Fourth was out of bed and on the watch he could hardly have baffled him more effectually.

The window was locked now, and Levison could not open it without a key. Levison's eyes glinted.

"If that isn't proof, what is?" he muttered. "They can't have left the window unlocked. Besides, it's locked again now. How did Talbot get through it? Railton has the key; he always takes it at night. Talbot must have picked the lock; and a schoolboy who can pick locks isn't an ordinary schoolboy."

Levison stood thinking it out. There were other ways of getting out of the house, of course, but it would take several minutes, and already Talbot had disappeared in the darkness of the quadrangle, and the spy had no knowledge of the direction he had taken.

Was it Talbot who had gone out? He was sure of it; no other fellow could have opened a locked window—nor Talbot, unless Levison's suspicions regarding him were correct. But there was a chance that it was some other Shell fellow breaking bounds, and that he had purloined Mr. Railton's key for the purpose by some means. It was not likely, but it was possible.

Levison made up his mind. He ascended the stairs again to the Shell dormitory. If Talbot was gone, his bed would be empty. Would not that fact, and the fact that he had evidently picked a lock, be proof enough against him, proof enough to cause the Housemaster to insist upon the opening of Talbot's mysterious desk, in which Levison was convinced the Shell fellow had hidden his cracksman's tools? If Talbot should be proved to have burglar's tools in his possession, his game was up.

Levison had thought out and written down his suspicions; all the circumstances that pointed to the conclusion that Talbot of the Shell was at St.

Jim's for a nefarious purpose; that he was not the schoolboy he pretended to be, but a member of a criminal gang.

Levison had waited for proof. What more proof could he ever obtain than that which was now in his hands?

Levison entered the Shell dormitory quietly. Before he awoke the fellows there to witness that Talbot was absent he must make sure that Talbot was really gone.

He knew which was Talbot's bed, and he crept silently towards it in the darkness. He bent over it and peered in the gloom, and listened for a sound of breathing.

There was no sound. Encouraged by the silence, he groped over the bed. It was empty!

Levison's eyes glittered with triumph.

Careless now of making a noise, he strode across the room to the electric light switch by the door and turned it on.

The dormitory was suddenly flooded with brilliant light.

Two or three of the fellows had awakened at the sound of Levison's footsteps, and they sat up, blinking dazedly in the sudden blinding light.

"Hallo! What's the matter?"

"Who's that?"

"What's on?"

"Levison!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Levison!" ejaculated Lowther.

"What are you doing here?"

Levison regarded the chums of the Shell with eyes that glittered like a cat's.

"Wake up!" he said.

"We're awake!" said Tom Merry angrily. "What the deuce do you mean by coming here in the middle of the night and turning the light on? Are you dotty?"

"Look at Talbot's bed!" said Levison grimly.

"My hat! Where's Talbot?"

All the Shell fellows were awake now. They sat up in bed, all staring towards Talbot's bed, now vacant. Tom Merry had jumped out.

"Have you been playing any trick on Talbot, you rotter?" he demanded.

"No."

"Then where is he?"

"Gone out!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I watched him go!"

"Spying again!" growled Manners.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a chap's duty to keep his eyes open when there's a thief and a criminal skulking in the house, pretending to be a schoolboy like the rest of us," he said.

The Shell fellows stared at him.

"Thief! Criminal!" repeated Tom Merry. "Who's a thief and a criminal?"

"Talbot!"

"You lying cad!"

"I don't know whether Talbot's his real name," said Levison deliberately.

"I dare say it isn't. It's a respectable kind of name he would naturally take for a job like this. Among his friends in the criminal classes he seems to be known as the Toff."

Tom Merry had clenched his hands, but he unclenched them again, and stared at Levison in blank astonishment.

"Are you mad?" he said.

"I know what I am saying. I have suspected Talbot for some time, and now I've got proof against him I'm going to show him up. You can keep your fists to yourself, Tom Merry. I'm going to call the Housemaster."

"What for?"

"To tell him that a thief and a burglar is living at St. Jim's, and to prove it to him."

Tom Merry set his teeth.

"Talbot seems to be gone out," he said. "He's broken bounds, but he's got some reason for going, which I dare say he will explain to us when he comes in. Most of us have broken bounds at one time or another, for some reason or other. You are not going to sneak to Mr. Railton about Talbot going out."

Tom Merry crossed quickly between Levison and the door.

"Stand where you are!"

"I'm going to the Housemaster," said Levison, between his teeth.

"You're not," said Tom Merry.

"You're going to keep this dark. You wouldn't have known anything about it if you hadn't been spying, as usual."

"But I say," said Gore, "what has Talbot gone out for, anyway?"

"No business of ours," said Tom. "He hasn't gone out to do anything rotten, I know that. But even if he had, it's not Levison's business to give him away to the Housemaster. Levison's going to hold his tongue."

"I tell you he's a criminal!" said Levison.

"And I tell you that you are a liar and a fool!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"I will tell you what he has done," said Levison. "I was in the passage when he came out of here. He went downstairs and picked the lock of the hall window, and went out, and locked it behind him. You know that Railton locks that window of a night and takes away the key. How did Talbot unlock it if he can't pick locks?"

"I wouldn't take your word for it that he did. Railton may have left it unlocked."

"It's locked now."

"Talbot may have got hold of the key."

"I'm willing to call Mr. Railton, and ask him whether he still has the key," said Levison, with a sneer. "The risk is mine."

"And a jolly big risk, if you accuse Talbot of being a thief," said Monty Lowther. "You'll be flogged for it, you utter idiot!"

"I'm going to prove it."

"But you're dotty!" exclaimed Manners. "If he's a thief, what has he stolen?"

"I'll tell you," said Levison deliberately, and with enjoyment of the shock he was about to give the fellows whose faith in Talbot was unbounded. "In the first place, he stole Mr. Selby's collection of coins—"

"What!"

"In the second place, he has robbed Glyn's father."

"My pater!" ejaculated Bernard Glyn.

"Yes. Talbot was the thief who broke open your father's safe at Glyn House, and robbed him of fifteen thousand pounds' worth of stuff."

"You're mad!"

"Talbot was there," said Levison.

"So were we there," remarked Tom Merry, more amazed than angry now.

"In the third place," went on Levison, "Talbot has robbed the Grammar School."

"The—the Grammar School!"

"Yes; he stole Dr. Monk's picture worth two thousand guid, and some money. He was there for a jape on the Grammarians with you fellows, and that was his chance."

"He's as mad as a hatter!" said Bernard Glyn. "Why, the day Talbot was at my place he risked his life to save young Wally from breaking his neck! And that mad idiot pretends

that he committed a burglary afterwards! He's raving!"

"And you all know," continued Levison, with the same deadly coolness, "that Talbot has a specially strong desk in his study with a patent lock on it. What does a schoolboy want with a patent lock on his desk?"

"Perhaps he doesn't want a dirty spy named Levison to look over his letters and things," Monty Lowther suggested.

"And in that desk," continued Levison, "he keeps burglar's tools."

"What!"

"I've seen them—or one of them. He took it out when I was watching him in his study, the day before the burglary at the Grammar School. He was muttering something about getting the things ready for the morrow night. And on the morrow night the burglary at the Grammar School took place, and Talbot was there."

"Go on!" said Lowther. "This is as good as a newspaper serial story. I didn't know you were a humorist, Levison! Keep it up!"

"Joe Frayne knew who and what Talbot was. He called him by his criminal nickname when he first came to St. Jim's. My belief is that Frayne knew that Talbot had robbed Glyn's pater. That's why he ran away."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Draw it mild!"

"Why didn't he say so if he knew it?" asked Kangaroo.

"Because Talbot had saved Wally's life, and Frayne was grateful to him for it. You know he said in his letter to Wally that something underhand was going on, and he couldn't stay here to be a party to it, and that gratitude prevented him from giving the fellow away."

"Oh!"

"And it was the day after the burglary at Glyn House that Frayne bolted."

"By Jove," said Gore. "Levison's got it all worked out! After all, nobody knows Talbot, or where he comes from. Looks as if there's something in it."

"He's supposed to have come from Australia," sneered Levison. "But Noble has never been able to get him to talk about Australia. I think the case is clear. I take the credit for ridding the school of a scoundrel and a criminal. If I'm wrong, I take the risk."

"If you're wrong, you rascal!" shouted Tom Merry, his eyes blazing with indignation. "Of course you're wrong! Talbot is thoroughly decent. As for all you've said, I wouldn't take your word against a mangy dog. We all know you are a liar, and we all know you hate Talbot. Your word's worth nothing!"

"Less than nothing," said Clifton Dane.

"It isn't only my word," said Levison calmly. "I've been waiting for proof, and now I've got it. Talbot picked a lock to get out to-night. That's proof."

"Rubbish!"

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"And I believe he's gone out to put Selby's collection somewhere where it can be found to-morrow," pursued Levison. "Talbot suggested that delay of twenty-four hours before the police were called in. He did it in order to have the things found. He doesn't want the police here at any price—or perhaps he isn't quite villain enough to let Frayne be caught and sent to a reformatory for nothing. My belief

is that the coins will be found to-morrow morning—simply because Talbot has gone out to-night to put them where they can be found."

"Well, my word!" said Gore. "If we find them to-morrow, blessed if it won't look like it!"

"Jolly like it!" said Crooke.

"Nonsense!" said Tom Merry. "We expect to find them to-morrow, anyway. Aren't we turning the place inside out to find them? If they turn up, Levison might as well say that you or I put them where they could be found!"

"Of course he might!" said Manners, with a breath of relief, for he had been staggered for a moment by Levison's last statement.

"And all this rigmarole of silly rot," said Tom Merry scornfully, "is your reason for wanting to give Talbot away to Railton for breaking bounds to-night?"

"Yes."

"You're not going to do it!"

"If he has gone out for anything innocent, it only means a caning and gating for a few half-holidays," said Levison. "I shall get quite as much as that if I don't prove my case against Talbot."

"That's so," said Gore. "It's an equal risk. You've no right to stop him, Tom Merry."

"No right at all," said Crooke. "Even if there's nothing in it, it ought to be thrashed out for Talbot's sake. This yarn will be all over the school to-morrow."

Tom Merry knitted his brows. He knew that Levison's accusation, wild as it seemed, would be the talk of St. Jim's in the morning. It was bound to come to the ears of the masters, even if Levison himself did not go to Mr. Railton.

"You see, you can't stop me," said Levison. "I'm going to demand to have Talbot's desk opened and searched. I shouldn't wonder if stolen property is found there. But I am quite certain that burglar's tools will be found there, unless Talbot is given time to get them out of sight. I suppose that would convince even you?"

"It would convince me if it happened," growled Tom Merry. "But it won't happen. You are either mistaken, or lying from beginning to end!"

"A little mistake and a big lie!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"More lies than mistakes!" grunted Manners. "We all know Levison!"

"Now will you let me pass, Tom Merry?" said Levison, unheeding the remarks of the Shell fellows.

"No."

"Then I shall go to Mr. Railton in the morning."

"You won't!" said Tom. "We can settle this matter among ourselves. You shall wait here till Talbot comes in, and then repeat to him what you've said to us. Then I'll ask him to open his desk in the presence of half a dozen fellows, to prove that you are a liar."

"He will refuse."

"If he refuses, you can go to the Housemaster afterwards."

Levison grinned.

"I agree to that," he said.

"Turn out the light, then," said Kangaroo. "Somebody will spot it from the windows, and we shall have Railton here, whether we like it or not!"

Tom Merry turned off the light.

The Shell fellows, too excited now to think of sleep, waited for Talbot to come back. Levison sat on the empty bed, calmly patient. He felt now that he held his enemy in the hollow of his hand, and he could afford to be patient.

CHAPTER 6.

The Toff's Resolve!

MEANWHILE, after quitting the School House, Talbot had crossed the quadrangle, climbed the school wall, and dropped into the road.

He gave a quick glance about him, and then tramped down the road in the direction of Rylcombe.

His handsome face was dark with troubled thought as he strode on through the night.

The black expression that had weighed on Talbot during the past few days seemed to have reached its climax now. There was trouble, anxiety, misery in the handsome face of the schoolboy as he tramped on.

He stopped at the stile in the lane and gave a low whistle. A dark figure came out of the trees at the other side of the stile.

"That you, Toff?"

"I'm here," said Talbot.

"Wot did you want to fix this 'ere for?" demanded the blue-chinned, roughly-clad man who had emerged from the trees discontentedly. "Wot's the good of it when there ain't a job on? Why couldn't you come to the Blackbird again?"

"I couldn't, Hookey. I was seen going in there last time, and a fellow who has his knife into me spread it about the school."

"By gum! They don't know that you come to see me?" muttered Mr. Hookey Walker, in alarm.

"No; they think I was pub-haunting, as they call it, some of them," said Talbot bitterly. "I explained it away; but I can't risk it again. This is the only safe way."

"Well, orlright," said Mr. Hookey Walker, "don't mind me. Wot's the news, Toff? Wot's the night for crackin' the crib at the school?"

Talbot was silent. Hookey Walker was watching his face closely in the dimness.

"It's a good crib at the school," went on Mr. Walker, in a low voice. "It's worth thousands, Toff! And you've got the lay of the place by this time. It will be easy. You let us in and open the safe, and it's done in a few minutes!"

"I can't, Hookey!"

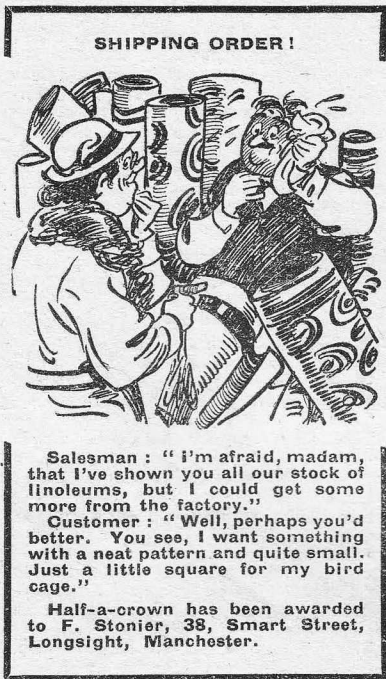
"Why not?" said Mr. Walker, a very ugly look coming over his stubby face. "It ain't as some of the coves 'ave been sayin', is it, Toff?"

"What have they been saying?" said Talbot wearily.

"As 'ow now you're a gentleman at a Public school you want to give the gang the go-by," said Hookey Walker significantly, "as 'ow you 'ave forgotten that you're the Toff, and the son of old Captain Crow, who used to be our captain, and thinks yourself a feller there like the rest. That wouldn't do, Toff. You know why you was fixed up to go to St. Jim's. I don't say as you haven't played up well. Only the coves are beginning to ask when the sharing-out is taking place. We ain't seen anythin' of the loot so far."

Talbot did not speak.

"There was that coin collection, to begin with," went on Hookey Walker. "That's worth 'undreds of quids, as you've told us, Toff. Then the job at Glyn House, and then agin at the Grammar School. We took you for our captain, Toff, after your father 'opped the twig, 'cause you was as skilful a cracksmen as any man twice your age, and you was useful. We left it all in your hands. We trusted you and 'elped you. But what are you keepin' the swag back for? When is it to be handed out?"



That's what the fellers want to know, and that's what I want to know, too! Why ain't it 'anded out?"

"I suppose I'd better speak out," said Talbot.

"You 'ad!" said Hookey Walker grimly.

Talbot drew a deep breath. "I'm sorry, Hookey. When I took my father's place with the gang, I meant to stick to you. I never thought of anything else. I intended to get into St. Jim's simply to have a better position for serving the gang."

"And it was a good idea," said Mr. Walker; "and I will say as 'ow you look as if you was born for the part, Toff!"

Talbot gave a short laugh. "Well, that was a mistake!" he said.

"And 'ow?"

"I can't go through with it. I don't suppose you'll understand—there's been a change. I'd never known what honesty was until—until I went to St. Jim's. I was the son of a cracksmen, and brought up to follow in his footsteps. I had a gift for that kind of thing, and my father gave me a good education, so that I could keep up appearances on one side, while I was a thief and an outcast on the other. But—"

"But—" said Mr. Walker, his look growing uglier and uglier. "I suspected somethin' of this sort, Toff, from your puttin' off sharing out the swag and puttin' off crackin' the crib at the school. But go on, let's 'ave it all!"

"You won't understand. I went there as an enemy, and they made a friend of me. I've made friends—fellows I like—fellows who like me, honest and open as the day, and they trust me. I don't know why it should have made a change in my feelings. I can't be such an infernal villain. At Glyn House I was a guest, and I robbed the man whose bread I ate. At the Grammar School the fellows there treated me decently, and I robbed the place. I felt like a crawling worm afterwards!"

Hookey Walker uttered an oath. "I thought you was weakenin', but, blow me if I thought it was as bad as this!" he said. "'Ave you forgot who you are—the son of Captain Crow, wot

was killed in a fight with the police? 'Ave you forgot that you'll starve unless you steal?"

"I can work."

"Work!" repeated Mr. Walker dazedly. "Work—when you're the cleverest cracksmen in the three kingdoms, kid as you are! Work!"

"Yes—work!"

"And wot can you earn workin'?" snorted Mr. Walker. "Fifteen bob a week—and you can make fifteen thousand quid at a time crackin' safes!"

"Better dry bread and honesty together than to be a thief rolling in money. I'm done with it!"

"Done with it?"

"For good!" said Talbot. A savage look came over Mr. Walker's face.

"You mean to say as you're done with the gang?" he muttered.

"Yes; unless—"

"Unless wot?"

"Hookey, old man, we've been pals together in this rotten line. Let's try it together in another line."

"Wot, workin'?" sneered Mr. Walker.

"Yes, honesty—"

"Don't talk that piffle to me!" said Hookey Walker, his voice quivering with rage. "No poor-but-honest business on my plate, thanks all the same. I ain't lookin' for a job at my time of life. And wot about the swag? Where's that?"

"Safely hidden."

"You don't mean," said Hookey Walker, speaking with difficulty, "as 'ow you're thinkin' of keepin' it and cheatin' us, Toff?"

"It's going to be given back to its owners."

"What?"

"There's no help for it, Hookey. I must do it!"

"You—you villain!" gasped Mr. Walker. "Why, it's a fortune. And another fortune to be made by crackin' the crib at St. Jim's!"

"That shall never be done!"

"You mean as you won't 'ave a 'and in it?"

"Never! And I shall prevent it if it's tried without my knowledge."

"Toff, 'ave you gone mad?"

"No; I've come to my senses, I think," said Talbot wearily. "Listen to me, Hookey. I told you of that kid Frayne; he bolted from the school because he knew what was going on, and he couldn't give me away. Well, they suspect him now of having bolted with those coins. They're going to put the detectives on him, unless the things are found. I'm going to see that they are found."

"Wot does he matter to us?"

"Well, if he were arrested, he would give me away, in the first place. I must see that he is safe, for my own sake."

"Pr'aps that's so," admitted Mr. Walker, after some thought. "But we could find the kid and put him where he couldn't talk, easy enough."

"Never!"

"Then you're thinking of going on at the school arter you've chucked up the game?" said Mr. Walker.

"Why not? I can feel decent there, if I'm not a thief. My fees have been paid for this term, and I can stay to the end. Then I may get a scholarship, and stay on. I've been looking that out already, and I can do it. Why shouldn't I have a chance of leading a decent life?" said Talbot bitterly. "I've never had a chance yet."

"You want to set up as a gentleman, and leave the gang in the lurch?" sneered Hookey Walker.

"Setting up as a gentleman doesn't make any difference to me. I want to be honest and decent. Any fellow can do that."

"And you think that we'll leave you there in peace, arter you've given us the chuck?" snarled Hookey-Walker, "when we've elped to get you there? No bloomin' fear! You go back on the gang, and the gang will go back on you."

Talbot eyed him calmly.

"You mean that you will betray me at the school?"

"If you give us the go-by, yes."

"Look out if you do! I know enough of you and Nobby and the Rabbit to send you all to penal servitude, if I choose to speak," said Talbot calmly. "Make trouble for me at the school, Hookey, and you make me an enemy, instead of a friend. Give me away to the Head, and I give you away to Scotland Yard. You'll get the worst of it."

"You—you'd turn on your old pals?"

"If they turn on me, certainly!"

"My word! We'd beat you up!

We'd—"

"Don't threaten, Hookey. You know I'm not afraid of you."

Mr. Walker changed his tone. Well he knew that the strange lad before him was utterly insensible to fear. And he knew, too, that he and his associates were far more in the Toff's power than Talbot was in theirs.

"Toff, if you mean this—and I can 'ardly believe it—you won't swindle your old pals. And out the swag, and we'll call it square."

"I can't. I can't stay at St. Jim's with my hands soiled with theft. You've done very well out of me, Hookey—you and the others."

"I don't deny it," said Mr. Walker. "You was a fortune to us."

"Then call it square now."

There was a long silence. Mr. Walker eyed the junior with a wolfish gleam in his eyes. But he was powerless against the schoolboy crackman, and he knew it. If Talbot chose to "chuck" the gang, there was nothing to stop him. Mr. Walker realised it, and he tried to conceal the rage that was surging in his breast.

"We'll talk about this 'ere ag'in, Toff," he said at last. "You've surprised me—though I won't say as 'ow I wasn't fearin' somethin' of the sort. But you'll come round. This can't last."

"It will last," said Talbot. "I mean it. My tools are at the bottom of the river already."

"We'll see," said Hookey Walker. "I'll git back to London and tell the fellows—and we'll talk it over ag'in. Let me see you ag'in. Say a week from now."

Talbot gave him a searching look.

"No tricks, Hookey?"

"My 'and on it," said Mr. Walker, and he held out a stubby hand.

Talbot shook hands with him, and they parted. Hookey Walker gazed after him with burning eyes as he strode away towards the school.

"So that's the end of it!" he muttered savagely. "Is it? Not if I know it! That there crib is too good not to be cracked, and if the Toff won't 'elp, it can be done without 'is 'elp."

And Mr. Walker tramped discontentedly away along the dark footpath. Talbot strode towards the school, feeling his heart lighter than it had been for many days. He had made that break with his old associates at last. His path lay clear before him now. When the proceeds of the robberies were once handed back he could look Tom Merry & Co in the face without fear.

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He would find Frayne as soon as he could and explain to him, and the fag would return—henceforth he would fear no man, strong in honesty and the determination to keep to the straight path.

Frayne had outlived the influence of his early days—why should not the Toff, with so many more advantages, do the same? And the hateful shadow of what he had once been should no longer darken his days.

CHAPTER 7.

Face To Face!

"HERE he comes!"

The door of the Shell dormitory opened softly and quietly.

"Is that you, Talbot?"

The dark figure that had glided silently into the dormitory halted, with a quick catching of the breath.

It was Talbot.

For a moment he stood quite still, as the whispers from the various beds reached him, struck by the sudden discovery that his absence was known to his Form-fellows.

In that moment Levison struck a match.

The glimmer showed on Talbot's face, suddenly pale.

"It's Talbot!" said Manners

Talbot made a quick effort and pulled himself together. The sight of his enemy, Levison of the Fourth, prepared him for trouble.

"What's the matter?" he asked quietly. "How does it happen that all you fellows are awake?"

"Levison woke us."

"What is Levison doing here?"

Levison smiled.

"That's what you're going to find out," he said. "Shut the door, unless you want the masters here—not that I mind. Tom Merry is very particular not to have the Housemaster on the scene."

Talbot closed the door.

"Thank you," he said, looking at Tom Merry, who was out of bed now. "Of course, I don't want Mr. Railton to know that I have broken bounds."

"Of course not," agreed Tom. "We're keeping that cad quiet for that reason. He has been telling us a cock-and-bull yarn about you, and nobody here believed a word of it."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Crooke. "It's up to Talbot to prove that it isn't true."

"This is rather a queer time for Levison to choose to make accusations," said Talbot. "We should all get into a row if we were found up at this hour."

Several of the juniors had lighted candle-ends, which shed a glimmer of light through the lofty room. It was not safe to turn on the electric light.

Talbot was quite cool and collected now—quite master of himself, and ready to meet his danger. For he knew that there was danger. At the very time when he was trying to throw criminal associations behind him, he was called upon to meet Levison's accusations—to lie to those fellows who had trusted him and believed his word. Yet there was no other way out, unless he admitted the truth about himself, and saw horror and scorn and disgust grow in every face that was now looking at him with faith and cheery confidence. And that was an ordeal which it was no wonder the unhappy boy shrank from.

"Speak up, Levison!"

"Yes, if you're not afraid to tell Talbot what you've told us."

"I'm ready to speak up!" said Levison. "I accuse Talbot of being the thief who stole Mr. Selby's coins, who robbed Glyn House and the Grammar School."

It sounded preposterous to the Shell fellows. They all looked at Talbot to see how he took it. But the son of Captain Crow had been in too many tight places in his chequered youthful career to be taken aback now, and he had had time to collect his faculties. What Levison had been about to say he did not know, and undoubtedly he did not expect this. But not by the flicker of an eyelid did he betray how the blow told.

Only surprise, with a trace of amusement, was visible in the handsome face.

"Anything else?" he smiled.

"I think that's enough."

"Well, it's certainly a big order," agreed Talbot. "Any reason to give, or did you simply dream it?"

"I'll prove it," said Levison. "You picked the lock of the window when you went out. How did you come to be able to pick locks?"

"What lock?"

"The hall window."

"I suppose you were spying, as usual?"

"Call it what you like. I was watching you because I suspected you. How did you pick that lock, unless you're practised at that kind of thing?"

"Perhaps you went to sleep watching, and had a dream?" suggested Talbot, with a smile. "I certainly did not pick any lock."

"Did you have a key?"

"No; I had no key."

"Then how did you undo the lock unless you picked it?"

"Hold on a minute," said Talbot. "I have broken bounds to-night. I can explain that to the satisfaction of my friends, and I intend to do so. I am not bound to be questioned by a boy belonging to another Form and who is my enemy. I don't recognise Levison's right to come here at this hour and ask me questions."

"I am quite willing to ask them in the presence of the Housemaster, if you prefer that," said Levison. "I'm keeping Railton out of it for the present, because Tom Merry insisted on it. You'd have to answer Railton."

"You'd oblige us by answering, Talbot," said Tom Merry earnestly. "I know how you feel. The accusation is simply an insult, and you don't want to take any notice of that worm at all. But it's been made, you see, and the fellows will all be talking about it tomorrow. We don't believe a word of it, but some fellows might. We want you to prove right here and now that Levison is lying. We know you can do it—and we want you to, so that even that cad can't go on with the yarn!"

Talbot nodded.

"Very well; I see now how it stands. You can ask me anything you like, Levison—it being understood that I'm answering to satisfy these fellows, and that I look on you as a liar and a sneak and a slanderer!"

Levison bit his lip, while the Shell fellows chuckled.

"Pile in, counsel for the prosecution," said Kangaroo.

"I've asked Talbot how he picked the lock of the hall window, if he isn't a lock-picker by profession," said Levison. "That's only one point; but that's the one he's got to answer first."

"Very well," said Talbot. "Prove that I went out by the hall window, and I'll show you how I did it."



"Found!" exclaimed the juniors. "Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Selby. He was on his knee beside the opening in a twinkling. In the dust and cobwebs lay a heap of gold and silver coins—the collection that had been stolen from the Third Form master!

"What!"

"To satisfy the other fellows—not you—I'll explain that I got out of the house by climbing down from the box-room window," said Talbot, with icy coolness.

Levison gasped. It was curious that, false as he was himself to the very core, he somehow never expected Talbot to lie.

"You—you liar! I was watching you!" he stuttered.

"Don't call me names," said Talbot, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes, and coming nearer to the Fourth Former. "I'm answering these questions to please the fellows, but I don't allow anybody to call me names!"

"I tell you I watched him get out of the hall window!" shrieked Levison.

"Liar!"

"Spoofier!"

"Rotter!"

"Rats!"

It was a chorus from nearly all the fellows there. Levison was suffering the fate of the boy in the fable, who cried "Wolf!" so often when there was no wolf that he was not believed when the wolf really came.

Levison gazed round almost wildly at the faces of the Shell fellows. Unbelief and contempt were plainly written on nearly all of them.

"I tell you I saw him—I watched him—I—" Levison was almost stuttering with rage. "I followed him when he came down from this dorm, and he—"

"Liar!"

"Rats!"

"Chuck it!"

"It's the truth!" screamed Levison.

"When did you start dealing in truth?" inquired Monty Lowther. "My dear chap, it's not in your line at all!"

"You may as well chuck it," said Tom Merry roughly. "Nobody would dream of taking your word against Talbot's!"

"I tell you he picked the lock of the window!"

"I tell you you lie!" said Tom Merry savagely. "And if you repeat the lie, we'll jolly well give you a dormitory ragging!"

"Hear, hear!"

Levison made a rush towards the door. Tom Merry sprang into his path, caught him by the shoulder, and swung him back.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Hang you! I'm going to Mr. Railton! I'll have this out! I'll call him—"

"You won't!"

"Hold the cad!"

"Jam a cake of soap in his mouth!"

Levison, in desperation, had opened his mouth to yell, with the intention of waking the house. Kangaroo jammed a chunk of soap into it promptly, and the spy of the Fourth spluttered wildly, half-choked.

"If you try to yell out," said Tom Merry, "we'll gag you. We've had enough of your rot, Levison—more than enough!"

"Groogh—groogh!"

CHAPTER 8.

Proof!

TALBOT looked on coolly. Levison was surrounded by the Shell fellows now, nine or ten of whom were out of bed and round him. Talbot's explanation had been received without the slightest doubt of his word, and in consequence Levison's case had

fallen to the ground, so far as the Shell fellows were concerned.

Levison spat out the soap furiously. "Mind, don't yell," said Tom Merry. "We mean business. You're not going to give Talbot away!"

"I don't know that I should mind much," said Talbot lightly. "Mr. Railton would not be very angry if he knew that I could explain about my reason for breaking bounds."

"I know where you've been," said Levison between his teeth. "I've told these fellows already. You've been out to put the coin collection where it can be found, so as to clear young Frayne!"

"Rather a peculiar proceeding for a burglar, then," smiled Talbot. "Burglars don't generally steal things to give them back again!"

"Oh, I know your game! You don't want the police called in here at any price. They might recognise you as the Toff, as young Frayne called you."

Talbot laughed.

"When you get a little calmer, you may go on with your questions, if you've got any more to ask," he said. "We may as well have it all out!"

"What do you keep in that desk in your study?"

"Papers and things."

"You have a secret place in it?"

There was a hush of interest now among the excited juniors; but Talbot's answer came clear and prompt:

"Yes."

"You admit that?" asked Levison.

"Certainly. These old desks often have secret places in them. I bought the thing second-hand; I didn't make it. There is a secret place in it."

"And what do you keep there?"

"Some old books are there, I think,"
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said Talbot, with mild surprise. "I don't remember putting anything in particular into the secret place. I may have used it for some books or papers."

"You don't keep burglar tools there?"

"Burglar tools!" ejaculated Talbot.

"Yes."

"I will hand you a five-pound note for every burglar tool that can be found in my desk," said Talbot.

"Are you willing to let us look?"

"Certainly!"

"What!" Levison was fairly staggered now. If Talbot allowed his desk to be searched, there certainly could not be burglar tools there. But Levison was convinced that he had seen at least one—a steel instrument, at all events.

"Anybody can look into my desk who likes," said Talbot calmly. "I keep it locked up, because I have some private letters I don't want read by spying cads like you, Levison. But in my presence I would allow the desk to be examined, if it was necessary. But I don't consider it necessary."

"Ah, you refuse, then?" Levison's eyes gleamed.

"I refuse you. I will let Tom Merry and any of my friends examine the desk if they choose to take the trouble to-morrow morning."

"And you'll sneak down before morning and get the things hidden in another place!" sneered Levison. "Not good enough!"

Tom Merry's brow clouded a bit.

"Talbot, old man, would you let some of the fellows see into your desk to-night—at once?"

"It's the only way of shutting up that cad, and keeping the Housemaster out of it," said Monty Lowther.

Talbot looked thoughtful.

"I don't know whether I shouldn't prefer the matter to go before the Housemaster," he said. "Levison has made a pretty serious accusation against me. I really think Mr. Railton ought to be told of it. Levison ought to be flogged by the Head, unless he can prove his words. And he would be flogged."

"I run that risk," said Levison.

"I've done it with my eyes open, to show up a criminal who has sneaked into the school to rob the place. You don't dare to allow the fellows to see into your desk now. But I warn you it will be done, for when I leave this dormitory, I go straight to Mr. Railton."

"Let him go!" said Talbot.

"But—but then Railton will know that you broke bounds," faltered Tom Merry.

"I'll chance that!"

"You mean you can explain that to him all right?"

"Easily."

"Why did you go out?" demanded Manners.

"I intended to tell you in the morning," said Talbot calmly. "A new place occurred to me where the collection of coins might be hidden, and I was thinking about it in bed. You remember when we were searching the ruined tower some of you fellows remarked that some of the stones in the floor were loose."

"I did," said Lowther.

"Yes. I was lying awake to-night, and it occurred to me all of a sudden that perhaps the chap who hid Mr. Selby's coins might have taken up one of the big stones and hidden them underneath. I had the idea of looking there, and giving you fellows a surprise in the morning if I found them. That's all."

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"Didn't I tell you?" shouted Levison. "He went out to find the coins as I said—to put them where they could be found."

"Did you find them, Talbot?"

"He will say he did," sneered Levison. "He jolly well knew where to look. Those who hide can find."

Talbot smiled.

"I'm sorry to knock your beautiful theories on the head, Levison," he said.

"But, as it happens, I didn't find them. I pulled up a good many of the stones and looked under them, but I found nothing."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, if you'd found them, we should have believed you, not Levison, of course. I don't think Railton would quite approve of your getting out at night to search for Mr. Selby's property, though. Better not tell him."

"I leave it to Levison," said Talbot, with a shrug of the shoulders. "He can go to Railton, or not, as he pleases. Let him pass!"

"All serene!" Tom Merry stepped aside from the door. "There's the door, Levison!"

But now it was Levison who hesitated. Talbot's willingness to let the matter go before the Housemaster proved to all the fellows that he was innocent. It did not prove that to Levison; but it proved to him that Talbot had an impregnable defence—that, innocent or guilty, he had covered up his tracks thoroughly, and could not be convicted. And if Levison once carried the matter to the Housemaster, and failed to prove his accusation, he would find himself in a very serious position indeed. Only the clearest proof could have justified so terrible an accusation against a schoolfellow.

"Well, why don't you go?" asked Talbot.

Levison paused.

"You say you're willing to open that desk in the presence of the fellows?" he asked.

"Quite!"

"Do it, then, and we'll leave the Housemaster out of the matter for the present."

"Climbing down—eh?" said Talbot, with a laugh. "You were very keen to go to Mr. Railton a short time ago. But I don't want to make trouble. Only, can we get down to the study without risk of being spotted?"

"No need for a crowd to go," said Tom Merry. "Two or three fellows will be enough. Mind, Talbot, we all believe you; this is only to shut up Levison, and to prove to everybody that he has been lying from beginning to end."

A shade crossed Talbot's face.

"I understand," he said.

"If burglar's tools are not found in the desk—and we all know they won't be—we shall know what to think of Levison," said Lowther.

"Yes, rather!"

"Who's coming?" said Talbot quietly.

All the fellows could not go without risk of discovery. The Terrible Three and Kangaroo, Gore and Crooke were settled on. Gore and Crooke were not on the best of terms with Talbot; but Tom Merry considered it best to have his enemies as well as his friends there. The fellows could not deny the evidence of their own eyes.

The candles were put out, and the little party of juniors cautiously descended the stairs to the Shell passage. Half-past one had struck; the

House was deep in silence and slumber.

They crept down to Talbot's study in the Shell passage and entered. Tom Merry closed the door. There was a glimmer of starlight in the room. Talbot drew down the blind before he turned on the light. Then he unlocked the desk and opened it.

"Look in," he said. "Find the secret place, if you can."

The juniors examined it in turn. Levison scanned the interior with wolfish eyes. He could discover nothing. Talbot smiled, and pressed a hidden spring, and the bottom of the desk opened, revealing a dark cavity beneath. It was a large space, and there were several old papers and books lying in it—nothing else.

"That's the secret place," said Talbot.

"Jolly well made!" said Tom Merry. "I should never have found it. Well, Levison, look in and find the giddy burglarious implements."

"They're not there," said Levison sullenly.

"And they never were there!"

"They were there the day I watched Talbot in this study. He took out something made of steel, muttering something about wanting it the next night—the night of the burglary at the Grammar School."

"Cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "Are you satisfied now?"

"I am not satisfied," said Levison, furious with rage and disappointment. "I believe there's another secret place in the desk that Talbot hasn't told us about."

"I'll make Levison an offer," said Talbot, laughing. "I gave three pounds for that desk. If Levison will hand me three quid, he can have it, and break it up looking for secret places. He's welcome."

"That's a good offer," chuckled Gore. "It's up to you, Levison."

"I have got no money to waste," said Levison sullenly.

Talbot closed the desk.

"Have I satisfied you fellows?" he asked.

"We didn't need satisfying," said Tom Merry quickly. "We knew Levison was lying. That was only to clear you from any possible suspicion from anybody. Levison must own up now that he is satisfied."

"I'm not. The things may not be here. Talbot may have got nervous and got rid of them. But he lied when he said he didn't pick a lock to-night, and if he's innocent he wouldn't lie," said Levison sullenly. "All he's said to-night only makes me feel more and more certain that I am right."

There were angry exclamations from the Shell fellows. Talbot raised his hand.

"You can keep your own opinion, Levison," he said. "But if you say one more word against me, I shall go directly to Mr. Railton, and demand to have it all out before the Head. That's all I've got to say."

And Talbot left the study. The juniors followed him out, Levison biting his lips with rage and chagrin. Tom Merry & Co. returned to bed, and Levison made his way back to the Fourth Form dormitory, but not to sleep. He lay sleepless almost till morning, turning restlessly in his bed, a prey to bitter thoughts.

He had been beaten all along the line. His accusation had fallen to the ground, and his only reward was that he was regarded as a reckless and unscrupulous slanderer.

The fellows would not believe him. He had only himself to blame for that. For the first time Levison understood that it does not pay in the long run to lie, whatever temporary purpose it may serve.

He was telling the truth now, and nobody would take his word. He was making a true accusation, and it was regarded as a callous slander.

Levison, as he lay, restless and sleepless, turned the matter over in his mind in every aspect; but under every aspect it was the same—Talbot was guilty, but he had won all along the line, and the mouth of one fellow who knew the truth was closed.

CHAPTER 9.

Those Who Hide Can Find!

TOM MERRY & CO. were up early on the following morning, without waiting for the rising-bell.

Some of them were looking very sleepy, from the interruption of their slumbers the previous night.

But all the fellows were keen to continue the search for the missing collection of coins. If it was not found by tea-time that day, the Head was to accede to Mr. Selby's demand and set the police on the track of Joe Frayne.

In the early sunlight, while the rising-bell was ringing, Tom Merry & Co. pressed on their search.

Levison did not join in it, but he remarked sneeringly, when he came down, that he knew that the coins would be found. And when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked him how he knew, he replied that Talbot had been out of his dormitory the previous night, and had put them somewhere to be found, because those who hide can find.

D'Arcy looked at him in blank amazement, and then walked away. He did not understand Levison's remark till he heard an account of what had happened in the Shell dormitory the previous night. Then his indignation was great.

That strange scene in the dormitory, of course, could not be kept a secret. In a short time all the juniors knew, and there was general amusement mingled with indignation at Levison's unheard-of accusation against Talbot. Levison, as Blake observed, was always accusing or suspecting somebody of something; but this, his latest, fairly took the cake.

The contempt and aversion with which Levison was regarded on all sides probably punished him more than a thrashing. Cold and averted looks, contemptuous glances, words of scorn and dislike, greeted him on all sides. Everyone, or nearly everyone, believed that in his hatred of Talbot he had deliberately concocted that accusation, hoping that some of it, at least, would do Talbot harm.

It was not suggested to send Levison to Coventry, but it came to that, for nobody would speak to him. Even his own friends, of his own kidney, Mellish and Crooke, looked the other way when they saw Levison.

Every spare minute until morning lesson was devoted to the search, without result. After morning lessons it recommenced. It was a half-holiday that day, and the first House match of the football season was due to be played, but Tom Merry's team and Figgins & Co. cordially agreed to postpone it and devote the afternoon to the hunt.

After dinner very nearly all the juniors of St. Jim's were ransacking the place right and left and round about. If Mr. Selby's precious collection was hidden within the precincts of St. Jim's

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling!



Hallo, everybody! Great writers are usually untidy, they say. Litterary geniuses.

Truth is stranger than fiction, they say, too. But you can't sell it so easily.

You heard about the Scot who always set his watch to Greenwich mean time?

Of course, some Scots won't even lend you their ear to listen to a good story.

Sorry, Scots! I have heard 1,017 Scotch stories to date, but never one about the Czechs. I shall have to "Czech" up on that. Ow!

Our Free Insurance: £100,000 will be paid to any reader who is injured in a collision between a steam-roller and a Transatlantic liner in mid-ocean.

I hear Manners is such a keen photographer that he often snaps his fingers.

I see somebody says your finger-

prints will show your character. Especially if found on the door of a safe.

News: There are a lot of adders about this year. An "adder"-tional discomfort for the hiker!

Light travels 186,325 miles per second, says Mr. Linton. Doesn't give you much time to "reflect"!

A writer suggests that if Britain is to have a new airship, why not use some of the "gas" floating about in the House of Commons?

Of course, you know Guy Fawkes plotted to blow up the Houses of Parliament in sixteen hundred and something? If you don't know the exact date, write it out a hundred times. I can't stand a fellow who forgets dates!

A reader wants to know what it was that King John lost in the Wash. I'll put you on to our Laundry Department.

"I think you are a trifle rude sometimes about Mr. Ratcliff," writes a reader. Only a trifle? After I've been trying my hardest for weeks!

Now, which part of the body is the most ill-used? The eye, because it's under the lash all day and gets a good hiding at night.

Wait for this: "Why didn't you tell us you were Scotch, Annie?" asked the matron of the new maid. "Oh, ma'am," replied the maid, "I didna think it richt to start off at a new place by boasting."

Och aye, chaps!

it seemed almost impossible that it could escape so many eager eyes in quest of it.

Wally had turned out with the whole of the Third Form. D'Arcy minor was keenest of all, most indefatigable of all. He was fighting for the honour of his chum, and he was tireless. He ransacked every likely and unlikely place.

It was close upon tea-time when Tom Merry & Co. paused for a rest, still unsuccessful. They were beginning to give up hope now. They adjourned to the tuckshop for refreshment in the shape of ginger-beer and doughnuts, and discussed the matter. Tom Merry was beginning to think that whoever had hidden the coins had hidden them outside the walls of St. Jim's, and in that case the search, of course, was hopeless.

"They might have been buried somewhere, perhaps, in the wood," said Tom despondently. "Might be a mile from here, for all we know. I'm afraid you judged the rotter wrongly, Talbot, in thinking he would let the things be found to save poor old Joe."

Talbot looked thoughtful.

"Well, any fellow of ordinary decency would do as much," he said. "But perhaps whoever hid them hasn't the nerve to go near the place again. But I've been thinking—"

"Go it, Talbot!" said Figgins encouragingly.

"We seem to have searched everywhere," said Talbot, with a smile. "But what about Mr. Selby's own room?"

"Eh?"

"Nobody's thought of looking there," said Tom Merry. "But how could they be there? That's where they were taken from. If they were in Selby's study, he'd have seen them."

"I mean, they might have been hidden in his study," explained Talbot. "Suppose, for instance, the chap who took them shoved them into his chimney?"

They'd be quite safe from being found there, and nobody would think of looking for them there. At least, we haven't thought of it so far. They're only coins, you see, and could be chucked into a small space."

Tom Merry whistled.

"It's a chance," he said. "My hat! Just imagine old Selby sitting within a few feet of his giddy treasures, and not knowing it. Of course, it's as likely as not; it would be the handiest place to hide them. The fellow needn't even have risked taking them out of the study at all. What asses we were not to think of that!"

"Let's go and see Selby."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors hastily finished their ginger-beer and made their way to the Third Form master's study. Mr. Selby was there, and he frowned when there came a knock at his door. It opened to reveal a crowd of Fourth Formers and Shell fellows.

"You have not found the coins?" he asked sarcastically.

"No, sir," said Tom Merry; "not yet."

"Then what do you want?"

"It's occurred to us that the fellow who took them might have hidden them in this room itself, sir," said Tom respectfully.

"Nonsense! I believe they have been stolen," said Mr. Selby snappishly. "And I certainly do not see how they could have been hidden in this room, which I occupy every day, without my seeing them."

"Would you mind our looking, sir?" said Tom. "You want to get them back. They might be in the chimney."

"Nonsense!"

"There's a loose board in the floor, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,492.

too," said Talbot, feeling with his boot. "It creaked as I came in."

"Yaas, wathah, I noticed that."

"I believe it is utter nonsense," said Mr. Selby crossly. "I am convinced that Frayne has stolen my coins, and taken them away from the school with him. However, if you choose to make a search, I do not object."

"We'll try the floor first," said Tom Merry, and he turned back the study carpet. "Now, where's the loose board?"

"It's not quite loose," said Blake, kneeling down. "There are nails in it. But—my hat—look at these nails! They're twisted over!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors were excited now. Even Mr. Selby lost his expression of contemptuous indifference, and peered down through his glasses. There was a short length of board nailed down to the joists underneath. But the nails, instead of being driven into the head, were turned over and flattened down, so that the board was scarcely attached to the supports below. They could not, of course, have been originally in that condition. It was proof enough that the board had been raised some time, and whoever had raised it, had not cared to make a sound of knocking by driving in the nails again.

"My word!" said Digby. "You see, the board's been prised up, and then the johnny couldn't hammer the nails in again—it would have awakened the whole house."

"We're on the giddy track! We'll soon have this board up!" said Tom Merry, opening his pocket-knife. The board was very loosely fixed, and with his strongest blade, Tom Merry soon prised it up. The juniors dragged it back, and a dark space, thick with dust and cobwebs, was revealed. There was a yell of excitement.

"Found!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Selby. He was on his knee beside the opening in a twinkling.

In the dust and cobwebs lay a little heap of ancient gold and silver coins—Roman coins, Greek coins, Byzantine coins. Mr. Selby's glasses almost dropped off in his feverish excitement as he grabbed at them. They were dragged out. The Form-master counted them, his fingers trembling—he knew their number well, and they were all there, to the last piece.

"Got 'em all, sir?" asked Wally.

"Yes, yes!"

Mr. Selby rose to his feet and placed the coins on the table. Expressing gratitude or any gentle emotion came awkwardly to the crusty Form-master, but he felt that he had to thank the juniors for their services.

"I—I am very much obliged to you, my boys," he said. "It—it appears that they were here all the time, and—and—Frayne certainly cannot have taken them."

"Perhaps you'll say you're sorry for suspecting Joe now, sir," said Wally resentfully.

"Don't be impertinent, D'Arcy minor. But—but certainly I am sorry I suspected Frayne. Apparently he had nothing to do with this—anyway, it is clear that the coins were merely hidden, and not stolen. You may go. I am obliged to you all."

"Oh, don't mensh, sir!" said Wally.

And the juniors trooped joyfully from the study. The numismatic collection was found, and Joe Frayne was saved. Tom Merry & Co. rejoiced. Levison of

the Fourth met them as they came away from Mr. Selby's study, and he smiled sneeringly as he saw by their looks that the long search had been crowned with success at last.

"You've found them?" he asked.

"Yes," said Tom Merry shortly.

"Where were they hidden?"

"Under the floor in Mr. Selby's own study!"

"Who thought of looking there for them—Talbot?"

"Yes."

"What did I tell you? What—Oh! Oh! Ow!"

Tom Merry did not trouble to speak. He hit out from the shoulder, and Levison of the Fourth rolled along the floor of the passage.

"Now, if you want some more, you've only got to say another rotten thing about Talbot!" said Tom Merry grimly.

Levison picked himself up. But he did not say another word; he only scowled blackly, and the juniors turned their backs on him and left him.

CHAPTER 10.

Before the Housemaster.

DURING the next few days the depression of spirits which the fellows had noticed about Talbot seemed to have disappeared.

The Shell fellow had regained his old cheery manner, his old sunny smile.

It was as if a weight had been taken from his mind; but the juniors little dreamed what was the weight that had been removed.

The schoolboy cracksman had broken with Hookey Walker & Co. With one resolute effort he had thrown his black past behind him.

He only waited a favourable opportunity for restoring the booty he had taken, and thus clearing his conscience.

No wonder his heart was lighter.

No wonder, too, that Hookey Walker had been astonished by the change in him. For Talbot himself was astonished when he reflected upon it.

He had been at St. Jim's only a few short weeks, and those weeks had made a complete revolution in his thoughts, his feelings, and his way of life.

To throw behind him all criminal associations, to live a decent life like the chums he had met at the school, to keep his honour unstained—that was the dream now of the lad who was the son of a desperate criminal, and had been leader of a dangerous gang.

A month earlier he had not shrunk from theft and falsehood; now, the fact that he had lied to Tom Merry & Co. troubled him more than all his crimes.

It had been unavoidable, if he was to stay at St. Jim's. If Levison had only let him alone, it would not have been needed. It was strange that the Toff, who had led a life of crime, should trouble about that. But it was so. For the reform in his character, sudden as it had come, was complete.

And he realised, too, that curiously enough, it had come only in time to save him. For if he had refused to have his desk searched, and Levison had called in the Housemaster to insist upon it—what then? Only twenty-four hours earlier Talbot had consigned his cracksman's tools to the deepest part of the river, and so he had been able to show the interior of that mysterious desk to the confounded Levison.

The cad of the Fourth, of course, cunningly as he had made out the case, had made no allowance at all for a possible repentance in the criminal. It was that repentance which had saved the schoolboy cracksman from discovery.

And that seemed to the Toff a good omen for the future. It was as if Providence had given him his reward.

And, for the future, there was hard work and honesty. It seemed bright enough. He would not have the wealth that might have been his by pursuing the old evil courses; but he would have freedom from care, freedom to enjoy honest friendship, a clear conscience—worth more than wealth.

It came into his mind at times that the past could not be so easily got rid of—that sooner or later his past would find him out.

But he put that thought resolutely from his mind, and set his face towards the future with a determination to do right, whatever the cost.

And so his heart was lighter than it had been for long, weary days, his look was more cheerful; he was able to throw himself into the games and occupations of the juniors with a heart free from care.

Meanwhile, Levison was almost an outcast in his House.

His wild accusation against Talbot had



"Queer place to find a picture," said Talbot. "Wasn't Dr. Monk's Leonardo da Vinci?" said Tom

been talked of throughout the school; and from the juniors it came to the seniors, and from them to the masters. Such a story was hardly likely to remain a secret.

A few days after the recovery of Mr. Selby's collection, Levison was sent for by his Housemaster.

The spy of the Fourth guessed easily enough what he was wanted for, and it was with fear and trembling that he made his way to Mr. Railton's study. He had to justify himself, and he knew that it was impossible. He found Mr. Railton with a stern, grim brow. The Housemaster fixed his eyes on the sullen face of the junior.

"A very strange story has come to my ears, Levison," he said. "I understand that you have accused Talbot of the Shell of dishonesty—theft—in short, of being a criminal, who has entered the school with ulterior motives. That is a most extraordinary accusation to make. Why have you done this?"

"I believe it, sir," said Levison. "I thought it my duty to show him up. I believe that he is going to rob the school, as he robbed the Grammar School and Glyn House."

"Then you adhere to your belief?"

"Yes, sir!" said Levison stubbornly.

"Give me your reasons. I will try to be patient with you."

"There are my reasons, sir."

Levison placed on the study table the paper he had drawn up. Mr. Railton read it through carefully, his brow growing darker and darker.

"This is mere nonsense," he said. "All these circumstances can be explained away. I understand that Talbot has explained everything satisfactorily to his friends."

"They don't know him as I do!"

"How can you know him better than the others?"

"I can see through him," said Levison. "He has deceived the others. He can't deceive me. A detective wouldn't think all that was nonsense."

"I am not a detective, so I cannot say," replied Mr. Railton. "But I will say this—you have made a terrible accusation against a boy you appear to dislike, without offering the slightest real truth in support of your assertion. You say these burglaries have all occurred since Talbot came to the school. They have occurred since Blenkinsop came, for that matter, but you would hardly suggest that Blenkinsop was liable to suspicion. Talbot was on the scene when they took place—so were a great many other juniors. Talbot possesses a desk which he would never allow anyone to look into; but I learn that, on this accusation being made, he immediately threw it open to inspection. I have spoken both to Talbot and to Tom Merry on this subject. Every circumstance has been fully explained."

"About Frayne—"

"It seems that Frayne knew Talbot before he came here. Talbot explains that he came across him in a London slum and befriended him. Tom Merry has done the same thing, but you attach no suspicion to him. It appears, Levison, that this ridiculous theory you have formed is coloured all through by your personal dislike of Talbot."

"Let him explain what part of Australia he comes from, what people he knows there, sir," said Levison. "He always avoids talking about where he came from."

"I have questioned him, Levison, and he has explained to me. He lived in a back-country township in Australia, and had few acquaintances. I am not a detective, Levison, to make searching investigations on the ground of these absurd accusations. You have done Talbot a serious wrong."

Levison was silent.

"I should report this matter to the Head, and you would be severely punished," went on the Housemaster. "But I understand that your school-fellows have taken their own method of making you feel the wrong you have done. But I forbid you to repeat anything of the kind in the future, Levison. If you do so, I shall immediately acquaint the Head with it, and you will be asked to leave the school. Now you may go."

And Levison went.

After he had gone, Mr. Railton remained with a thoughtful frown on his brow. He looked again over the paper Levison had laid on his table, conning it over point by point. Then he carefully destroyed it. But the frown remained on his brow. Was it possible that the Housemaster felt a lingering doubt? He shook his head abruptly, as if dismissing the matter from his mind.

But when he met Talbot again he gave the boy a searching look, as if he would read his very heart. But the cheery, sunny-looking junior, chatting carelessly with the Shell fellows, looked what all St. Jim's believed him to be—a happy, careless schoolboy.

And the Housemaster smiled at the lingering doubt that had found a place in his mind, and dismissed it.

CHAPTER 11.

The Scouts' Find.

TOM MERRY came downstairs in his Boy Scout garb, and put on his wide-brimmed hat as he stepped into the quadrangle.

It was a Wednesday afternoon, and the Curlew Patrol were going for a "run." There were already seven members of the Curlew Patrol—the Terrible Three and the chums of Study No. 6. But Talbot had joined it, making the total eight. All the fellows wanted Talbot in the Curlews, and he had been very glad to join. He had taken up scouting very keenly.

Talbot looked very handsome in Boy Scout rig, with his big hat shading his handsome, clear-cut face. Tom Merry looked over his patrol.

"Ready?" he asked. "Yaas, wathah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, adjusting his eyeglass with care. "Pway give us the plogwamme."

"I am going ahead, and you fellows have got to follow the giddy track in the wood," said Tom. "Talbot's coming with me. If you catch us we stand you a feed in the tuckshop when we get in. If you don't, you fellows stand the feed. Savvy?"

"Good egg!" said Blake. "Lead on, Macduff!"

And the Curlews marched out.

At the stile in the lane they separated. Tom Merry and Talbot plunged into the wood with five minutes' start. Talbot glanced round him curiously, wondering what Tom Merry would think if he had known of that meeting with Hookey Walker in that very place a few nights ago. But all that was a sealed book now.

"We'll give 'em a jolly good run," said Tom Merry, as they tramped through the shady wood. "It was a good idea of yours, Talbot, to have a Scout run this afternoon. You'll soon get into the way of it. Your experience in the bush in Australia will be useful to you."

Talbot frowned slightly. Every reference that was made to Australia—a country he had never seen—reminded him of the fact that he had come to St. Jim's with a lie upon his lips.

And yet, now it was impossible to escape from the net which he had spread around his own feet. His conscience was growing strangely acute of late. Sometimes he felt a strong impulse to tell Tom Merry the whole truth, and throw himself upon his mercy. But always he thought better of it.

Even if Tom Merry's friendship had stood the strain, it would have burdened him with a guilty secret to keep, which would have brought a shadow into his happy life. Talbot felt that it would not do. And yet every reference to his supposed early life in Australia made him wince.

"This way," said Tom, without noticing the momentary cloud that had passed over his companion's face. "Right through the wood."

"I've heard you fellows speak of an old hut in the wood somewhere," said Talbot. "Shall we make for that?"

"As good as any other point," agreed Tom. "We'll stop there for a rest. It's a good step from here. Tread lightly, and don't leave a trail."

"Right-ho!"

Taking care to leave as little "sign"



Picture stolen from the Grammar School? "Yes; excitedly. "And, my hat, this is it!"

as possible, the two Scouts pursued their way through the wood. In half an hour they reached the old hut on the edge of the glade, where once a poacher had lived, or had been supposed to live. The hut was a tumbledown ruin. The spot was very lonely, deeply shadowed by great trees.

Tom Merry looked back from the hut. The woods were very silent round them. "No sign of the bounders yet," he remarked.

"They don't know which direction we've taken," said Talbot. "They won't pick up our trail in a hurry, either."

"Rather not. We can afford a bit of a rest. I've got a bottle of ginger-beer in my haversack and a couple of buns."

"Good!" The juniors sat down on the displaced beams in the old hut, keeping their eyes on the open doorway, ready to steal away at a sign that the pursuers were at hand.

The buns and the ginger-beer were very welcome after the tramp in the wood. Talbot was looking very curiously about the place.

"I've heard the fellows say that there is a cellar under this floor," he remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's so, and a secret passage to the old castle on Wayland Hill. We'll explore it some day. It wouldn't be quite fair on the pack to get out that way now."

Talbot laughed.

"No; but I'd like to have a look at it. Lots of time. They're nowhere near us yet."

"Right-ho!" said Tom. "I'll show you the place quick enough; it's not hidden."

He dragged away a heap of old brambles and twigs, and a square stone in the floor was disclosed. There was an iron ring in the stone, and Tom Merry seized it and pulled.

A dark aperture was disclosed, and a stone step could be seen.

Talbot lighted a match and peered down into the dark recess. Tom Merry followed his glance and uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hallo! What's that?"

"What's what?"

"There's something there. Looks like a bundle."

"Somebody's been here lately, then."

"Looks like it."

Tom Merry stepped down into the opening and struck another match. The light gleamed upon a bundle, fastened up in brown paper of a common kind. The paper was quite dry, showing that it had not long been in the recess.

Tom Merry lifted the bundle up into the hut.

"Somebody's hid that there," he remarked. "Jolly queer, isn't it? I suppose it's no business of ours."

Talbot regarded the bundle with a curious glance.

"Jolly queer!" he agreed.

"Shall we open it?" asked Tom doubtfully. "I suppose it belongs to somebody, and the owner has hidden it here for some reason or other. I suppose we'd better leave it where we found it—what?"

Talbot looked thoughtful.

"It's queer for anyone to hide a thing in that place if he came by it honestly," he said. "I should say that it's something that's been stolen and hid there for safety."

"I suppose that's most likely," agreed Tom Merry, after a moment's thought. "There have been two robberies in the neighbourhood lately—at Glyn House

and the Grammar School, you know. Rather a find if we came on the plunder—not that it's likely. The giddy cracksmen wouldn't hide his swag here. I think they call it swag."

"I don't know," said Talbot. "I think we should be justified in looking into the bundle, anyway; it's not sealed."

"No; only a string round it."

"Well, see what it is, and then tie it up again if there's nothing fishy about it," suggested Talbot.

"Good idea."

Tom Merry untied the string and opened out the brown paper. He was naturally curious to know what might be in the mysterious bundle so strangely found in that unexpected place. As the paper opened out Tom Merry gave a gasp.

"My only hat!"

"What is it?"

"A picture!"

"Queer place to find a picture!" said Talbot. "Wasn't there a picture stolen from the Grammar School?"

"Yes; Dr. Monk's Leonardo da

diamond necklace! And these blessed papers—they must be the bonds that were taken from Mr. Glyn's safe. I shouldn't wonder if the whole lot was here. It was the same chap who robbed the Grammar School, as everybody supposed. This proves it."

Tom Merry's eyes were dancing. It was a glorious and unexpected find to make while on a run with the Scouts. The two juniors examined their prize eagerly and forgot all about the Scouts who were on their track. There was a sudden shout as Jack Blake broke from the trees and ran up and touched them on the shoulder one after the other with his staff.

"Caught!" yelled Blake.

And the other Scouts came running from the trees.

"Caught!" said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I hadn't forgotten all about you! We've made a find! Look!"

"My hat!"

"Gweat Scott!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, coming up, breathless.

"What have you got there, deah boys?"

"Loot!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"Where did you find it?" asked Manners.

"In the cellar under the hut. I was showing the place to Talbot, when I spotted the bundle. It's all the stuff that was taken from Glyn House and the Grammar School, and the thief must have hidden it here."

"What luck!" said Monty Lowther. "Old Monk will dance when he sees his picture again. Gordon Gay told me that he's going round in sackcloth and ashes on account of it. And Glyn's pater will be pleased."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Never mind scouting now, you fellows; we've got to get these things to the police station," said Tom Merry. "We'll go straight to Rylcombe and hand them over to Inspector Skeat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And in great delight the Scouts marched off to Rylcombe with their prize, and Inspector Skeat almost fell down in astonishment when they brought them into the police station.

The inspector had a full list of the stolen articles, of course, and he went over the recovered property, and announced that every article was there.

"This was a good day's work for you, young gentlemen," said the inspector. "Who was it found them?"

"Tom Merry," said Talbot quickly. "He was showing me the cellar under the hut when he spotted the bundle."

"Then Dr. Monk and Mr. Glyn will be very much obliged to you, Master Merry. This lot altogether is worth close on twenty thousand pounds."

"Bai Jove!"

"Jolly lucky find!" said Tom Merry. "I'd like to see the face of the thief when he comes back for his plunder and finds it isn't there!"

"Bai Jove! It would be a wippin' ideah to keep a watch on the place, and nab the wascal when he comes back!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The inspector smiled.

"You may be sure we shall have our eyes open for him," he said. "The swag is found, and I hope we shall have the burglar, too, before long."

And the juniors returned to St. Jim's in great spirits. They left the inspector in great spirits, too, feeling that he had a chance at the mysterious cracksmen at last. And the news of the great find caused considerable excitement at St. Jim's.

Bernard Glyn immediately dashed off on his motor-bike to carry the news

(Continued on page 18.)



Vinci," said Tom Merry excitedly. "And, my hat, this is it!"

He unrolled the canvas, which showed plainly where it had been ripped out of the frame with cuts from a knife. An Italian face—that of a smiling woman—was disclosed. Tom Merry gave a shout of glee.

"It's it!"

"You know the picture?"

"I've seen it at the Grammar School a dozen times!" said Tom Merry exultantly. "Great Scott! We've come on the place where the thief hid his giddy loot. No doubt about that. I suppose he thought nobody else knew of this place—naturally—and he thought it was a safe place to hide things till the hue-and-cry was over. Look here! Here's the money, too—quids wrapped up in paper!"

"By Jove!"

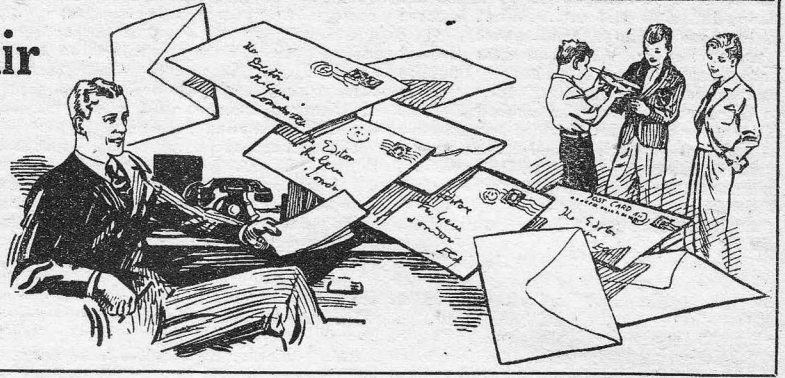
There was another parcel as well as the rolled picture, that had been contained within the brown paper. Tom Merry opened it with fingers that trembled with excitement. There was a sudden gleam of precious stones in the light.

"Diamonds!" ejaculated Talbot.

"Yes, rather! That's Miss Glyn's

The Editor's Chair

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don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, chums! My announcements about the revival of the St. Frank's stories have brought me many letters from readers expressing their delight, and I am pleased to see this general enthusiasm and satisfaction for the return of those old favourites, Nipper & Co. In addition, several readers raise a point about Jimmy Silver & Co., the chums of Rookwood. Here is what R. Edgar, of Durham, says: "I saw in Wednesday's GEM about the return of Nipper & Co. I would like to see Jimmy Silver & Co. back, so why not run another book containing stories of both?"

Jack Golding, of East London, who is the spokesman for his friends, makes the same suggestion. After heartily endorsing the return of Nipper & Co., he states: "There is another bunch of youths we would also very much like to see reappear. This is Jimmy Silver & Co. Would it not be possible to have another companion paper to the GEM and 'Magnet,' featuring both St. Frank's and Rookwood stories?"

I thank these readers, and the many others who have written, for their suggestions. I should like to point out, however, that the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. appear at intervals in the "Schoolboys' Own Library." As a matter of fact, there's a Rookwood story in the October issues, entitled, "Follow Uncle James!"

I know that the readers quoted above are suggesting another weekly publication, and the "Schoolboys' Own" is a monthly; but, at the same time, their requirements are being catered for. "Schoolboys' Own" stories are extra long, which really makes up for the Rookwood yarns not appearing weekly. I should advise readers to make a note that book-length stories of Greyfriars, Rookwood, and St. Frank's will be published in the October issues of the "Schoolboys' Own," price 4d. each.

"JOLLY JINKS AT ST. JIM'S!"

Martin Clifford "hits the high spots" again with his next ripping yarn of the chums of St. Jim's. It is a story full of fun, ragging and japing, all of which emanates from Tom Merry & Co.'s bright idea of celebrating the birthday of Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell.

There is a little dissension between the rivals of the School House and the New House over the idea, which brings down upon all of them the wrath of Mr. Linton himself. Figgins & Co. thereupon withdraw their interest in the celebration scheme; but Tom Merry & Co., amid no little fun and frolic, go ahead with it.

They little know, however, that,

meanwhile, the rivals of the New House are plotting a daring jape to "dish" their rivals—a jape which has highly amusing results, though not altogether in the way the japers expect.

There's not a dull moment in this bright and breezy story, which readers will heartily enjoy from the first word to the last.

"HARRY WHARTON'S SACRIFICE!"

Frank Richards, too, is in first-class form with his great yarn of the early schooldays of Harry Wharton & Co. It tells of the dangerous position into which Hazeldene's folly has led him, and how others become involved in his troubles.

The cad of the Remove is in the clutches of a moneylender, and the man threatens to expose him unless he pays his debt. But desperate as Hazeldene's plight is, it is no excuse for theft, which is the cad's resource in his effort to stave off disaster for a time. The theft brings Harry Wharton into the matter, however, which is to mean a great deal to Harry and Hazeldene in subsequent events.

Together with jokes and "Just My Fun," this grand Greyfriars story sets the seal on another tip-top issue of the old paper. Don't miss it, chums!

"SCHEMERS OF STUDY NO. 7."

Something else which is much too good to miss is the ripping number of the ever-popular "Magnet," now on sale. This week's lively yarn will greatly entertain all "Gemites." It features Peter Todd, Tom Dutton, and Billy Bunter, the queer trio of Study No. 7, who set out to seek revenge on Loder, the bullying prefect of the Sixth. Unfortunately, things don't pan out as the three schemers anticipate, and the fun and excitement which follow will keep you smiling throughout this sparkling story. Don't forget, ask for the "Magnet" to-day!

CRICKET "DOWN UNDER."

Football is in full swing again, but during the winter months cricket will loom large in the thoughts of all sportsmen. For the pick of England's cricketers will be "down under" making a big bid to wrest the "Ashes" from the "Aussies," which the latter won when they were over here last.

The efforts of our Test team will be watched with the keenest in-

terest by most of us at home in England, and—thanks to the wireless—we shall have up-to-the-second reports of how our men are faring.

Youth gets its chance in the rather experimental team which has been selected, but the players have only to reproduce their county form to be sure of putting up a big fight.

The Test matches have been arranged as follows: First Test, at Brisbane, Dec. 4-9; Second Test, at Sydney, Dec. 18-23; Third Test, at Melbourne, Jan. 1-6; Fourth Test, at Adelaide, Jan. 29-Feb. 3; Fifth Test, at Melbourne, Feb. 26-Mar. 3.

Owing to the wretched weather it has been a poor season for English cricket, but let's hope our Test team makes up for it by bringing back those "Ashes" from Australia, as our men did the last time they made a visit "down under."

IN REPLY.

The richest boy in the world, J. Baxter, of Peckham, is the grandson of the Nizam of Hyderabad. He is two and a half years old, and is heir to the fabulous fortune of £230,000,000!

The water a steam-engine uses, F. Mason, of Swindon, depends, of course, on the speed at which it is travelling. An express moving at 60 m.p.h. will consume about 30 gallons of water a minute.

A REMINDER.

By the way, let me remind readers that, as usual, the "Holiday Annual" is selling like hot cakes. If you want to make sure of obtaining this year's best-ever issue, get in early with your order!

PEN PALS.

Frank Wells, Havelock, Marlborough, New Zealand; stamps; age 13-14.

Ian Brown, Havelock, Marlborough, New Zealand; pen pals; age 13-14.

Miss Joan Bayly, c/o Mrs. George Smith, Havelock, Marlborough, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 10-12.

Miss Elsie McKay, Havelock, Marlborough, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 14-16; stamps.

B. T. Lim, 378, Orchard Road, Singapore, Straits Settlements; age 14-17; British Colonies.

Frank Davis, Garthowen, 276, Carrington Road, Coogee, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia; age 15-18; stamps, films, sports.

R. E. Tiekou, United Africa Co., Ltd., P.O. Box 151, Nsawam, West Africa; London, Scotland, U.S.A.

THE EDITOR.

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PEN PALS COUPON

19-9-36

home. And Levison, when he heard the news, felt sick at heart. What became of his case against Talbot now?

True, he could surmise that Talbot had placed the plunder there. That he had intentionally led Tom Merry there to discover it. But why should Talbot, if he were the thief, restore his plunder to the last jot and tittle? That was a question that Levison found it impossible to answer, and for the first time a chill of doubt entered his breast, and he asked himself whether he had made a mistake, after all.

"What price that feed?" Jack Blake asked, after the news had been imparted and the excitement had died down a little. "We caught you, you know."

Talbot laughed. "Quite right!" he said. "It's up to us, Tom. We were caught. This way to the tuckshop!"

And Tom Merry good-humouredly assented. And the Curlews gathered in the school shop, and Tom Merry and Talbot stood the feed.

CHAPTER 12.

The Parting of the Ways.

DARKNESS lay upon St. Jim's. In the Shell dormitory Talbot stirred restlessly in his bed.

Many times of late he had been restless and wakeful at nights. In the midst of his new-found peace of mind a troublesome thought had haunted him.

Hookey Walker had set his mind upon "cracking the crib" at St. Jim's, well knowing the valuable loot that was to be secured there. Since Talbot had refused his aid, had the ruffian abandoned the scheme? Talbot hardly dared to believe so. Hookey had said that the Toff would hear from him soon; but he had not heard. How the "gang" had taken his defection from their select society the boy did not know. But he knew that they must be bitterly angry and disappointed. Especially at his determination to restore the fruits of the previous robberies. Would Hookey Walker & Co. abandon that promising "job" because their former comrade had left them?

Talbot hoped so, but he feared. And the thought that under the shadows of the night the cracksmen might be lurking about the old school often disturbed his slumbers. More than one night, while the rest of the dormitory slept, Talbot had heard some faint noise in the house or the quadrangle, and had descended to make sure that all was safe. But as yet there had been nothing and his hope was growing stronger that Hookey Walker had given up the idea.

For if the cracksmen had attempted the robbery, Talbot knew what he must do. He must stop them. At any risk to himself, at the price even of betrayal, he must not allow his benefactor to be robbed.

It was the last and most terrible test of his repentance, but if the trial came, he was determined not to shrink from it. And he was determined, too, that if the cracksmen came they should not find him napping.

This particular night he was very sleepless. In the street of Wayland that afternoon he had caught a glimpse of a rascal who seemed like the Rabbit, and who had avoided him at once. If it was the Rabbit, it meant that the gang were in Wayland, and that would mean they had a "job" in the neighbourhood. He might have been mistaken, but a trifle light as air was sufficient to make him sleepless.

And at midnight there had been the

bark of a dog in the quadrangle. Taggles' dog sometimes barked at night, and there had been but a single bark, followed by silence. But Talbot knew of old Hookey Walker & Co.'s method of dealing with troublesome dogs. A piece of drugged meat would have silenced the dog soon enough.

His alarm was vague, but he could not sleep.

In the silence of the night he lay listening for some sound, but no sound came; the school had been long asleep, and the old house was silent.

But the silence itself alarmed the boy in his present feverish state of mind. He had resolved to descend and make sure, as he had done several times before, since his last meeting with Hookey Walker at the stile in Rylcombe Lane.

He slipped out of bed without waking the other fellows, and hastily put on a few clothes. With bare feet he stole silently to the door.

He opened it and listened. There was no sound below. He stepped into the passage, and pulled the door shut behind him.

The house was dark, but a full, round moon sailed high over the quadrangle, and shafts of light came in at the many windows, cutting like bars of silver across the darkness inside.

Talbot descended the stairs, and stood in a flood of white light that streamed in through the window in the hall.

Still there was silence around him.

That small window, half hidden by the stone porch outside, was a favourite spot for making an entry into the house, if, indeed, thieves were at work. Talbot stepped to it, and examined it. The casement came open in his hand.

The lock had been forced. The boy stood quite still, his heart thumping.

In spite of the dead silence around him, he knew now that there were thieves in the house. They had entered by that window, closing, but not fastening it behind them, as a way of escape in case of discovery.

Hookey Walker had come. He would not have come alone. Probably, almost certainly, Nobby and the Rabbit were with him. Where were they now? In the Head's study, probably, where the safe was situated, with the historic school silver in it—a rich prize for the gang, as they well knew.

Talbot stood motionless—thinking.

He would not allow the robbery to take place—that was impossible. But to give the alarm, which would be easy—what then? The thieves, if arrested, would denounce him at once as a former accomplice, that was certain; and they would prove it at their trial, even if the accusation was pooh-poohed when it was made. But that was not the only consideration that made the Toff hesitate. These men, thieves and rascals as they were, were his old comrades and associates—they were engaged upon a rascally robbery, but it was a piece of rascality that he would cheerfully have shared with them a few weeks previously.

Rascals as they were, he could not betray them.

To go to them, to warn them to desist and go—that was the only alternative. But would they go? Hookey Walker was more likely to lay him senseless with a jemmy than to yield to his order to desist from robbery.

It was a fearful risk, for he knew that he had nothing but hostility to expect from his old friends now, especially if he sought to baulk them in their present purpose. But Talbot soon resolved.

He knew no fear.

With quiet steps the boy made his way towards the Head's study. Outside the door he paused and listened. Not a glimmer of light came from within. But there was a low, steady sound—a sound that was familiar of old to the ears of the Toff—the sound of a drill working upon iron.

They were there! A rug was laid along the inner side of the door, to keep in the dim light by which the thieves were working.

With a hand that did not tremble, Talbot turned the handle of the door and pushed it silently open.

So silent was it that the three men in the study did not observe it, and Talbot saw them before they saw him.

Hookey Walker was working with the drill upon the safe, and the Rabbit was holding an electric torch for him to work by. Nobby stood by with a bludgeon in his hand, his eye upon the progress of Hookey's work.

Talbot watched them quietly for a full minute.

Hookey Walker paused in his labour, and muttered a curse.

"The Toff could have opened this safe easy as winkin'," he muttered. "And it's a good two hours for me with the drill, 'ang 'im!"

He moved as he spoke, and his movement made him aware of the open door. He swung round, with a startled oath.

Nobby and the Rabbit turned at the same moment. The sight of the boy standing there, half-dressed, his eyes fixed upon them, his face pale but calm and steady, seemed to petrify the ruffians for a moment.

"The Toff," muttered Hookey Walker at last.

"You've come to lend a 'and, Toff?" said the Rabbit, in a whisper.

Talbot shook his head.

"You ain't goin' back on your old friends, Toff?" murmured Nobby, taking a tighter grip upon his bludgeon.

Talbot spoke at last.

"You've got to chuck this."

Hookey Walker breathed hard.

"You ain't bearin' a 'and, Toff?" he asked.

"No!"

"Then you'd better git back to bed and leave us alone. We don't want to hurt you, though you've gone back on us. Get back to bed."

"I can't leave you here."

"You don't mean as you've come down to give us away?" said Hookey Walker, taking up a steel jemmy that lay among his tools, with a very ugly look on his stubbly face.

"No."

"Wot do you mean, then?"

"I mean that I cannot let you rob the school. I don't want to betray you," said Talbot steadily. "But you must go. I came here to warn you to go."

"And if we won't?" sneered Hookey Walker.

"If you won't go, I shall give the alarm."

"And what will 'appen to you arter that?" said the Rabbit. "If we're took, you'll be took along with us. We'll jolly soon tell 'em who you are!"

"I understand that. But it is better than allowing you to rob this place. Leave it alone. There are other cribs for you—leave this place alone. I served you well when I was with you—leave me in peace here, for old times' sake," said Talbot.

"You give us the go-by," said Hookey Walker. "We got to work without you. You ask us to leave you alone. Leave us alone, and we'll leave you be. But

we ain't lettin' up on this 'ere. This 'ere is a plum, and we're baggin' it."
 "You bet!" said the Rabbit tersely.
 Talbot made a backward step to the open door.
 "I give you two minutes to clear off," he said. "If you're not gone then, I shall wake the house, at any risk."
 "Will you?"

Hookey Walker's hand jerked forward, and the steel jemmy whizzed suddenly through the air, direct for Talbot's handsome face.

**CHAPTER 13.
 Denounced!**

CRASH!
 If the murderous weapon had reached its aim, Talbot would have fallen to the floor, stunned. But he had been watching the ruffian. And he had sprung back in time. The jemmy crashed upon the wall behind him, shattering the glass of a picture, and dropped heavily to the carpet.

The crash rang almost like thunder through the silent house.

Talbot made one spring into the passage outside. Then his voice rang out sharply and clearly through the School House of St. Jim's.

"Help, help! Thieves! Help!"
 "By gum!" muttered the Rabbit. "You've done it now, Hookey! We've got to clear!"

"He's waking the house!" snarled Nobby. "Come on! No time for the safe now! Lucky if we git clear at all!"

"Him first!" snarled Hookey. "I'll out him afore I go!"

They ran into the passage.

Talbot had reached the hall, and was on the lower stairs, still shouting. There was a sound of opening doors above. The alarm was spreading in the house. Voices called, and a light flashed in the upper passages. Talbot had switched on the electric light in the hall now, and the three ruffians ran into dazzling light.

Nobby and the Rabbit bolted directly for the unfastened window, and dragged it open, and tumbled one after the other out into the night.

Hookey Walker made a bound for the boyish figure on the stairs. His face was almost convulsed with rage.

The jemmy was in his hand again now, and there was no doubt of his intention. Talbot, on the stairs, faced him with grim coolness.

"Better cut it!" he said, without a quiver in his voice.

"You first!" snarled the ruffian. "You traitor—you nark! You first!"

And he hurled himself forward and upward at the boy.

Talbot dodged the murderous blow, and closed with the ruffian, and hurled him backwards. The jemmy clanged on the stairs, and Hookey Walker went back with a crash down the stairs to the floor below.

"Well done, Talbot!" shouted a voice above.

Mr. Railton came dashing down half-dressed. He had seen Talbot's action in the glare of the electric light.

He passed the panting boy and leaped upon the cracksmen as Hookey Walker was struggling dazedly to his feet.

Mr. Railton was an athlete, and in his grasp the cracksmen, strong as he was, had no chance. He struggled fiercely, but the Housemaster held him with a grip of iron.

Talbot looked on, with a white, set face.



Nobby and the Rabbit bolted for the window and tumbled out into the night, but Hookey Walker made a bound for Talbot on the stairs, a jemmy raised in his hand. "You first!" snarled the ruffian. "You traitor—you first!"

The revengeful, murderous attempt of the ruffian had cost him his liberty. There was no escape for Hookey Walker now. Kildare and two or three more of the Sixth were already rushing downstairs to the Housemaster's aid. Hookey Walker was a prisoner, and Talbot, with sick misery at his heart, waited for what would follow.

He had repented of his evil doings, and had stood by his repentance, and now he was to pay for it. The past was not so lightly shaken off as he had hoped. Hookey Walker, burning for revenge, and with a prospect of a long term of imprisonment before him, had no motive for keeping silence concerning the Toff. As soon as he was secured the torrent of denunciation would come pouring forth. Talbot knew it, and was prepared for it.

"Got him, sir!" exclaimed Kildare, as he laid his strong grasp upon the struggling ruffian. "Safe as houses! Get a rope, somebody!"

"Safe enough!" said Darrell of the Sixth, as he inserted his fingers in Hookey Walker's collar and seized him. "He can't get away. Are there any more here?"

"Did you see any others, Talbot?" asked Mr. Railton, panting.

"They are gone," said Talbot dully.

"Ah! The window is open! Never mind, we have secured one. We must see if there has been any robbery effected."

"That is all right, sir. I interrupted them before they had finished drilling the safe. Nothing has been taken."

"My dear lad," exclaimed the Housemaster, "you have rendered a great service to-night! But for you there would have been no alarm. Ah! Here is the Head!"

Dr. Holmes came hurrying up, in

dressing-gown and slippers. His face was startled and alarmed.

"It is all right, sir," said the Housemaster. "We have secured the ruffian. It was an attempted burglary, but, thanks to Talbot, no harm has been done."

"Bless my soul! You heard them, Talbot—you came down——"

"Yes, sir."

"This ruffian attacked him most savagely," said Mr. Railton, with a gesture towards Hookey Walker, who lay panting breathlessly, and still feebly struggling in the grasp of Kildare and Darrell and several other seniors. "Talbot threw him, luckily, and then I arrived."

"Secure the soundrel!" said the Head.

"Here's a rope!" said Tom Merry, bounding downstairs with a cord in his hand.

The juniors were swarming out of the dormitories now.

Tom Merry bound the hands of the captured cracksmen, while the Sixth Formers held him, unable to resist.

Then they released him, and Hookey Walker sat dazedly on the floor, panting for breath, and glaring at the crowd round him, his wrists securely fastened together.

"Bai Jove! And it was Talbot spotted the wascal!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the midst of the crowd on the stairs. "What has Levi-son to say about that, I wondah?"

"I think this will shut the cad up for good!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Railton looked out of the window.

"I suppose the other rascals are clear by this time," he said. "Fortunately,

we have this desperate scoundrel. The police had better be called in at once, sir!"

"At once!" said the Head. "Let him be kept secure until they come."

Hookey Walker burst into a bitter, sardonic laugh.

"The perlice!" he repeated. "Yes, send for 'em—let 'em 'ave me! They've been waitin' for me for a long time now. Quite a 'andsome present for the peelers. And the Toff can go along with me. We'll be company for one another, Toff, same as we used to be."

And he grinned leeringly at the pale, rigid junior.

"What does he mean?" said Dr. Holmes in surprise. "Do you know this man, Talbot?"

There was no mistaking Hookey Walker's glaring glance.

"Yes, sir," said Talbot quietly.

"Know me!" said Hookey Walker, with a hideous chuckle. "I bet you! The Toff knows me, and I know the Toff. I was his father's pal, and his pal afterwards—a good pal till the Toff turned goody and rounded on me. You call 'im Talbot 'ere, but in Angel Alley he was the Toff, the son of Captain Crow, and the best cracksmen in the three kingdoms, kid as he is! Isn't that so, Toff?"

There was a sudden hush.

The cracksmen's accusation, bearing out, as it did, the accusation that Levison of the Fourth had made, struck upon the hearers with a strange shock.

For there was no doubting the malicious earnestness of the ruffian.

"What rascally, wicked nonsense are you talking, my man?" said the Head sternly. "Do you dare to say that Talbot ever had anything to do with you?"

Hookey Walker chuckled again.

"Ask him! He won't deny it, 'cause he knows that I can prove it. That kid Frayne, who was 'ere, 'e knew it, and 'e could 'ave proved it. There are a dozen coves in Angel Alley that knew old Captain Crow, and knew his son—'im that you calls Talbot! Look at me, old covey. I'm one of the gang that went for you the night the Toff 'elped you. It was a put-up job to get the Toff into your good graces, and get him admitted into the school. The Rabbit and Nobby would tell you the same, if they was 'ere!"

"Talbot!" The Head, his face suddenly pale and worn, turned to the boy he had trusted. "I cannot believe this! But—but deny it! Why are you silent? Why do you not say that this scoundrel is lying in revenge for your brave conduct in baffling him? Talbot, do you hear me?"

Talbot smiled—a haggard, terrible smile that struck a chill to the hearts of the fellows standing round him. It was the smile of a lost soul. What was the use of denying it now, and being believed, only to have it dragged up again, with the proof that Hookey Walker could furnish without limit? What was the use of more and more lies to stave off the inevitable for a few hours? Talbot did not speak.

Tom Merry gave him a strange, startled look, and caught him by the arm in almost a fierce grip. His face had gone white.

"Talbot!" Tom muttered huskily. "Speak up, man! We don't believe a word of it! We know he's lying! Say he's lying!"

Talbot shook his head.

Dr. Holmes' face grew stern and hard. "Talbot, you must speak! Cannot you tell me that this evil man is lying?"

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**"If you don't eat your porridge, Willie," said mother, "you'll never be a man like your father."
Little Willie took one look at his father—and pushed his porridge away!**

Half-a-crown has been awarded to B. Carnie, 8, Ridgeway Avenue, Gravesend, Kent.

"I cannot, sir," said Talbot.

"But—but—"

"It is true!"

CHAPTER 14.

More Sinned Against Than Sinning!

A DEAD silence followed Talbot's words.

It was broken by a ghoulis chuckle from Hookey Walker. The captured ruffian had had his revenge now glutted to the full. The misery in Talbot's face might have touched any heart but that of a baffled and revengeful criminal.

The fellows round Talbot looked at him as if they could scarcely believe their ears. It seemed like a horrible dream to Tom Merry and his comrades.

"Talbot!" Tom Merry was the first to find his voice. "Talbot! You can't mean it! That was what Levison told us, and you said it was lies!"

"But it was true!"

Mr. Railton broke in sternly.

"But if you denied it before, why do you not deny it now, Talbot?"

The unhappy boy made a gesture towards Hookey Walker.

"He can prove it."

"It is—is true?" stammered the Head.

"Quite true!" Talbot looked round at the horror-stricken faces of the St. Jim's fellows. "I'm sorry, you chaps. You trusted me, and I tried to deserve it; but luck has been against me, and the game's up."

"You bet! It's up for you, Toff, as well as me!" snarled Hookey Walker.

"Silence, ruffian!" said Dr. Holmes sternly. "Take that man away, and lock him up safely till the police come for him!"

Hookey Walker was hustled away—none too gently. He had told the truth; but there were many fellows there who resented that more bitterly than his attempted robbery at the school. Talbot had been—whatever he had been—but they could not forget all at once that they liked him—that he was their pal.

The Head fixed his eyes upon the pale, handsome face with amazement and pity in his glance.

"You admit the truth of what this ruffian has stated, Talbot?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You have been the associate of thieves? When you helped me on the occasion that I was attacked by foot-pads, you were in league with them?"

"I was in league with them," said Talbot dully.

"And your purpose?"

"To get into the school."

"With the intention of committing a robbery here?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

"Talbot," murmured Tom Merry—"Talbot, old man, you're mad! Don't say such things! It's madness!"

"Yaas, wathah!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "I don't believe you, Talbot! I don't believe a wotten word of it!"

"He's potty!" said Blake. "It can't be true!"

"And the story you told me of having lived in Australia, of your uncle who brought you to England and abandoned you—that was false?" went on the Head, his look and tone growing sterner and sterner.

"Lies!" said Talbot bitterly. "Lies from beginning to end!"

"Then who are you?"

"My father was a professional cracksmen," said Talbot, in a low, even voice, that gave hardly a sign of the terrible stress in his heart. "He was called Captain Crow among his associates. I was brought up to follow in his footsteps. I was given a good education, but only with the view of helping me to get an entry among decent people, where I could be of more use to the gang. My father was killed in a struggle with the police, and I was too useful to the gang for them to let me go. I became their leader. I have been their leader since—till I came here, and after. I was born a criminal among criminals, and until lately I never thought of being anything else. That is my story, sir. All else that I have told you is lies. I should lie now, only that scoundrel can prove what he has said. Frayne knew it; he recognised me when I came here. He knew that I had cracked the safe at Glyn House."

"Frayne knew!" exclaimed the Head. "And he did not—"

"He could not. Because I saved his chum's life, he felt that he could not betray me. That is why he left the school. He would not stay here and see it going on. He felt that that would make him my accomplice."

"The unfortunate boy!" exclaimed the Head.

"It's all rot!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn. "You never cracked my pater's safe, Talbot. You are mad! He's mad, sir, and doesn't know what he's saying! Why, only yesterday he and Tom Merry found all the stuff, and it was taken back!"

"Of course, he's wandering in his mind," said Tom Merry. "It was through Talbot I found the plunder hidden under the old hut, sir."

Talbot smiled faintly.

"I placed it there to be found."

"You—you did!"

"Yes. That was why I proposed a scouting run, and got you to show me the cellar under the old hut, so that you would find it."

"Talbot!"

"And I placed the coins under Mr. Selby's floor, and led you there to find them," said Talbot wearily. "You may as well know all. I intended to

keep them, of course, when I took them, but—"

He broke off. "You have been very frank, Talbot," said the Head quietly; "but there is one thing you have not explained."

"I will tell you everything, sir. It is not much use keeping secrets now," said Talbot, with a bitter smile.

"If you stole these things, why did you replace them? What benefit was it to you to steal and to restore? Why did you interrupt these thieves to-night, and thus bring about your own denunciation and ruin?"

"Because I had repented, sir," said Talbot steadily. "I don't suppose you will understand, any more than Hookey Walker understood; but—but after I was here, somehow I changed. I couldn't go on with it. I hardly understand it myself; but—but I couldn't keep it up. When I heard that Frayne was suspected of stealing Mr. Selby's coins, I put them where they could be found, and made the fellows find them. I met Hookey Walker, and told him I had decided to break with the gang. I placed the plunder from Glyn House and the Grammar School for Tom Merry to find it. I intended to keep a clear conscience after that. I hoped that I might win a scholarship and stay here honestly, and have a decent future to work for, and look forward to. I should have done it, too, but for what has happened to-night."

"Talbot, old man," said Tom Merry, "I—I knew you weren't so bad as you made out. I knew you were the right sort, after all."

"Thank you, Tom!" said Talbot quietly. "You have been a good pal to me—better than I ever deserved."

"But—but you knew that this man would turn upon you if you interfered with him?" said the Head.

"I knew that, sir."

"Then why did you not leave him to do as he wished?"

"Because I would not let them rob you, sir—that is all. I went to them in your study and warned them to go, and they would not, so I gave the alarm."

"My dear lad," said the Head softly, "you have told me a terrible story, but I can see that you have been more sinned against than sinning. And you have proved, only too well, the sincerity of your repentance. You have chosen the straight path, and you have followed it at a cost many honest men might have shrunk from. That proves that you are at heart an honest and noble lad, as I have always believed you. It is, of course, impossible for you to remain in this school after what has happened, but so long as I live you shall never want a friend. Follow me to my study. I must talk to you further. Boys, you may go back to bed."

Talbot looked at Tom Merry & Co. "Good-bye!" he said.

"Talbot!" Tom Merry held out his hand. "Give us your fist!"

"Yaas, watah! And me, too!"

"After what you know?" said Talbot.

"We know you're a good sort," said Tom Merry steadily. "I don't care what you have been; I know what you are now. Give me your fist!"

And Talbot shook hands with his old friends before he followed the Head. Then slowly and sadly the juniors made their way upstairs. Talbot's

revelations had astounded them and shocked and grieved them. But there were few who did not feel compassion for the unhappy boy. There was one who was glad—one who was triumphant. It was Levison of the Fourth.

Levison had been right, but there was no credit for him. The fellows knew only too well that his motives had been bad, and their scorn for him was not lessened by the discovery that he had been right in his denunciation of Talbot.

Talbot was not seen again at St. Jim's.

When Tom Merry & Co. came down in the morning he was gone.

Hookey Walker, in the hands of the police, told his story, and at his trial it was in the papers. And the police would have been glad to find the son of Captain Crow, but he had vanished without leaving a trace behind.

At St. Jim's the fellows missed him, and remembered him with kindness. Whatever he had been, he had repented—repented only too sincerely—and brought about his ruin by his repentance.

And they could not forget his noble qualities. Wally of the Third could not forget that Talbot had risked his life to save him, and he was sorry that he had gone. The scamp of the Third was comforted, however, by the return of his old chum, Joe Frayne. For Frayne had seen the case in the papers, and knew that Talbot was no longer at the school, and he promptly returned to St. Jim's, to be forgiven for his escapade, and to take his old place in the Third Form.

Tom Merry & Co. missed Talbot sorely, and they did not forget him. Whatever he had been, he had wiped out all offences at the last, and they remembered him as a good chum, and they hoped to see again some day the lad who had been forced to make so terrible a choice between good and

evil, and had chosen the right when he came to the cross-roads.

(Next Wednesday: "JOLLY JINKS AT ST. JIM'S!"—a lively long yarn of fun, ragging, and japing. Look out for it.)

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BILLY BUNTER'S STILL GOING STRONG—BUT NOT GROWING STRONG!—WITH HIS PHYSICAL CULTURE!

BUNTER THE ATHLETE!

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

After reading a book on physical culture, by Professor Kramm, Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, decides to go into training to get himself strong and healthy. Such is his enthusiasm for physical culture that he has visions of becoming the strong man of Greyfriars!

But unfortunately for Bunter, he hasn't the necessary two pounds to buy the physical development apparatus which Professor Kramm has for sale, and which Bunter thinks he requires to make a new man of himself. He tries to borrow the money, but without any luck. However, Hurree Singh, the Indian junior, lends him fifteen shillings to buy a pair of dumb-bells, and Bunter orders them in the village.

Meantime, he starts training in earnest, utilising Harry Wharton's punching-ball for the purpose. All the Removes take an interest in Bunter's training, in the hope of extracting some fun from it. A crowd turns up to watch when the Owl gives an exhibition of how to punch the ball scientifically, but the exhibition has disastrous results for Bunter!

(Now read on.)

Bunter Bowls!

SCHOOL was over, and the afternoon was bright and sunny. The chums of the Remove came out of the School House in white flannels, with bats under their arms.

Billy Bunter was standing in a thoughtful attitude under the big elm-tree near the doorway. He was leaning back against the trunk, his hands in his trousers pockets, and his brow corrugated with the lines of thought. He looked up at the sight of the Famous Four and came towards them.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, have you been staggering humanity with the punching-ball practice again?" asked Nugent.

"Well, no; I'm letting that alone for a bit."

"The staggerfulness has been the esteemed Bunter's so far," the Nabob of Bhanipur remarked. "I was quite tired with the extreme laughfulness of this afternoon."

"It wasn't really a laughing matter, Inky."

"You are in a minority of one on that point, Bunty," remarked Harry Wharton, laughing. "But what's on now? If you want to talk, come down to the ground with us."

"That's just what I want," said Bunter, trotting along by the side of the junior whom the Remove had selected for the Form cricket captain. "I have rather neglected athletics in more ways than one."

"To make the judgefulness by the appearance, that is extremely true," remarked Hurree Singh. "You look what is called weedful."

"Oh, that's chiefly appearances, you know. I'm a jolly strong chap, and you can't judge wholly by appearances."

"No, that is correctful. As your esteemed English proverb says, 'you cannot judge cigars by the honourable picture on the box.'"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,492.

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

"But, as I was saying, I have neglected athletics in more ways than one, and I really think I ought to have devoted more attention to football," said Bunter. "It's too late for football now, so I'm going to go in for cricket in dead earnest."

"My only turban! I shall be glad to see you taking up the crickeftful exercises in the deadly earnest, Bunter."

"So shall I," said Harry Wharton. "It's a good idea. Stick to it. Don't kill anybody with the ball if you can help it."

"Or brain anybody with the bat unless it's absolutely impossible to avoid it," said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"Now, don't rot, you fellows," said

Billy Bunter thinks there's nothing to stop him from becoming the strong man of Greyfriars . . . until he takes up cricket and dumb-bell exercises!

Bunter reproachfully. "I should have thought you'd be glad to back a chap up in playing the game!"

"So we are, Bunter. Only—"

"The trouble is, where will the ball go when you start bowling?" said Bob Cherry. "If you brained a fieldsman with it he would get angry—"

"And if you killed a batsman, he would be annoyed."

"Then you won't help me?"

The chums of the Remove looked at one another in some perplexity. It was a laudable desire on any fellow's part to want to become a good cricketer. But with the Owl's extreme short sight, and his general habit of doing the wrong thing in the wrong way at the wrong time, he was likely to be a dangerous bowler—not in the usual sense of that expression.

"I have bowled and batted before," said Billy Bunter. "My idea is that I ought to practise hard, and then you can put me in the Remove eleven when the Form match comes off with the Upper Fourth."

The Removites grinned.

"Yes, I can see myself doing that," Harry Wharton answered. "I'm afraid you'd be about the last recruit I should select for the Form eleven, Bunter."

"I don't see why you shouldn't give me a chance."

"Well, you see—"

"Just you back me up a bit at practice, and I'll jolly soon show you what I can do. Why, Cherry was saying only the other day that cricket was what I wanted to make me buck up."

"Something in that. But—"

"Well, if you won't give me a trial—"

"Oh, we'll give you a trial," said Wharton resignedly. "Come on, Bunter! You can bat if you like."

"Well, as a matter of fact, Wharton, I rather fancy myself at bowling. I think I'll bowl first. If you can keep up your wicket against me—"

"I think perhaps I can manage it, with a tremendous effort, of course. Here we are. Give him the ball, Cherry."

Bob Cherry grinned and tossed the ball to Billy Bunter.

Bunter tried to catch it and missed, and the ball plumped on Nugent's shoulder. Nugent gave a jump.

"Who the—what did you chuck that ball at me for, you ass?"

"I threw it to Bunter, but the silly butterfingers missed it," said Bob Cherry, in disgust. "Pick it up, Bunt."

"I can't exactly see it."

"There it is under your nose, close to your hoof!" howled Bob Cherry.

"So it is. Shall I bowl now, Wharton?"

"Yes, if you like."

"If you'd really rather I didn't—"

"Oh, go on and bowl!"

"Certainly, to oblige you, Wharton."

And Billy Bunter toddled down the pitch. There were several other wickets up along the nets, and there was a general glare of the Removites on the ground as Billy Bunter took up his position to bowl.

"Here, what are you up to?" roared Herring of the Remove. "What is that Owl doing with that ball?"

"I'm going to bowl to Wharton, Herring," said Billy Bunter.

"You young villain! You'll brain somebody. Here, get out of the way, chaps, before he chucks it!"

"There is no danger, Herring, I assure you."

"Isn't there? Wharton, what do you mean by letting him have the ball? Why—"

"You will put me off my bowling if you go on calling out like that, Herring."

Billy Bunter clutched the ball hard and took a little run, and then the ball flew from his hand. His spectacles fell off, and he made a clutch at them and fell down in the grass. But where was the ball?

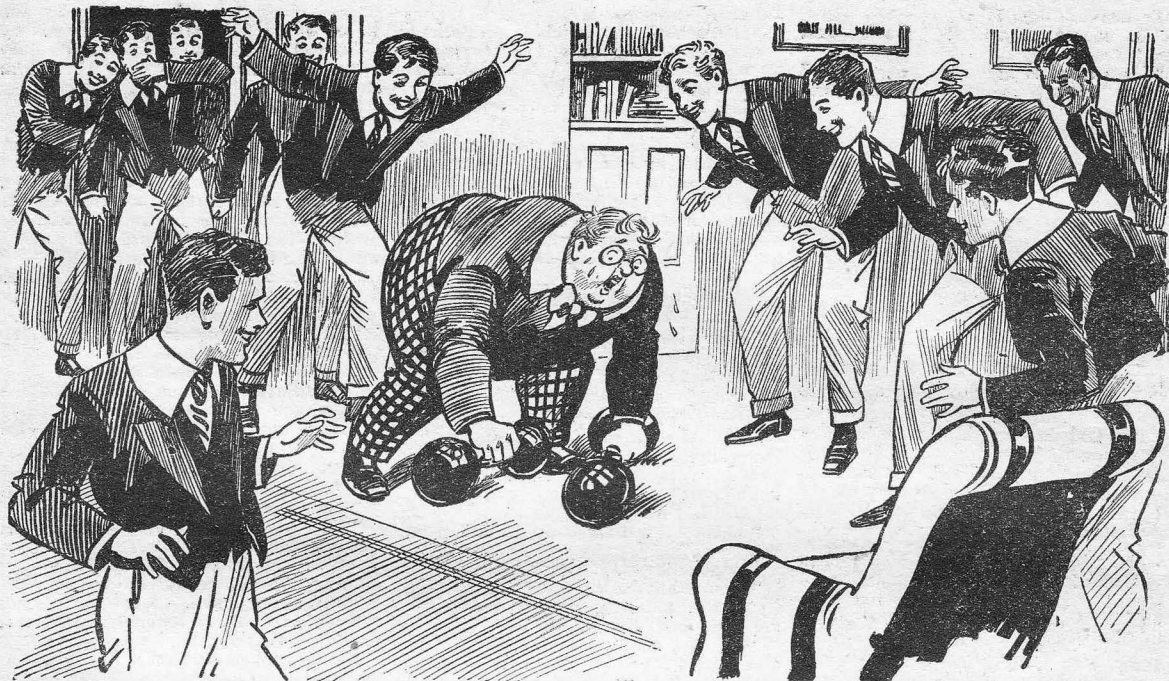
Harry Wharton did not know. It came nowhere near his wicket. A sudden yell from the distance announced where it was. Every eye turned in the direction of the yell.

Carberry of the Sixth had been passing at least a dozen yards away, arrayed in a resplendent silk hat to go down to the village. Alas, for the silk hat! The ball had taken it in the side, and it had been fairly carried off the Sixth Former's head.

Carberry stared at the damaged hat and the cricket ball that had fallen beside it. Then he glared round in search of the culprit. Carberry was the worst-tempered prefect at Greyfriars, and all who witnessed the incident looked for trouble.

"Who threw that ball?" yelled Carberry.

MORE FUN AND FROLIC IN THE EARLY SCHOOLDAYS OF THE CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS.



Billy Bunter stooped down and grasped the dumb-bells. He remained stooping. "Why don't you lift them?" asked Bulstrode. Bunter strained and panted and tugged at the dumb-bells, but he could not lift them. "I—I can't!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I threw it, Wingate," said Billy Bunter, getting up and adjusting his spectacles. "Oh, it isn't Wingate; it's Baker. Is it Baker or Carberry?"

"You threw it, you young scoundrel?"

"Yes. Will you kindly return it to me, Carberry?"

"I'll give you a licking, you young sweep!" yelled Carberry, making a dash across the field at the junior.

"Really, Carberry, I hope the ball did not strike you."

"It has busted my hat!"

"I'm sincerely sorry!" gasped Billy Bunter, dodging. "It was due to my extremely short sight."

Bunter dodged along the pitch and got behind Harry Wharton. The captain of the Remove stood in the Sixth Former's way.

"Hold on, Carberry!" he said quietly.

"Get out of my way, Wharton!"

"You can let Bunter alone——"

"He's busted my hat!"

"It was an accident."

"I don't care whether it was an accident or not. I'm going to give him the thrashing of his life for doing it!"

"Some of us will pay for the hat, if that's what bothers you!" said Harry Wharton scornfully. "You are not going to bully Bunter."

"Will you stand out of the way?"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll give you the hiding instead of Bunter!" roared the bully of the Sixth.

Harry Wharton lifted his bat.

"You won't touch me, Carberry!" he said quietly.

The Sixth Former glared at him. "Do you mean to say you would use that bat?"

"Yes, I do! If you lay a finger on me, I'll knock you flying, prefect or

no prefect!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

It was something of Harry Wharton's old nature peeping out now. The old hard look was coming back to his face. And he meant what he said. If Carberry had touched him, then the prefect would have been sent flying with the cricket bat.

Carberry knew it, and he weakened. Like most bullies he was not brave. Besides, the Removites were gathering round. The Remove, as the seniors at Greyfriars often complained, were as thick as thieves when it came to quarrelling with anybody outside the Form, though among themselves they fought without end.

"Oh, cut it, Carberry!" said Trevor, ostentatiously displaying the sharp end of a cricket stump. "You're interrupting the practice."

"Well, if Bunter says it was an accident——" said Carberry, climbing down.

"I give you my word," said Billy Bunter. "You see, I'm a little short-sighted."

"You young ass, you bowled at right-angles with the pitch!" exclaimed Carberry.

"Did I? I'm sorry!"

"If you choose to pay for that hat, Wharton, as you said, I'll say no more about the matter," said Carberry.

"It's sixteen-and-six. You can bring the tin to my study."

And the prefect walked away.

"Mean beast!" said Bob Cherry.

"Fancy letting us pay for his old topper!"

"Mean enough!" agreed Nugent. "Still, it's no joke to have one's topper bashed in by a dangerous lunatic with a cricket ball."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"I know jolly well for a fact that he only gives twelve-and-six for a

topper," said Herring. "You can rely on that, Wharton."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he can have the sixteen-and-six if he likes!" he said. "I can get the money. I'm not going to haggle with him!"

"Well, you're an ass, then!"

"I say, where's the ball, though?" said Billy Bunter. "I'd like to get on with the bowling, if you fellows are ready."

"I'm afraid we shall never be ready, then," said Harry, laughing. "Your first ball has cost sixteen-and-six, and if you keep on you'd want a millionaire to stand it! You have done bowling, Buntie."

"Well, I think that's rather mean of you, Wharton," said Billy Bunter, shaking his head. "Cricket is an important branch of physical culture."

"Oh, you have the bat for a bit if you like," said Harry Wharton, resignedly.

"Thank you, Wharton! Will you bowl?"

"Oh, I'll bowl!" said Harry, taking the ball and going down the pitch. And Billy Bunter plumped the bat on the crease and stood ready.

Bunter the Batsman!

"ARE you ready?"

"Yes, I think so, Wharton. No, wait a minute. I haven't any pads on."

"Oh, get them, then, and do look sharp!"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't any. If you will lend me yours, Nugent——"

"Oh, certainly!" said Nugent.

"Put them on him, Cherry."

"Certainly, I'll lend a hand."

"Buck up!" shouted Wharton.

"There you are, Bunter!"
 "Thank you! The pads don't seem quite comfortable. Still, I dare say they are all right."

"Of course they are! Go on and bat."

"I am quite ready to do so, only——"
 "Are you ready?" called out Wharton.

"Oh, yes, quite! No, wait just a minute—I haven't any batting gloves."

"Lend him some batting gloves, somebody, for goodness' sake!"

"Here you are!" said Bob Cherry.
 "I'm afraid they're much too big, Cherry."

"Try mine, my esteemed friend," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "I think they will give you a fit."

"I'll give him a fit if he doesn't buck up!" said Wharton.

"Thank you, Hurree Singh. I think they will be all right."

"If you would exercise the greater quickfulness, Bunter——"

"It's bad for the health to be in a hurry over anything," said Billy Bunter, shaking his head. "I can tell you what Professor Kramm says on the subject. It's very interesting and instructive. It says in the book——"

"Are you ready?" roared Wharton.

"Quite ready, Wharton. "I was just saying to Hurree Jampot——"

"I'm going to bowl."

"I'm practically ready. Wait a moment. Now, then——"

Billy Bunter plumped his bat down on the crease again and stood looking towards the bowler with nervous watchfulness.

"Mind you chuck batting as soon as you're out," said Nugent. "We can't have this rot hanging about all the time. We want to get some practice."

"It is necessary for me to become a good cricketer, Nugent, if I'm to take my place in the Form eleven."

"Oh, cheese it! Play!"

Harry Wharton bowled, carelessly enough. It was as easy to hit Billy Bunter's wicket as to hit the side of a house, as a matter of fact.

Bunter swiped at the ball, and his bat described a circle in the air, and he nearly lost his footing. The willow struck nothing but air, and while it was still swinging there was a crash of a falling wicket.

"Out!" yelled Nugent.

Billy Bunter recovered himself and stared at the wrecked wicket.

"Did anybody see where the ball went?" he asked.

"You ass! Can't you see your wicket's down?"

"My hat, so it is! Did the ball do that?"

"Did the ball do that?" howled Nugent. "I should say it did!"

"Throw the ball back, Nugent, will you?"

"But you're out!"

"Out! What do you mean?"

"You're out!" shrieked Nugent.

"Can't you see your wicket's down?"

"Travel along, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

Bunter did not move from the wicket.

"I say, you fellows, you ought to know more about cricket than that!" he said, in a tone of mild remonstrance.

"Eh? What are you getting at?"

"Well, you ought to know that a batsman can't be out to a trial ball!"

"Trial ball be sugared!"

"There was no trialfulness about that ball," said the nabob. "The outfulness is complete, my ludicrous friend!"

"Of course it was a trial ball!" said Bunter obstinately. "Wasn't it a trial ball, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, call it a trial if you like!" he said. "Chuck us the ball, Nugent, and I'll give him another."

"Don't bowl too quickly, or perhaps I shan't see the ball. I never saw it at all that time!" said Bunter, in an aggrieved tone.

"Ha, ha! I'll send you a slow one."

Harry gave the batsman the easiest ball he could. Bunter made another swipe, and, by some curious chance, the bat struck the ball, and sent it flying. Bob Cherry's right hand came out of his pocket and went into the air, and his fingers clutched the ball safely.

"How's that?" said Bob.

"Out!"

"Where's the ball?" asked Billy Bunter, looking round.

"Here it is!" said Bob Cherry, thrusting it under his nose. "This is it! You're caught out!"

"Did you catch the ball?"

"Yes!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Well, I must say I think that rather inconsiderate of you, Cherry, when it would very likely have been a boundary!"

"Oh, kill him, somebody!"

"Throw the ball back to Wharton, will you?"

"But you're out!"

"Now don't be an ass, Cherry. This isn't a regular game, of course, so fielding doesn't count!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "He won't give up that bat till somebody takes it and brains him with it!"

"I say, you fellows, play the game, you know!"

"Oh, chuck the ball over again!" said Harry Wharton. "Mind, Bunter, if your wicket goes this time, you go, too!"

"I don't think you'll get my wicket so easily," said Billy Bunter.

"Play!" said Nugent.

Harry Wharton bowled again.

There was a clatter as the wicket was broken, and two stumps assumed strange angles in the ground.

"How's that?" laughed Harry.

"Out!"

"Does that count?" asked Bob Cherry sarcastically.

"Well, I'd rather have it over again," said Bunter doubtfully.

"Ha, ha!" Nugent gently extracted the bat from his reluctant hands.

"Bunter, old man, it's time for you to take a run!"

"But I can't take runs unless I hit the ball!"

"I don't mean that sort of run. Take a run towards the Cloisters: don't look back, but keep straight on."

"Oh, I say!"

"Anyway, get off the grass! You are giving us a tired feeling, and we've got to practise. Your chances of getting into the Form eleven this week are very small, so there's no hurry for you to study the game. Travel, Bunter!"

And Billy Bunter reluctantly travelled.

The chums of the Remove settled down to half an hour's practice, while the Owl strolled off the field disconsolately. He was startled out of a brown study by a shake of the shoulder, and looked up to see Hazeldene.

"Hallo, Vaseline! Don't shake me like that; you might make my spectacles fall off, and if you were to break them, I should expect you to pay for them, and you are such a rotter you very likely wouldn't, and——"

"Don't you ever have to take breath, Bunter?" asked Hazeldene.

"Well, I was only making a remark."

"A jolly long one! But, I say, I hear you've been taking up cricket, and

staggering humanity with your batting and bowling."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Bunter modestly. "I'm taking up the game, and I think I'm getting on very nicely; but there's a lot of jealousy about a fellow getting into the Form eleven."

Hazeldene chuckled.

"You see, Wharton and his friends have the matter really in their hands, and they're not likely to let me in," said Billy Bunter. "I'm sorry, you see, because I know I'm cut out for a jolly good batsman, and I want the Remove to beat the Upper Fourth, and so I would like to be in the eleven. But——"

"I see. By the way, I hear you're flush of tin lately."

"Oh, no! I've only got sixpence!"

"But you've just ordered an expensive pair of dumb-bells."

"Oh, no; only fifteen shillings!"

"When are you going to have them?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

"Have you got the tin to pay for them?"

"Oh, yes! Hurree Singh lent me the fifteen bob."

"Then you've got it about you?"

"Yes, it's in my pocket," said Bunter unsuspectingly.

"Would you mind lending me ten shillings till to-morrow, Bunter? I want it particularly, and, of course, it's all the same to you, so long as you have it back by the afternoon."

Bunter looked extremely dubious.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said.

"You see, I should be sure to pay you then, so it would be all right. I really only require the ten bob as a—matter of form. It will be a real convenience to me, and I should be ever so much obliged."

"You're sure you'll let me have it back after dinner to-morrow?"

"Absolutely certain!"

"Well, here you are, then," said the simple Bunter, handing over the ten-shilling note Hurree Jampet Ram Singh had given him. "I rely on you, you know."

For a moment Hazeldene hesitated. He was not a conscientious boy, but even to him there seemed something unusually mean in taking advantage of Bunter's simplicity. But it was only for a moment.

Then he took the ten-shilling note and slipped it into his pocket, and, with a muttered word of thanks, turned away.

Bunter looked after him rather uneasily. He was the most unsuspecting of juniors, but he knew Hazeldene. It was too late now, however. Hazeldene had gone straight down to the gates, almost at a run, as if fearful that Bunter would change his mind. And Bunter, simple as he was, felt an uneasy foreboding that he had looked his last on that ten-shilling note.

A Parcel for Bunter!

"PARCEL for Master Bunter!" It was Gosling, the school porter, who spoke, as he opened the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove. He had a parcel on his shoulder, and from the way he carried it it was evident that it weighed a great deal, although of not large bulk.

Bunter looked up from the tea-table. The chums of the Remove were in the study at tea. It was twenty-four hours after Bunter's attempt to become a great bowler and batsman. Bunter had been anxiously expecting the arrival of his dumb-bells; all the more anxiously

because Hazeldene as yet had made no sign of repaying the ten shillings.

"Hallo! That's for you, Bunter," said Harry Wharton.

"What on earth is it?" asked Bob Cherry. "Gosling looks as if he were performing the champion weight-lifting act."

The porter set the parcel down on the floor with a bump and a grunt.

"Which it's 'eavy!" he said.

"Thank you very much, Gosling!" said Bunter. "I should reward you with threepence, but I am, unfortunately, out of money, owing to the delay of the arrival of a postal order I have been expecting for some time."

The porter made a sarcastic grimace. "Oh, of course! You always was so liberal, sir."

"I'm sorry—"

"The porterman expects the tipfulness," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, "and his observation that the parcel is heavy seems to be borne out by the weight of it, which is certainly terrific. Will you accept this shilling, my esteemed porter friend, although the bestowfulness does not proceed from Bunter?"

Gosling accepted the shilling.

"You're a kind gentleman, sir," he said.

"Thank you," said the nabob. "It is pleasant to have one's perhaps doubtful claims to distinction confirmed by a judgful personage such as the worthy porterman. Thank you, my esteemed and ludicrous friend."

The porter looked somewhat puzzled.

"Thank you, Gosling," said Billy Bunter. "You may go."

"Which the boy as brought the parcel is waiting."

"Oh, tell him he needn't wait!"

Gosling sniffed expressively.

"He says there's fifteen shillings to pay, and his instructions is not to leave the goods without the money; and 'ere's the bill."

"Thank you, Gosling," said Bunter, taking the bill. "It will be necessary for me to—to examine this before paying it—"

"Then he'll take the goods away."

"No, I can hardly consent to that. You see, these are my dumb-bells, which I require for my physical culture."

"The boy says as how he ain't to leave 'em without the money," said Gosling. "And I'm a busy man, Master Bunter. I've got my work to do."

"Tell the boy—"

"I'll send 'im up 'ere," said Gosling. "You may tell him what you like, but my belief is that he's not to be done."

"Done!" exclaimed Bunter. "What do you mean, Gosling? Do you dare to insinuate—"

"You had no right to say that, Gosling!" said Harry Wharton.

"Beggin' your pardon, young gentlemen, but Master Bunter is well known—"

"Well, in pointfulness of fact, why don't you bestow the payfulness upon the waiting youth, Bunter?" asked Hurree Singh. "You have the cashfulness, and the examination of the purchased goods will not occupy great lengths of time."

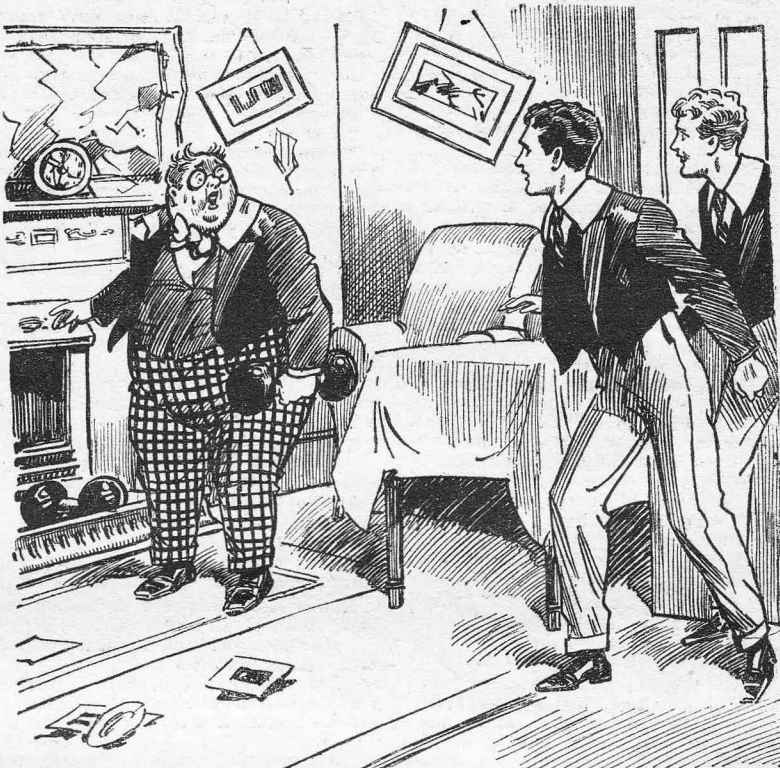
Billy Bunter turned red.

"You see, I—I—"

"You must pay for the dumb-bells!" exclaimed Wharton. "What do you mean? Hurree Singh gave you the money yesterday to do so."

"I—I—"

"Which I said—" began Gosling. Harry Wharton gave him a cold glance.



Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry looked into the study, to see Bunter standing with one dumb-bell in his hand. The other was lying in the fender. The shattered glass over the mantelpiece and the broken clock told their story!

"You can go, Gosling," he said. "Tell the boy to wait."

Gosling quitted the study. When the door had closed the chums of the Remove rose from the tea-table and came round Billy Bunter, who looked decidedly nervous.

"Now, then," said Bob Cherry, "what does this mean? Do you mean to say that you have blueed Hurree Janset's fifteen bob, and can't pay for the dumb-bells?"

"You see, I can't pay for them at present."

"Then they will have to go back," said Wharton.

"Oh, no, they can't go back, Wharton! You see, I particularly want them for my physical culture."

"If you can't pay for them now, you never will be able to. There's a carelessness in money matters, Bunter, which is awfully like dishonesty."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"They will have to go back. Anyway, if you don't pay the boy who brought them, he will demand the parcel back; and if you don't give it to him, he will go to the Head, and then you will have to—"

"Oh dear! But I can pay next week, Wharton."

"Where will you get the tin from?"

"I'm expecting a postal order."

"You young ass! You'll pay for them now, or they'll go back. What have you done with Hurree Singh's money? You have no right to spend it on anything else."

"I—I haven't—"

"Then where is it?"

"Here's five bob of it," said Bunter, dolefully turning the five shillings out on the table. "The rest I lent to Hazeldene."

Nugent gave a whistle.

"You young lunatic! Hazeldene never pays his debts. He's nearly as bad as you yourself in that respect."

"Oh, I say, Nugent—"

"Hazeldene had no right to borrow it," said Wharton. "It was a mean trick to take advantage of Bunter's stupidity."

"Oh, really, Wharton, you can't call me stupid, you know. Hazeldene promised faithfully to let me have it back this afternoon for certain."

"And you see how he's kept his promise?"

"Yes; it is mean of him, and no mistake. I've been trying to speak to him, but he's been dodging me. He doesn't mean to pay up, I believe."

"He should be forced to perform the payfulness," said the nabob. "If he does not repay the money, he is what you English call a scotcher."

"A what?"

"A scotcher—or is it a welsher? I forget."

"Ha, ha! Never mind whether it's a scotcher or a welsher," grinned Bob Cherry. "He certainly ought to be made to dub up. He's a rotter to take advantage of this young duffer. Meanwhile, the boy's waiting for his tin."

"One of you go down and tell him we won't keep him long," said Wharton. "I'll go and speak to Hazeldene."

"I will go," said the nabob. "The boy has had to carry a heavy parcel from the village and is probably in want of refreshfulness. I will take him into the school shop and fill him up with grubful supplies."

"Good! You others come with me."

The chums of the Remove left the study. Billy Bunter remained, and THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,492.

began to unfasten the parcel. Bunter was so accustomed to being got out of his difficulties by others that he had already ceased to worry. He knew the matter would be managed somehow.

While the nabob was, in his generous way, attending to the tired lad who had brought the dumb-bells from the village, Wharton, Nugent, and Cherry proceeded in search of Hazeldene. He shared Bulstrode's study, and it was there that the chums of the Remove found him—alone.

Hazeldene was standing at the window, looking gloomily out into the Close. He turned as the chums came in, with such a haggard look on his face that the anger they were feeling almost died away.

"What do you want?"

Hazeldene's voice was low and husky.

"We want to see fair play," said Wharton quietly. "You took ten shillings from Billy Bunter yesterday, promising to return it this afternoon. Where is it? His dumb-bells have been sent home, and he hasn't the money to pay for them."

"I might have known you would meddle in the matter."

"You might have known it," broke in Nugent hotly, "as we are called upon to pay the money you have borrowed—or stolen would be a better word."

"Let the things go back——"

"The tradesman has got them down from London specially. There would be a row. He would have to be paid, anyhow. You promised to pay Bunter this afternoon," said Wharton quietly.

"Why haven't you done so?"

"I haven't the money."

"That's not much of an excuse. You oughtn't to have borrowed it, then——"

"Do you always do what you ought to do when you are in a fix?" asked Hazeldene, with a wretched sneer. "I don't."

"Do you mean to say that you took the money from Bunter knowing well that you couldn't let him have it back to-day?"

"Yes, I did, if you want to know."

"Then—— But I won't tell you what I think of that sort of conduct, Hazeldene. But the matter can't rest where it is. You understand that?"

"Do your worst!"

Wharton looked at him attentively.

"Is there anything the matter, Hazeldene?" he asked, not unkindly. "If you've got something on your mind——"

"Well, I have," muttered Hazeldene. "I—I had to have the money. I—I tell you I had to have it. I couldn't help it. I knew I couldn't pay Bunter. Now you can show me up to the Form, or to the Head, if you like. I don't care!"

Wharton gave him another keen look. Then he turned quietly to the door.

"Come away, chaps," he said.

Hazeldene made a quick step after them.

"What are you going to do?"

"Nothing. We are going to make up the money for the dumb-bells," said Wharton. "I don't know what your motive was for swindling Billy Bunter, but you don't look very happy about it. We shall say nothing. If you've got any decency you'll pay up the money some time. That's all. Come along, you chaps!"

The chums of the Remove left the study. They left Hazeldene staring after them with mingled relief and misery in his face.

Bunter Goes Ahead.

BILLY BUNTER was busy when the chums of the Remove returned to the study. Bob Cherry was the first to enter, and he jumped back with a startled exclamation.

"You ass! Look out!"

"You should have some lookfulness yourself," said Hurree Singh. "You have trodden on my toe, my worthy chum."

"Well, that young ass nearly brained me!"

"Ha, ha!" ejaculated Nugent. "He's got the dumb-bells going."

"I nearly got a cosh on the napper with them!" growled Bob Cherry. "Mind what you're at, you dangerous lunatic!"

"Please keep out of the way a little," said Billy Bunter. "I'm awfully busy just now, you know."

The Famous Four stood in the doorway and looked at him. Billy Bunter was wielding a pair of dumb-bells much too heavy for him, swinging them slowly and fro with evident effort.

It would have been no joke to receive a knock from one of them, and Bob Cherry had really had an escape.

Bunter set down the dumb-bells at last. He was gasping.

"Had enough?" asked Harry Wharton, coming into the study.

"For the present, yes," said Bunter, sinking into a chair. "I think perhaps sixteen pounds is a bit too heavy for me to start."

"Six pounds would be nearer the mark."

"I will practise a little with the lighter dumb-bells," said Bunter. "I will use yours. On second thoughts, I shall not take up cricket."

"Oh, think twice about that!" implored Bob Cherry. "Think what a loss you would be to the cricketing world, Bunter."

"Think of the Remove team and the college eleven, to say nothing of the county," said Nugent. "You ought really to keep on at the game, Bunter."

"I've got an idea that you're joking," said Billy Bunter, peering at them through his spectacles. "Anyway, I'm not going to keep on the cricket. I prefer a kind of athletics that can be stuck in all weathers. You can't play cricket when it rains. Now, with the Indian clubs and dumb-bells you can always be at it."

"Yes, if you can get your study-mates to stand it," said Nugent.

"Oh, of course, you fellows wouldn't think of putting difficulties in the way of my physical development."

"We'll put difficulties in the way of your braining us with your giddy dumb-bells, though!" growled Bob Cherry.

"I'm sorry, Cherry——"

"Oh rats! Keep those dumb-bells away, that's all."

"I'm not going to use them again just yet. I must get over this tired feeling. By the way, did Hazeldene pay the ten shillings?"

"No, he didn't."

"Do you know, Wharton, I had a feeling that he wouldn't," said Bunter confidentially. "I'm afraid that ten bob's gone."

"Well, it's Inky's loss, not yours!" grunted Bob.

"Oh, of course, I shall pay Inky! I've reason to expect that my postal order will arrive this evening."

"Oh, get off that, Bunter! Between your physical culture and your postal

order, you'll make us old men before our time."

"But, I say, you fellows, I hope you have settled satisfactorily with the boy from the dealer's."

"We've paid him."

"I'm really much obliged to you. Which of you do I owe the money to?"

asked the Owl, blinking round at them.

"Oh, never mind that!"

"I'm sorry, Wharton, but I must mind that," said Billy Bunter firmly. "I cannot possibly accept the money except as a loan. If Hazeldene doesn't pay up, the loss will be mine. Which of you paid for the dumb-bells?"

"We made it up between us."

"Then I shall repay you all the exact sums when my postal order comes. Of course, I shouldn't mind being under obligation to you, but you know that short reckonings make long friends, and so I can only take the money as a loan."

"There's something else you can do for us, Bunter," said Bob Cherry.

"What is it, Cherry?"

"You can leave off talking for a bit, so that we can get our preparation done," said Bob Cherry, sitting down at the table.

"Really, Cherry, you seem to think that I'm a talkative person. I've noticed a lot of fellows who think that. I don't know why. I say, you fellows, you haven't looked at my dumb-bells yet."

"They're a nice pair," said Wharton, glancing at them.

"Yes. And do you see, you uncrow this little nut, and pour shot into the hole, till you make them the weight you want. It will be some time, I expect, before I can lift thirty-pound dumb-bells."

"Ha, ha! I should say so!"

"Oh, not so very long, Cherry! They are rather heavy for me now, but I shall stick to it. I suppose I shan't interrupt you if I go on with the dumb-bell practice now, shall I?"

Bob Cherry rose and seized a ruler.

"If you touch those dumb-bells again while I'm in the study, Bunter, there will be a dead ass in the Remove," he said darkly.

"But, really, Cherry——"

"Seat! Get out!"

"But I'm really going in quite seriously for physical culture——"

"Will you shut up?"

"And I can't afford to waste time——"

Bob made a rush at him with the ruler. Billy Bunter skipped out of the study with surprising agility, and slammed the door after him.

The chums of the Remove laughed and settled down to their work.

"I say," said Bob Cherry, rising and stretching himself when his work was finished, "these are jolly good dumb-bells, you know. They're dangerous things for Bunter to play with, though."

He picked up the dumb-bells and swung them over his head.

Nugent looked at him, and a sudden chuckle escaped him.

"Let me see, they load up to thirty pounds, don't they?" he remarked.

"That's it."

"At that weight Bunter couldn't shift them off the ground."

"I fancy he couldn't shift one of them."

"It would be rather a good wheeze to fill them up for him when he's going to practise without letting him know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh chuckled appreciatively.

"The funniness of the wheeze is terrific," he remarked. "I should like to be presentful to behold the efforts of the esteemed Bunter."

Billy Bunter looked into the study. "Hallo! Have you finished, you chaps? I want to do some exercise."

Harry Wharton laughed as he rose from the table.

"Yes, we're finished. You'll have to postpone the wheeze a bit, Bob."

"I say, has Cherry got a wheeze on?"

"You'll know all about it in good time, Bunter. Come along to the Common-room, you chaps, and let's have a go at the chess."

"Right you are!"

The Removites quitted the study. Billy Bunter grasped the heavy dumb-bells at once, and began to swing them.

The chums of the Remove had reached the end of the corridor, and were about to go downstairs, when Harry Wharton suddenly halted with an exclamation.

"What was that?"

It was a terrific crash from behind them.

"Sounded as if it came from the study," said Nugent. "Is it possible that the young ass has let a dumb-bell go?"

"My hat! Let's go and see."

The Removites raced back along the passage. They reached the door of the study in a few moments, and Harry Wharton threw it open. Billy Bunter was standing with one dumb-bell in his hand in a state of dismay. The other was lying in the fender.

The glass over the mantelpiece, bought by a whip-round among the Remove chums, was shattered, and the clock was broken. The dumb-bell had evidently crashed into the glass with a terrific concussion, for the back was broken as well as the glass.

"You young lunatic!" shouted Bob Cherry, grasping Bunter by the shoulder and shaking him. "What have you—Ow!"

There was a bump as the startled Bunter let the other dumb-bell fall from his hand. It bumped on the floor within an inch of Bob's foot.

Bob shook the Owl in exasperation. "You little villain! You might have lamed me!"

"You startled me, Cherry."

"You—you—"

"I say, you fellows, don't let him shake me like that. My spectacles might fall off. If they got broken, you will have to pay for them."

Bob Cherry gave him a final shake.

"What did you smash that glass for?"

"It was an accident, Cherry. I was swinging round the dumb-bell, and somehow it slipped from my hand and flew against the glass. I'm very sorry."

"If we had been in the study it might have brained one of us."

"Yes, I think that's quite likely, and I should have been really sorry. Not that you need be afraid of its happening again. I shall keep a better hold in future, and there's not one chance in a hundred that I shall brain any of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Nugent. "It's no good talking to him. As he's smashed the glass, there's no more damage he can do, unless he smashes himself—and the sooner he does that, the better! Let's get along."

So the aspiring athlete was left to his

own devices. But though the Famous Four did not remain, there was soon a good number of Removites at the door watching Bunter. The movements of the Owl of the Remove were regarded with great interest by the juniors. They watched him; but when a dumb-bell flew from Bunter's hand they sought safer quarters, and Billy Bunter was left to continue his physical development without a grinning crowd for an audience.

Bob Cherry's Little Joke.

"**H**OW'S the physical culture getting on, Bunter?"

It was Bulstrode who asked the question the next day. Billy Bunter looked up with a cheerful grin. The breaking of the glass the previous evening did not worry him much. As he was stony, he could not be expected to pay for it.

"First rate, Bulstrode," he said. "I expect I shall be breaking records soon and—"

"To say nothing of looking-glasses."

"Oh, that was an accident!"

"Ha, ha! I'm not sorry I've changed out of that study," grinned Bulstrode.

"Any casualties yet?"

"Not likely to be. They won't let me practise when they're in the study," said Bunter. "I'm afraid there's some jealousy in the matter. I've been going rather ahead lately, and, naturally, the Remove is beginning to look up to a fellow who can make new men of them by showing them the right way to take up physical culture."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at in that remark, Bulstrode—I don't really. Physical culture makes a new man of

you, and there's a right way and a wrong way to do these things—and I can show you the right way."

"Well, you furnish us with some fun, anyway, so keep on. You ought to give an exhibition of physical culture, Bunter—how to do the things, and how not to do them."

"I was thinking of that," said Bunter modestly. "You see, I've carefully studied Professor Kramm's book, and I know the whole thing from start to finish. I feel that I ought to impart my knowledge to the whole Form. They will be grateful to me when I make new men of them. I was thinking of asking some of the fellows to come along to the study this evening, after those chaps have done their prep—they won't let me go on exercising while they're doing their prep."

"Too bad!"

"Yes, it's rather selfish of them; but it's no good expecting too much in this world. I'm beginning to learn that," said Bunter, with a wise shake of the head. "Would you care to come along and see a show of how to handle the dumb-bells, Bulstrode?"

"Oh, yes; I'll be there!" grinned Bulstrode.

"And I, rather!" said Trevor and Russell.

"Oh, yes!" chuckled Herring. "We'll come and see the fun."

"There won't be any fun," explained Billy Bunter. "It's quite serious business—an exhibition of dumb-bell exercises, you see."

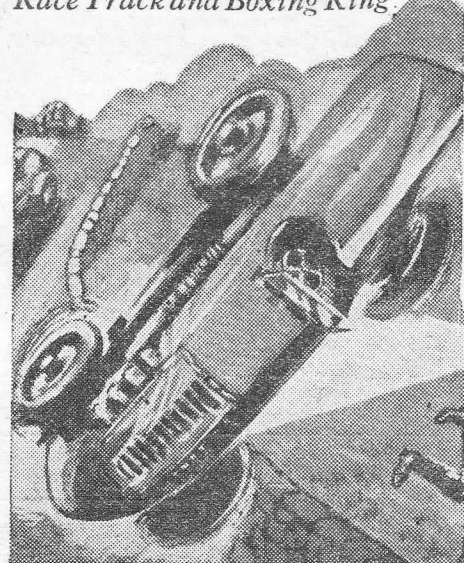
"It may be funnier than you expect. Anyway, we'll come."

"It will really do you good," said Billy. "You can pick up a lot in the way of physical culture by watching one who knows. It says in the book—"

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But Billy Bunter suddenly found himself without listeners, so he was not able to impart what was said in the book, and that valuable knowledge was lost to the Greyfriars Remove.

The Famous Four soon learned of Bunter's project, and some of them were inclined to growl. Nugent remarked that now the glass was gone there was nothing much to smash. Wharton's desk could be put out of the way. Hurree Singh was inclined to let Bunter have his way, with his usual good nature. Bob Cherry grinned gleefully, as if scenting fun.

"Don't be alarmed!" he exclaimed. "I don't suppose Bunter will even lift the dumb-bells off the floor. This is where I come in."

And the Famous Four chuckled. Bunter was the most famous fellow in the Form at the present moment, and he bore his blushing honours thick upon him, to tell the truth, in a rather cocky manner. His physical culture was regarded by the Remove as the biggest joke of the season; but Bunter was far from looking at it in that light. He was in deadly earnest.

After tea the chums of the Remove did their prep. Billy Bunter brought out the dumb-bells, and looked dubiously at the four.

"Would you fellows mind if I went through the exercises now, as a sort of prelim?" he said. "I want to be quite up to it when the chaps come."

"Do you want to be painlessly killed?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, no, Cherry, not at all! Only I—"

"Then get out of this study until we've done our prep."

"Get out!" roared Bob Cherry. "If you pick up those dumb-bells I'll knock you on the head with one of them. You can come back at eight o'clock."

"Oh, very well! I'm not going to do my prep now. I think I had better go and have a turn with the Indian clubs in the gym to get into form. You can have the study to yourselves till eight o'clock. I suppose you'll stop and watch the show?"

Bob Cherry grinned expansively.

"Oh, yes, we shall stop and watch the show!"

So Billy Bunter went out. He went to the gym and handled the Indian clubs there, the other fellows giving him a wide berth. Naturally, he let one of them fly from his hand, and Wingate descended upon him wrathfully.

"You young ass!" shouted the Greyfriars captain. "You—"

"Don't get excited, Wingate," said Billy Bunter meekly. "It was quite an accident. I'm sorry!"

"I'd make you sorrier if that club had hit anybody. You're not to use them again in here, Bunter. Do you hear?"

"But, really, Wingate, it's part of my physical culture. The Indian clubs play an important part in physical development. It says in the book—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Wingate, walking away.

"It's surprising how impatient some people get with a fellow who's trying to develop himself physically," murmured Billy Bunter. "But I suppose I'd better not use the clubs in here again, as Wingate doesn't like it. Hallo, there's eight striking! Are you fellows coming along?"

"Rather!" said half a dozen Removites.

And they marched off to Study No. 1 with Billy Bunter. Bunter opened the door. The big dumb-bells were lying on the floor, and the chums of the Remove had pushed back the table out of the way, to make all ready for the physical culture exhibition.

"Good!" said Billy Bunter. "That's really thoughtful of you. You fellows can stand round. Don't get too near."

"You needn't tell us that," grinned Bulstrode. "We're not likely to get too near when you're swinging dumb-bells."

"Oh, there's no danger, you know. I'm not likely to let one fly from my hand again, and if I did, it is very

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improbable that it would actually kill the person whom it struck. What are you grinning at, Cherry?"

"Was I grinning? I'm waiting for the exhibition."

"It's just going to begin. A little later, you fellows, I hope to give you an exhibition with much heavier dumb-bells than these. These will load up to thirty pounds by unscrewing the nut and pouring in shot. I have no shot now, but I'm going to purchase some when a postal order comes that I've been expecting for some time. Now, I'm just going to begin."

Billy Bunter stooped down and grasped the dumb-bells. He remained stooping. He grasped the dumb-bells easily enough. There was no difficulty about that. But he could not lift them from the floor.

The Removites watched him curiously.

"Well, why don't you lift them?" asked Bulstrode.

Billy Bunter strained, and panted, and tugged at the dumb-bells.

"I—I can't!" he gasped. "I don't know what's the matter with them. They seem to be heavier than they were yesterday."

"Are you going to lift those dumb-bells?"

"Don't be impatient, Bulstrode. This is really very curious."

The joke had dawned upon most of the Removites, though not upon Billy Bunter. There were broad grins upon every face as Bunter tugged at the dumb-bells. He could move them, but he could not lift them. He grew red in the face, and panted with his exertions.

"This is most curious!" he gasped. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not funny, Bulstrode. Cherry, I really don't see why you should keep on laughing. I think there must be something wrong with the dumb-bells, or else I've been exhausting myself exercising with the Indian clubs. Dear me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites were rocking with laughter. Billy Bunter's endeavours to lift the loaded dumb-bells were comical in the extreme. Bunter could see nothing funny in the matter, but the spectators seemed to.

Bunter gave a last desperate drag at the dumb-bells; but they would not lift.

"Oh, I'm not going to stay here and see a chap fooling with dumb-bells he can't lift," said Bob Cherry. "I'm off!"

"Don't hurry away, Cherry. I'm sorry, but there seems to be something wrong with the dumb-bells."

"Perhaps there is. Perhaps there's something wrong with you. I'm off."

And Bob Cherry marched out.

"Keep it up, Bunter," said Nugent encouragingly, and he followed Bob. Harry Wharton tapped Bunter on the shoulder.

"Stick to it," he said cheerfully as he followed his chums.

"The endeavourfulness is careful to receive its rewardfulness," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in his soft voice. "Keep to it with resolute stickfulness, my worthy chum."

And the nabob, too, disappeared. And the other Removites, laughing like hyenas, followed, and Billy Bunter was left alone with the dumb-bells. He stared at them in amazed dismay, and an idea suddenly occurred to him. He unscrewed one of the nuts, and rolled over the dumb-bell. A stream of small shot poured out of the opening upon the floor.

"The—horrid bounders!" murmured Bunter. "They've loaded the dumb-bells, and never told me. I think—Is that you, Cherry?" Bob was looking into the study. "I really think, Cherry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"You put the shot in the dumb-bells!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" And Bob Cherry went down the passage yelling with laughter. The whole Remove was soon yelling over the story, too. Billy Bunter did not give up physical culture, but he sold those dumb-bells cheap, the next day, to a fellow in the Fifth!

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