

HALF-CROWNS AWARDED FOR READERS' JOKES!

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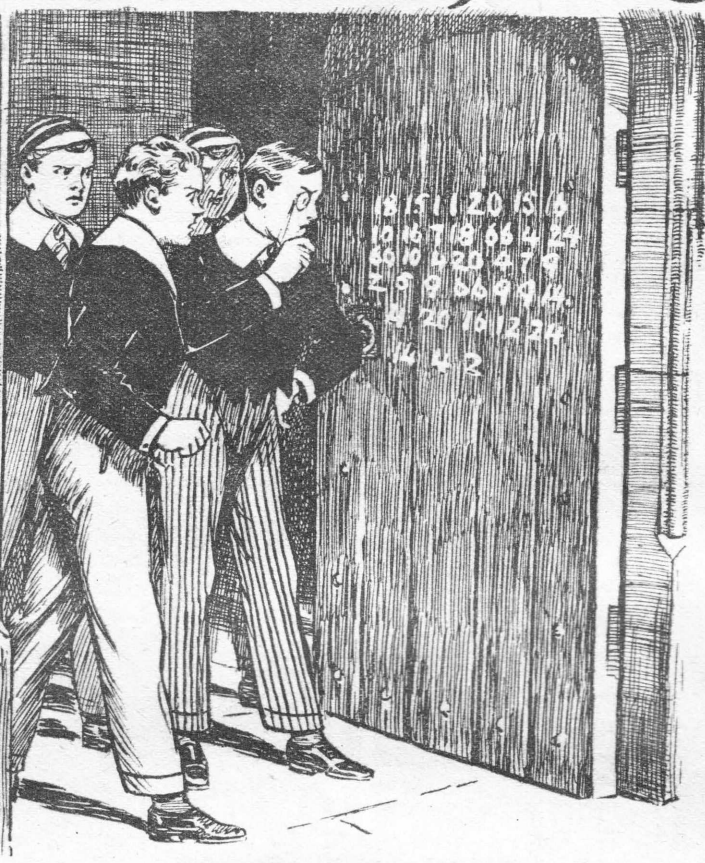
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The
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CIPHER!

The SECRET of the CIPHER!



The juniors stared blankly at the extraordinary inscription in chalk on the door. Who had put it there was a mystery—and what it meant was a greater mystery still! "Well, this beats the band!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

For some moments the juniors stared in silence.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Monty Lowther at length. "What silly ass has been chalking those figures there?"

"What on earth can they mean?" said Manners.

"Can't mean anything," said Tom Merry, wrinkling his brows over the puzzle. "Must be a joke of the New House, I suppose."

"Where does the joke come in?" "Blessed if I know!" confessed Tom Merry.

"But as they don't mean anything, I suppose it must be a joke."

"Pewwaps they do mean somethin', deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Rats! What could they mean?" "Pewwaps it's a ewyptogwam?"

"A which?" "A ewyptogwam," said D'Arcy firmly; "that's what it looks like."

"Oh, a cryptogram!" said Tom Merry. "What would anybody want to chalk a cryptogram on the door of the School House for, fathead?"

"I wufuse to be called a fathead, Tom Mewwy. I think it must be a ewyptogwam. It can't be anythin' else, you see. Pwobably some wotten joke of the New House boundahs. When we work it out, we shall find it is some diswepful message."

"Oh, very likely!" said Tom Merry. "Then we won't work it out. We'll rub it out instead."

"Hold on, deah boy. Don't wub it out. Let's work it out first. I'm wafahh good at ewyptogwams, you know."

"Hallo! What have you got there?" asked Blake of the Fourth, coming down with Herries and Digby.

"Hallo! What on earth's this?" "My hat!"

"What's the joke?"

More and more fellows were coming down now, and they joined the group of juniors in the doorway, staring at the strange inscription.

There were exclamations of surprise on all sides.

"Must be a cryptogram," said Levison of the Fourth, eyeing the

CHAPTER 1. Most Mysterious!

"GWEAT Scott!" D'Arcy of the Fourth uttered that exclamation in tones of the greatest amazement.

In his astonishment his eyeglass dropped from his eye. He gathered it up again, polished it, jammed it into his eye, and regarded blankly the object which had called forth his surprised exclamation.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first fellow down that morning in the School House at St. Jim's.

The big door of the School House had been unfastened, but it was not yet opened when the swell of St. Jim's came downstairs, and Arthur Augustus swung it open himself.

Then he stood transfixed.

He stood, with his eyeglass in his eye, regarding the outside of the big oaken door in blank amazement.

"Bai Jove!"

The early housemaid in the Hall looked at Arthur Augustus in surprise.

Tom Merry of the Shell, who was just coming down the stairs, stared at him.

"What's the row, Gussy?" "Gweat Scott!"

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"What the dickens—"
 "Extwairdinawy!"

"What on earth's the matter with the chap?" asked Monty Lowther, coming down with Manners and joining Tom Merry. "What are you blinking at, Gussy?"

"I am not blinkin', Lowthah. I am wegardin' the most extwairdinawy thing."

"Something on the door, I suppose," said Tom Merry, puzzled. And the Terrible Three, perplexed by D'Arcy's attitude of amazement, hurried to join him in the doorway. Then they exclaimed all at once, as they beheld the object that had caused D'Arcy's surprise:

"My hat!"

It was indeed surprising. The door had only just been opened, and nobody belonging to the School House had yet been out in the quadrangle. But on the outside of the door was an extraordinary inscription in chalk.

The juniors stared at it blankly. Who had put it there was a mystery; and what it meant was a greater mystery still. Upon the oaken surface of the big door a number of figures had been chalked. They ran, in order:

"18 15 1 1 20 15 16 10 16 7 18 66 4 24
 60 10 4 20 4 7 9 2 5 9 66 9 9 14 4 20 16
 11 24 14 4 2."

A GRIPPING YARN OF MYSTERY, FUN AND THRILLS, STARRING TALBOT, LEVISON, AND THE EVER-POPULAR TOM MERRY & CO.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

chalked figures very curiously. "The figures stand for letters, you know; and when you get the right letters, you can read it off quite easily."

"Read it off, then," said Blake.

"Ahem! I haven't got the right letters."

"I wathah think I can work it, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, with the smile of superior knowledge. "Pway don't wub it out. Of course, it must be some cheeky message fwom the New House boundahs. Now, suppose you numbah the letters of the alphabet, you know, fwom beginnin' to end, and use the figuahs instead of the lettahs, then you get 1 for A, 2 for B, 3 for C, and so on. Pway wait a minute, till I sewibble it down."

Arthur Augustus, deeply interested in the mysterious cryptogram, hastily took out his pocket-book and a pencil and scribbled down the alphabet from A to Z, and wrote under each letter an appropriate figure, from 1 to 26.

"Now, then, it won't take long—"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "One of the numbers is 66. Which is the 66th letter of the alphabet, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pewwaps there's a catch," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Anyway, we'll twy the numbahs fwom 1 to 26."

"That would make the first part of it read R O A A T O P—and what does that spell?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! It weally doesn't seem to spell anythin', deah boys, unless it's in a beastly foweign language."

"Must be a jolly foreign language if it spells anything," said Lowther.

"Blessed if it's worth the trouble of working out!" said Tom Merry. "It must be a joke of Figgins & Co. Instead of working it out, we'll go and look for the New House bounders, and bump them for their cheek."

"Hear, hear!"

"Perhaps it wasn't Figgins & Co.," said Levison, who was eyeing the inscription with keen curiosity. "It doesn't look to me like a joke. I'm going to make a copy of it, anyway, and work it out if it's a cryptogram."

And Levison proceeded to copy down the strange figures into his pocket-book.

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry. "It isn't worth the trouble, and perhaps it doesn't mean anything at all. It may be only a jape, to make us try to work it out for nothing. Then the bounders would have the laugh of us. Come on, you chaps; let's go and bump the bounders for their cheek instead of working out their blessed cryptogram. Where's Talbot?"

"Here I am!" called out Talbot, coming down the stairs. "What's on?"

"A rotten joke of the New House bounders," said Tom Merry. "We're going to bump them."

Talbot laughed.

"I'm on," he said cheerily.

"Come on!"

"Hallo! What's this—" Talbot pounced as he saw the chalked figures on the door and started violently. "Who's written this here?"

"Figgins & Co.," explained Tom

Merry. "It's some rotten joke up against the School House—at least, we suppose it is. Come on, Talbot!"

But Talbot did not move. He seemed rooted to the floor, and he stared hard at the chalked figures. The colour had faded out of his cheeks. Then, as he caught the keen eyes of Levison turned curiously upon him, he flushed.

"Odd idea," he said calmly. "I suppose it's some sort of a cryptogram—what?"

"Can you read it?" asked Levison, his eyes still on Talbot's face.

"How should I be able to read cryptograms at sight?" said Talbot carelessly.

"I'll take a copy of it, though."

"Oh, don't waste time!" said Tom Merry. "I've just spotted Figgins across the quad—"

"I'll come after you," said Talbot.

"Oh, all right!"

Tom Merry & Co. crowded out of the House. Talbot made a copy of the chalked figures on the door. Only Levison remained with him, and he was watching the Shell fellow with an odd expression in his eyes.

"Might as well rub this rubbish out," said Talbot, when he had finished making his copy.

"Why?" asked Levison.

"Oh, of course, it doesn't matter!"

Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, came along the passage, and he frowned as he saw the chalk-marks on the door.

"What's this?" he asked. "This kind

Tom Merry & Co. are puzzled one morning when they find chalked numbers on the School House door. What do they mean? Only Talbot knows the answer. The Toff had not forgotten the secret code of his former gang of cracksmen!

of thing isn't allowed. Rub that chalk off the door at once, Levison."

"Right-ho!" said Levison.

He borrowed a duster from the housemaid and rubbed the old oak door clean.

Talbot drew a deep breath, and, without a glance at Levison, went out into the quad.

CHAPTER 2.

A Little Too Hasty!

F IGGINS, Kerr, and Wynn, the famous Co. of the New House, had just come out of their House as the rising-bell ceased to clang over St. Jim's.

In the keen morning they were taking a trot round the quadrangle to freshen up their appetites for breakfast—though Fatty Wynn's appetite, at least, did not require any aid of that sort. The three chums of the New House halted as a crowd of School House fellows bore down upon them with a rush.

"Look out! School House cads!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Collar them!" roared Tom Merry.

Figgins & Co. made a rush for their own House. But the School House fellows crowded in the way, and the New House trio was promptly surrounded.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Fair play's a jewel, you know! What are you on the warpath for so early in the morning?"

"Looking for cheeky bounders who chalk up cryptograms on the door of our House," said Tom Merry.

"What!"

"Collar them!"

"Here, I say—"

But Figgins had no time to say anything. The crowd from the School House closed in upon the three, and they were promptly collared. Figgins & Co. resisted manfully, but in the grasp of so many pairs of hands they had no chance at all.

"Bump them!" roared Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Bump the boundahs!"

"Yow-ow!" roared Figgins. "What the dickens—"

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

"Now, explain what it all means!" howled Blake. "We're not taking the trouble to work out your rotten cryptogram! Tell us what it means!"

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at!" gasped Figgins. "Have you gone off your silly rockers?"

"Explain!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, bump him again!" said Tom Merry. "We'll bump it out of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins came into rough contact with the quadrangle again, and he roared.

"Yow-ow-ow! You silly asses—"

"Now will you tell us what it means?" demanded Tom Merry.

"What what means, you frabjous ass?"

"The cryptogram!"

"What cryptogram?"

"Oh, he doesn't know!" grinned Lowther. "Give him another bump and freshen his memory!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Figgins.

"Chuck it, you asses! Yaroooh! Leggo! I'll slaughter you! Rescue, New House!"

"Now will you explain?" demanded Blake.

"I don't know what you're burbling about!" yelled Figgins. "I don't know anything about any silly cryptogram!"

"Honest Injun?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, fathead!"

"Then it was Kerr," said Tom Merry. "Bump him!"

"Hold on!" yelled Kerr, as he was bumped on the hard, unsympathetic earth. "Hold on! Chuck it! I don't know anything about it, either!"

"Oh, rats! Give him another bump for not knowing anything about it, either!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crumbs! You fatheads—oh!"

"It must have been Wynn, then!" said Tom Merry. "Now then, all hands to the mill! Fatty's a heavy-weight!"

"Leggo!" gasped Fatty. "I don't know—yaroooh!—anything about it, either! Oh!"

"Now, look here!" said Tom Merry, wagging his forefinger at the gasping heroes of the New House. "If it wasn't you, it was some bounder in your House. Who was it?"

"You—you silly ass!" gasped Figgins. "It wasn't! We're the first out of our House this morning, you burbling jabberwocks!"

"And we don't know anything about it!" roared Kerr.

"Bai Jove, we have been wathah hasty, deah boys!" remarked Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Never mind. A bumping will do them good, on general principles," grinned Kangaroo—otherwise Harry Noble—of the Shell. "But if it wasn't those bounders, who was it?"

"It's a giddy mystery, then!" said Tom Merry. "Somebody must have got in over the school wall in the night and chalked that rot on our door. I suppose it couldn't have been old Taggles. Then it must have been somebody from outside St. Jim's."

"It's extwaordinawy!"
 Figgins & Co. were released. They were a little dishevelled, and somewhat flustered, and a very great deal exasperated. But their curiosity overcame their exasperation.

"What's the giddy mystery?" asked Figgins, as he dusted himself down. "What are you burbling about, you School House fatheads?"

"Weally, Figgins—"
 Tom Merry explained, and the New House chums listened in great astonishment.

"Well, that takes the cake!" said Figgins. "Honour bright, it wasn't us—or anybody in our House, either. We were the first out of the House. Besides, some of you were out before us. I saw your door open. Must have been a School House chap playing the giddy goat!"

"Wats! I opened the door first, Figgins, and I found it there."
 "Let's see it," said Kerr.

Figgins & Co. walked towards the School House with the crowd of fellows. In their curiosity concerning the strange message in figures, they had quite forgotten the bumping. But when they got to the door of the School House, it was bare.

"My hat! It's been rubbed out!" said Blake.

Figgins looked at him suspiciously. "I say, I suppose you're not pulling our leg?" he said.

"Honest Injun!" said Tom Merry. "It was there right enough. We all saw it. I didn't take a copy of it, though. Did any of you fellows?"

"I was goin' to," said Arthur Augustus, frowning. "But I didn't. It's wotten, because I'm wathah a dab at finding out cryptogwams."

"Levison took a copy of it," said Herries. "I saw him doing it."

"Good! We'll hunt up Levison."
 There was a search for Levison. The Fourth Former was discovered in a quiet corner of the quadrangle, wrinking his brows over the strange set of figures in his pocket-book.

"Here he is!"
 "Found it out, Levison?"
 Levison shook his head.

"I can't make head or tail of it," he said.

"Let's see it," said Figgins. "I dare say I can tell you what it means."

"Weally, Figgins, as I have not been able to guess the meanin', I hardly considah—"

"Depends on a chap's brains," explained Figgins. "You wouldn't be able to, you know."

"You uttah ass—"
 "Blessed if I can make it out," said Figgins, staring at the queer set of figures in Levison's pocket-book. "Looks as if some silly ass has jumbled up the figures simply to puzzle us. They can't mean anything."

"Each figuah stands for a lettah, deah boy—"

"Or a word," said Lowther.

"Yaas, possibly. But how to find out what lettahs or words—that is wathah difficult."

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"Beats me," said Figgins. "You try it, Kerr. You're a blessed Scotsman, and you've got a head for this kind of thing."

Kerr grinned. He was already scanning the figures with deep interest. But he could make nothing of them.

"I'll take a copy of it and try to work it out," he said.

A good many of the fellows took copies from Levison's, and set to work, trying to decipher the weird figures. But they tried in vain, and most of them gave it up before breakfast-time.

When the bell rang, and Tom Merry & Co. went into the School House, they met Talbot.

"Found it out?" asked Tom Merry. Talbot started.

"Eh—what?"
 "You took a copy of the cryptogram, I mean."

"Yes, I took a copy," said Talbot carelessly. "I've thrown it away since. Let's get in to brekker!"

"Right-ho! I'm hungry," said Tom Merry cheerily.

They went into the dining-room, and at that time it did not occur to Tom Merry that Talbot had not, in point of fact, answered his question. But Levison, who was following them in, noted it, and he smiled in a curious way.

After breakfast, when the juniors came out, Levison touched Talbot lightly on the arm as he went out into the quadrangle. Talbot's brow was wrinkled with thought and he started irritably as he looked round at Levison.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Only a word," said the Fourth Former, "about that cryptogram."
 Talbot looked annoyed.

"Oh, don't bother me about it!" he said.

"I haven't been able to read it," said Levison. "I thought you might have spotted what it meant."

"I don't see why you should think so."
 "Oh, it was only an idea! I know you are a keen chap."

"Thanks!" said Talbot dryly. And he turned away.

"Hold on!" said Levison. "You haven't answered me yet. Have you found out what it means, Talbot?"

"I don't want to talk about it," said Talbot brusquely. "I wish you wouldn't bother me about the rot, Levison."

Without a word further he walked away. Levison smiled.

CHAPTER 3.

The Shadow of the Past!

TOM MERRY & CO. were particularly cheerful that day.

The afternoon was a half-holiday, and the School House juniors were playing a House match with Figgins & Co. And the weather was fine.

Tom Merry & Co. were looking forward to the match with especial keenness, because they had a "rod in pickle" for the New House.

Talbot, the scholarship junior, short as was the time that he had been at St. Jim's, had proved himself a tower of strength in the junior eleven.

In all the more important matches played by the St. Jim's juniors the new winger was sure of a place in the team, and with his aid in the House match, Tom Merry confidently expected to give Figgins & Co. the "kybosh," as he expressed it.

After morning lessons, the juniors were thinking of nothing but the House match; the chalked figures on the

School House door had been dismissed from their minds. One or two fellows were still puzzling over them, but that was all.

How they had come to be chalked on the door was a mystery. Every fellow who had been asked declared that he knew nothing of the matter, and it was pretty clear that some outsider must have got in over the school wall and chalked the figures on the door. Why anyone should have done such an extraordinary thing was a mystery. Some absurd practical joker had done it to create a mystery, was the general opinion, and so the subject was dismissed.

Football was the subject in all minds now. After dinner most of the fellows sauntered down to the playing fields. There was a senior match on that afternoon, too—Kildare and the mighty men of the first eleven playing a visiting team on Big Side. But to the Lower School the junior House match was the event of the day.

"Time we got down to the ground," Tom Merry remarked, looking at his watch. "Where's Talbot? Has he gone down?"

"I haven't seen him," said Lowther. "I'll look in his study."

Tom Merry ascended the stairs to the Shell passage. He was a little surprised that Talbot needed looking for; the new fellow was usually very keen about footer. Talbot shared a study with Gore and Skimpole, next to Tom Merry's in the Shell passage. Tom tapped at the door, opened it, and looked in.

Talbot was there, alone. He did not look up. He was sitting in a chair, with his hands driven deep into his jacket pockets, and a deep wrinkle in his brow, his eyes fixed on the carpet. It was evident that he had not heard that tap on the door, and had not heard the door open.

Tom Merry's cheery face clouded a little as he looked at Talbot, silent, immobile, and plunged in a gloomy reverie.

Talbot was subject to those deep fits of despondent thought at times, and Tom Merry well knew the reason. But of late they had seemed to leave him, and Talbot had become as light-hearted and cheery as the rest of the Co. Apparently, this afternoon the old black mood had returned once more to take possession of the junior whose past had been so strange and so shadowed.

"Talbot, old chap—"

Talbot started at the sound of Tom Merry's voice, and flushed red.

"Yes, come in, Tom?"
 "Nothing wrong, old fellow?"

"I—I was thinking," said Talbot.

"Are you ready for me? I—I'd forgotten about the match. I won't keep you waiting."

Tom Merry dropped his hand on the Shell fellow's shoulder.

"Look here, Talbot. I can guess what you were thinking about. Chuck it! All that's over now."

Talbot smiled a curious smile. "You can guess?" he said.

"Yes," said Tom Merry bluntly. "You're thinking about things that are over and done with, and can't be helped. You shouldn't. Look forward, not back. It's best."

"I know it is," said Talbot quietly. "But sometimes a fellow can't help looking back, especially when he's had a past like mine. I can't help thinking how short a while ago it was I came here—and what I was—"

"Forget it," said Tom.

He did not like to think of what his

chum had been in those black, wretched days.

Talbot smiled bitterly. "And I had no shame then," he said. "When I first came here I was the Toff—the confederate of Hookey Walker and his gang of cracksmen. Then—then came the change. I know you believe in me now, Tom; I think I've proved that I'm sincere."

"Of course you have," said Tom. "You let your old pals denounce you rather than let them rob the school. After that you did a jolly plucky thing, and earned the King's pardon. Nobody has a right to say anything to you after that; and nobody will! Why, even Levison, who was always against you, has turned round, and he stands by you now. You have the gift of making friends with everybody. Nobody ever expected to see Levison play the game at any time—he was reckoned an out-and-out cad—but you have found some good in him, and brought it to light. That's something for you to set against the past that can't be helped, Talbot."

Talbot nodded. "There's good in everybody," he said; "it only needs getting at. When I was a cracksmen, nobody would have supposed I was good for much; but—"

"But they'd have been wrong," said Tom Merry. "But what made you think about all this now, Talbot? I thought you were getting over all that, and putting it right out of your mind."

"I was," said Talbot slowly. Tom Merry had an anxious look. "Do you mean that something has happened to bring it all back?" he asked. "Some of the fellows have—"

His eyes gleamed as he spoke. "No," said Talbot. "The fellows have acted like bricks, considering what they know about me. Croke and Mellish sometimes sneer—let them! It doesn't hurt me. It isn't that."

"It's something, though," said Tom. "I haven't seen you like this for a long time. I read in the paper some time ago about that burglar who broke into St. Jim's and denounced you because you wouldn't help him. What was his name—Hookey Walker?"

"That was the name." "I read that he escaped," said Tom. "But he can't bother you, Talbot. He can't say anything more about you than he's said already, and your pardon covers all. You're not afraid of him?"

"No." "Besides, he couldn't show up anywhere without being arrested and sent back to choky," said Tom. "I know. But—"

"Is it that man Hookey Walker you've been thinking of?" asked Tom. "Yes."

"But—but why?" Talbot paused before he replied. His handsome face was clouded.

"I—I don't know if you'll understand," he said. "I—I was that man's companion. My father—Captain Crow, as they called him—was the leader of the gang, and he was killed, and I took his place, because I was useful to them. If I hadn't come here, and known you fellows, I should be in the same boat still."

"Rubbish!" said Tom. "You chucked it all overboard the first chance you had."

"Yes, I think that's true," said Talbot, with a sigh. "I asked Hookey to do the same, and he laughed at the idea. Then he attempted to rob the school. Now he's being hunted for by the police. Tom, I know he's a thief and a villain,



As Hammond helped the injured Arthur Augustus into the dressing-room, a junior swung round guiltily from the pegs where the coats were hanging. It was Levison. "Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "What are you up to, Levison, you wotah?"

and he never cared a straw for me. But—but he was my comrade in those days."

"Talbot! You don't mean to say that you're thinking—that you want to help that villain?" asked Tom Merry.

"The question is whether I ought to," said Talbot miserably.

"Certainly you ought not to," said Tom warmly. "You've been pardoned, and that covers all you've ever done against the law. But if you renewed your connection with Hookey Walker again, you'd have Mr. Fox of Scotland Yard on your track once more. You'd be breaking the law, and you'd be liable to go to prison."

"I know." Tom Merry closed the door of the study. His face was agitated now. This had to be settled, and he meant to settle it.

That Talbot, who had fought so hard to throw his black and miserable past behind him, and who had a chance at last to lead a new and brighter life, should think for a moment of risking all that he had won, from a mistaken sense of loyalty, alarmed Tom Merry greatly. He knew that the Toff was fearless; he knew that he was loyal; and the thought that Talbot might fall back into the morass of crime he had so barely escaped from, for the sake of an unscrupulous and callous villain like Hookey Walker, filled Tom with uneasiness.

"Look here, Talbot. We'll have this out," he said. "We're not leaving this study till it's settled."

"The footer match—" said Talbot.

"Never mind that—Figgy won't mind waiting a few minutes. You're thinking of this wretched brute Hookey Walker.

What has he ever done for you, excepting keep you as long as he could in a life of crime?"

Talbot winced. "Nothing else," he said.

"And when you wanted to reform, he tried to keep you there still?"

"Yes." "And when you refused to help rob this school, he turned on you, denounced you, and did you all the harm he could. If you hadn't earned the King's pardon, you'd be in danger from the police now, and all through him."

"Yes." "And he is an utter rascal—a criminal who had a chance to reform, if he had liked, and refused to take it?"

"Yes."

"Then what do you owe him? Listen to me, Talbot. All you've got, all you've won, you'd lose, if you broke the law again. And you're thinking of doing it for such a man as that, who would turn on you if it served his purpose. You know he would!"

"I know he would," said Talbot.

"Then you've got to put the idea right out of your mind. I know you too well to suspect you; but I warn you, if the other fellows heard you talking like this, they'd very likely think it was a hankering after the old life that was troubling you."

Talbot turned crimson. "Tom, you don't think—"

"No, I don't," said Tom Merry. "But I want you to promise me, on your word of honour, that you won't try to see Hookey Walker, or to find out where he is, or have anything to do with him, or help him. I want you to promise to keep clear of that. Will you?"

Talbot drew a deep breath.

"You're right, Tom! He has no claim on me. Yes, I promise! If he asks me for help, I shall refuse him—I promise."

Tom Merry's face brightened. "I know you won't break your word," he said. "And now drive the matter out of your mind, and don't think anything more about the rascal. He can't trouble you here, anyway. Now let's go down to the footer. Hallo!"

The study door had opened softly, without a knock, and Levison stood in the doorway, startled, his face flushed.

CHAPTER 4.

Levison on the Track!

THE two Shell fellows stared at the Fourth Former.

Levison had opened the door quietly, stealthily, and it was evident that he had not known that the room was occupied. The confusion in his face showed that.

Tom Merry frowned darkly. Of late he had begun to entertain a more favourable opinion of the cad of the Fourth. Levison had been won over by Talbot; from a foe he had changed into a friend, and his friendship had at least been very useful to the one-time Toff.

Levison, at a good deal of risk to himself, had saved Talbot from a false accusation, and Talbot and his friends had not forgotten it. But all Tom Merry's old dislike of the cad of the Fourth came back as he looked at the flushed and guilty face in the doorway, and he could not repress the scorn in his look.

"Well?" he snapped.

"I—I thought you fellows were gone down to the footer," stammered Levison. "It's past the time for kick-off."

"We were just going," said Tom Merry. "What were you sneaking into Talbot's study for?"

"I—I—I—"

"You thought there was no one here, and you were coming in like a thief!" said Tom contemptuously. "What did you want? Spying, as usual?"

"No; I—I was going to borrow Talbot's Virgil. I've got some lines to do, and—and I've lost mine."

Levison's late reform had evidently not extended so far as learning to tell the truth. It was quite plain to both the Shell fellows that he was lying. Tom Merry's lip curled with scorn.

"You were spying!" he said bluntly. "Though what there is to spy on, I'm blessed if I know!"

"Nor I," said Talbot.

"There's nothing to spy on now," said Levison, emphasising the last word spitefully.

Talbot coloured.

"Oh, shut up!" said Tom Merry roughly. "Come on, Talbot; you'd better lock your study door, if you don't want a spy here."

"I don't mind," said Talbot quietly. "Levison is welcome to turn my study inside out if he likes. I can't imagine what he wants here."

The two Shell fellows passed out of the study, and went their way without looking back, leaving Levison standing in the doorway, his face still flushed, and his eyes glinting.

He hesitated for some moments.

Then, as Tom Merry and Talbot disappeared down the stairs, he made up his mind, entered the study, and closed the door.

His next actions were very curious. He searched the wastepaper-basket, turning over every scrap of paper it contained with great care. His expression, when he had finished, showed that he had not found what he sought.

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With a grunt, he carried his mysterious search further. He scanned the grate and the fender, and then hunted round the study. Every scrap of paper he picked up and examined carefully, and threw them aside again.

It was more than half an hour before he gave up the search, with deep disappointment in his face.

"He's too jolly careful," he murmured. "It's no good. He must have written it out—if it's him—but I'm sure of that. But if he wrote it out, he's destroyed it, or he's got it about him."

His eyes lighted up at that thought. He crossed to the window, from which he had a view of the junior football ground. On Little Side, the House match was going strong. He could see Talbot on the wing of the School House team, racing with the ball down the touchline. There was a roar; that came to his ears as he stood looking from the study window.

"Well saved, Fatty!"

Talbot had sent in a rasping shot, but the Welsh junior in goal had fisted it out. Owen cleared, and the struggle went away to midfield again.

The crowd of juniors round the touchline were shouting; but Levison did not listen; he was not interested in footer. It was Talbot only that his eyes were upon. Talbot was in his footer rig, of course; he had changed in the dressing-room, and Levison was thinking—perhaps in the dressing-room, in Talbot's pockets, was what he had sought in vain in his study.

Should he chance it?

He knew what he had to expect from Tom Merry & Co. if they caught him rifling Talbot's pockets in the dressing-room. They would not be surprised to find him so engaged; he would only be living up to his reputation as a spy and a sneak. Levison smiled at the thought—a bitter smile. The good opinion he had won lately from Tom Merry & Co. had become dear to him. He did not want to lose it.

This time, whatever might be said of his methods, his motive was not bad. An insatiable curiosity and a desire to help the boy who had befriended him, and whom he believed now to be in difficulties, prompted him. But, however good his object might be, he could not explain it to Tom Merry & Co.,

and if they had known it, they would not have forgiven his stealthy and underhand methods.

He was thinking the matter out, with wrinkled brow, when the study door opened. Levison started. He did not want to be caught in Talbot's study. A youth, with bulging forehead and a large pair of spectacles, came in. It was Skimpole of the Shell, one of Talbot's studymates.

He blinked inquiringly at Levison. "My dear Levison, do you want anything here?" asked Skimpole. "Are you looking for the book I offered to lend you?"

"The—the book?" stammered Levison.

"Yes," said Skimpole benevolently. "You remember I offered to lend you the great volume of Professor Balmycrumpt on the subject of Determinism. I—"

"Exactly!" said Levison coolly. "I—I was looking for it."

"I will lend it to you with pleasure, my dear Levison!" said the brainy man of the Shell. "Indeed, I will explain it to you, if you like, in simple language suitable to your understanding."

"Thanks!" said Levison, who was not at all disposed to spend his half-holiday listening to an explanation of any of Skimpole's weird and wonderful "isms." "Another time, Skimmy, old man. By the way, have you tackled that cryptogram? A brainy chap like you ought to be able to see through it."

Skimpole nodded. Skimpole was a youth of tremendous genius, and what he didn't know about Determinism and Darwinism, and all sorts of "isms," wasn't worth knowing. But he never could see when his leg was being pulled—his scientific knowledge did not extend so far as that.

"Certainly, my dear Levison! I have no doubt that, with my scientifically trained mind, I should decipher it at once; but I have no time to waste on such trifles. I hope this afternoon to complete chapter three hundred and sixty-seven of my book—"

"Did you see Talbot working it out?" asked Levison carelessly. "He brought a copy of it up to his study to work out this morning, I think."

"Yes, before breakfast," said Skimpole. "I was here, and I remember I asked him if I could help him; but he declined my assistance. I have no doubt I could have saved him all the difficulties at once. But Talbot is very self-willed. He never listens when I try to explain to him that Professor Balmycrumpt—"

"Did he work it out?" asked Levison.

"Really, I do not know, my dear Levison. I was not paying any attention to him," said Skimpole. "He seemed annoyed when I glanced at what he was jotting down, though I could not see why he should object to my seeing a crowd of absurd figures and some lines from Shakespeare. I have noticed that his temper is not always reliable, because when I have tried to explain Determinism to him—"

"Lines from Shakespeare!" said Levison eagerly, his eyes gleaming. "He had written down some lines from Shakespeare?"

"Yes. As I was saying—"

"In connection with the cryptogram, Skimmy?"

"I really do not know, Levison. He had written the lines down on the same sheet of paper, and seemed to have numbered the words, or the letters, I forget which. It was a matter of no importance. Ah, here is the volume

you were looking for! I hope you will read it from beginning to—"

"Do you remember the lines, Skimmy?"

"Really, Levison, I did not note them. I am not very well acquainted with Shakespeare. I prefer Professor Balmcrumpet as a writer. I—"

"What play were they from?"

"Let me see! I think they were from 'Julius Cæsar'! Yes, I am sure. But—"

"And the lines?"

"I cannot remember. Now, about this book, Levison—"

"Try to remember the lines, Skimmy," urged Levison.

Skimpole shook his head. His mind was a beautiful blank on that subject.

"I really cannot, Levison. I do not see why you should be interested in such a very unimportant thing. Now, this book—"

"He was numbering the words in the lines?" asked Levison.

"Yes, I think so."

"Or the letters in the words—which?"

"I really did not notice. I only observed that he was covering them with figures, and then he looked cross, and I did not look at the paper again, of course."

"Did he say anything when he had finished?"

"Not that I remember," said Skimpole, surprised by Levison's persistence. "Yes, now I recall; he said something—yes, he said, 'The hound! Never!'—which surprised me very much. But he left the study before I could ask him what he meant."

Levison snapped his teeth.

"Now let me show you where you should begin the study of this valuable volume. I say, Levison, where are you going, my dear fellow?"

Skimpole blinked after Levison in astonishment as he strode to the door. But the Fourth Former turned in the doorway; he had another question to ask.

"What did he do with the paper when he had finished, Skimmy?"

"The—the paper?"

"Yes; the one he had written the lines on."

"I really do not remember. Yes, I remember; he threw it into the grate."

"Was there a fire?"

"My dear Levison, there is never a fire early in the morning."

"Then the paper ought to be there!" exclaimed Levison.

"I have no doubt it would be there now, Levison, but Talbot picked it up again—I am sure I do not know why—and put it into his pocket. Then he went out. You seem to be very curious about it, my dear Levison."

"Oh, not at all!" said Levison. "Which pocket did he put it in, Skimmy?"

"In his jacket pocket," said Skimpole in astonishment. "Really, my dear Levison—I say, you haven't taken the book I'm lending you—"

But the Fourth Former was gone.

Skimpole blinked after him in amazement.

"Dear me, how very queer Levison is!" murmured Skimpole. "He came here especially for Professor Balmcrumpet's book, and he has gone away without it. How very curious!"

But the genius of the Shell dismissed the matter from his mind as he sat down to get to work upon the three hundred and sixty-seventh chapter of his great book—the tremendous volume which was to electrify the world when it was published—perhaps!

CHAPTER 5.

Caught in the Act!

"GOAL!"

The School House fellows were shouting and clapping as Levison came down to the football ground.

The first half of the House match had ended with no score to either side; but in the second half the School House had gone ahead at last.

The new winger was showing his value. The ball had gone into the net from Talbot's foot in spite of Fatty Wynn's heroic effort to save, and the School House were one up.

"Bravo, Talbot!" Tom Merry clapped the winger on the back as Fatty Wynn tossed out the leather.

"Good for you, Talbot! We've broken our duck, anyway!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That was weally a wippin' goal, Talbot, deah boy! I could not have done any bettah myself!"

Talbot smiled.

The teams lined up again, Figgins & Co. looking very grim. There were only twenty minutes more to go, and prospects were not bright for the New House. But Figgins & Co. meant to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, if it were possible to be done, and the game became fast and furious.

Levison stood watching the play for a few minutes, and then sauntered to the pavilion, to the dressing-room where the players changed.

No one had eyes for Levison; every eye was on the footer field, where the struggle swayed to and fro, now in the School House half, now close up to Fatty Wynn's goal.

"Play up, School House!"

"Go it, Figgins!"

"On the ball!"

Arthur Augustus had the ball, and Figgins charged him off it. D'Arcy fell sprawling, and two or three of the players, in the press, fell over Arthur Augustus. But Herries cleared, and the ball went away to midfield.

Tom Merry, one of the players to fall over Arthur Augustus, was on his feet in an instant; but D'Arcy, after a vain attempt to rise, rolled over on the ground, with a sharp ejaculation.

Phoop!

The whistle went, and play stopped, and the fellows gathered round the swell of St. Jim's. D'Arcy was looking very white.

"Hurt?" asked Tom Merry breathlessly.

"Yaas, a' little," said D'Arcy, wincing. "My beasty ankle has been twodden on. Some silly ass twod on it with his hoof. I think it was you, Hewwies!"

"Sorry!" said Herries.

"Oh, it's all wight, only I can't stand up," said Arthur Augustus. "Nevah mind me; I can hop off!"

"Hard cheese, Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"It's all in the game, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I shall be all wight pwesently. The twouble is that I can't go on!"

One of the linesmen came and helped Arthur Augustus off the

field. In spite of his cool cheerfulness, D'Arcy's pallor showed that he was hurt. Hammond helped him towards the pavilion.

The whistle went for the resumption of play, and the two teams were hard at it again, Tom Merry playing a forward short. But Talbot, in the front line, was almost as good as two men.

Arthur Augustus limped into the pavilion, leaning heavily on Hammond's arm.

"I 'ope it isn't bad, D'Arcy," said Hammond anxiously.

"Only a beasty big bwuise, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "You can wub it with embwocation for me if you like!"

"You bet!" said the Cockney schoolboy.

He helped Arthur Augustus into the dressing-room.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus forgot all about his bruised ankle for a moment.

A junior in the dressing-room swung round from the pegs where the clothes were hanging and stared at him, with a flushed and startled face.

It was Levison.

"Bai Jove!" repeated Arthur Augustus, in astonishment and scorn. "What are you up to, Levison, you wotah?"

"N-nothing!"

"You had your paw in the pocket of that coat. Whose is it? Talbot's!" said Arthur Augustus. "What are you goin' through Talbot's pockets for, you cad?"

"I—I wasn't!"

"Don't tell whoppahs, Levison! I saw you! Did you see him, Hammond?"

"What-ho!" said Hammond, with a contemptuous glance at the cad of the Fourth. "I seed him plain enough. He 'ad his 'and in Talbot's outside pocket!"

Levison panted: "I—I—I—"

The cad of the Fourth made a movement to leave the dressing-room. Arthur Augustus limped in his way.

"No, you don't, you wotah!"

"Let me pass!" muttered Levison.

"Wats! You're goin' to stay here till the fellows come in!" said Arthur Augustus. "I'm goin' to tell Talbot you've been at his pockets, and he can see what you were aftah. You've been takin' somethin'!"

"I—I haven't! Do you think I'm a thief?" hissed Levison.

"I certainly think it looks like it," said Arthur Augustus. "What do you think, Hammond, deah boy?"

"Course he is," said Hammond at once. "I s'pose he wasn't going through Talbot's pockets for nothing, was he? He was arter something."

"You Cockney rotter!" exclaimed Levison furiously. "I'll—"

(Continued on the next page.)

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"Well, wot will you do?" asked Hammond, clenching his fists as Arthur Augustus sank into a seat.

"I—I wasn't taking anything!" said Levison sullenly.

"Then what were you doin'?" demanded Arthur Augustus. "If you weren't takin' anythin' you were playin' some twick on Talbot!"

"I—I was not. You don't understand—"

"I undahstand wight enough, you wottah! It's some of your old twicks, I suppose, and Talbot is goin' to know about it!"

Levison breathed hard. The match would be over soon, and the footballers would come trooping in. If Levison had to face them, he knew that he had a rough handling to expect. Worse than that, too, was the general contempt he had to expect.

"Look here!" said Levison in a low voice. "It—it isn't as you think, D'Arcy. I—I was going to do Talbot a good turn."

"By goin' through his pockets and spyin'?" asked Arthur Augustus caustically.

"You don't understand. I—I can't very well explain—"

"I watah think you can't, you wottah!"

"But—but I'm acting as Talbot's friend. Hang it, I think I've proved that I'm his friend!" said Levison savagely. "Didn't I prove it at the time Tresham accused him—"

D'Arcy's face softened a little. It was true enough; he remembered that Levison had certainly played up unexpectedly well on that occasion. Talbot had done him a good turn, and Levison had repaid it with interest.

"That's all vevy well," said Arthur Augustus. "But what are you goin' through Talbot's pockets for?"

"I—I can't explain; but—but—"

"Playing some rotten trick!" said Hammond.

"I was playing no trick," said Levison sullenly. "I don't choose to explain. But—but I don't want Talbot

to know. He—he would think the same as you do, and—and I—"

There was a trampling of feet, and a crowd of flushed footballers came in, with gleeful faces.

"All serene, Gussy!" chortled Blake. "We're one to nil—beaten them to the wide— Hallo, what's Levison doing here? What's the matter?"

CHAPTER 6.

Friend or Foe?

LEVISON backed away, breathing hard.

He had been fairly caught, and he had to go through with it now.

"What's the matter here?" asked Tom Merry.

"We caught 'im," said Hammond, beginning to chafe D'Arcy's swollen ankle. "See that 'e don't get away. That 'urt, D'Arcy?"

"Ow! No—go on, deah boy—"

"What was he doing?" asked Blake.

"Goin' through Talbot's pockets."

"What?"

"The rotter!"

"What beastly tricks have you been playing now, Levison?" demanded Tom Merry, with an angry glance at the cad of the Fourth.

Levison's face set sullenly and defiantly.

"I've been playing no tricks. I've done no harm, and I've got nothing to say. You can do as you like."

"We'll jolly well rag you if you've been playing any tricks on our things here!" said Herries wrathfully.

"Yaas, watah!"

"Look at your things, Talbot, and see if there's anything wrong," said Tom Merry.

Talbot nodded, and examined his pockets. He had given Levison a quick and very curious look. He went through all his pockets carefully.

"Anything missing?" asked Blake.

"Nothing," said Talbot.

"And nothing put there that doesn't belong to you?" asked Monty Lowther,

remembering the trick that Tresham had played on Talbot a short time before.

Talbot shook his head.

"Nothing," he said.

"Then what did you want with Talbot's pockets, Levison?"

"Find out!" said Levison.

"That's what we're going to do!" said Tom Merry grimly. "I don't know what your little game is, but it's pretty plain that you're up to your old tricks again."

"And before you leave this room you're going to explain," said Blake.

"You made us believe that you were dropping your rotten, caddish ways. Spoofing, as usual, I suppose. What were you going through Talbot's pockets for?"

"Speak up, you cad!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply. The footballers gathered round him with angry looks.

"Now, look here! You've got to explain yourself," said Tom Merry.

"You didn't come here and go through Talbot's pockets for nothing, I suppose?"

"Find out!"

"What was your object?"

"I've got nothing to say."

"You don't deny that you were doing it?"

Another shrug of the shoulders. A lie would have cost Levison nothing; but it was useless to deny what Arthur Augustus and Hammond had seen.

"And you won't explain?" demanded Blake.

"No, I won't!"

"It doesn't matter," said Talbot mildly. "Whatever he wanted, there's no harm done. Nothing has been taken from my pockets. Anyway, I can't believe that Levison would have taken anything valuable. That's all rot! He's not a thief!"

"Thank you!" said Levison.

"But he must have had some reason for doing what he did," said Blake, "and he ought to be made to explain. We all know Levison. I suppose you've got some letter there that he wanted to read!"

"There's nothing in my pockets that anybody mightn't see," said Talbot.

The Toff could not help recalling that there had been a time, not so very long ago, when he had secrets to keep. The other fellows were thinking of that, too. And their natural conclusion was that Levison believed that the Toff was in communication with his old associates, and was seeking to "howl him out" by spying into his correspondence. And that suspicion made them extremely "ratty."

"You've got to explain, Levison," said Tom Merry. "You came sneaking into Talbot's study this afternoon. Now we find you going through his pockets. You'll have to learn that we don't allow that kind of thing here."

"Put it how you like," said Levison. "Talbot knows I'm no enemy of his. You fellows ought to know it. I've got nothing else to say."

"Will you tell us what you were going through his pockets for, then?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then we'll jolly well rag you, and teach you to leave our things alone!" burst out Jack Blake angrily.

"Yes, rather! Collar him!"

Levison made a spring for the door. But there were half a dozen fellows in the way, and he was promptly collared and dragged back. The cad of the Fourth struggled in the grasp of the incensed juniors.

Talbot came quickly forward, a

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troubled expression on his handsome face.

"Let him alone, you fellows. Chuck it!"

"Rats!"

"Look here, it was my things he was meddling with. If I don't mind, you fellows needn't!" urged Talbot.

"Bosh! He's going to have a lesson. Bump him, and kick him out!" said Tom Merry.

Bump, bump!

"Oh!" roared Levison. "You rotters—varoooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, then—all together!"

Levison was swung through the doorway, and half a dozen football boots were planted behind him. He shot out of the pavilion like a bullet from a gun.

As he rolled outside, panting, three or four of the footballers rushed after him, and the cad of the Fourth was fairly "dribbled" off the ground. The footballers came back grinning. Levison had had a severe lesson, and they felt that they had done their duty.

Levison picked himself up and limped away, his face white with rage. He limped into the School House and went to his study.

There he flung himself into a chair, gasping; but he quickly rose again. Sitting down was not very comfortable for him just then.

"What rotten luck!" he muttered. "And it wasn't there, after all; he must have destroyed it."

When Levison's studymates came in to tea, they found him with a sullen and savage face. Lumley-Lumley looked at him curiously.

"Same old Levison!" he remarked. "Same old game! Same old spying tricks! You'll find yourself sent to Coventry, my infant!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled Levison.

But Lumley-Lumley's prediction was correct. Levison was not exactly sent to Coventry; but when he came down into the Common-room he could not help observing that all the fellows were giving him a very cold shoulder indeed.

Tom Merry & Co. made it a point to ignore his existence.

They were, as Monty Lowther put it, fed-up. They had been willing to believe that the cad of the Fourth was trying to turn over a new leaf, and they had treated him accordingly; but the discovery of him going through Talbot's pockets in the dressing-room made a complete revulsion in their feelings. As Lumley-Lumley said, he was the same old Levison; and the School House fellows meant to let him know what they thought of him.

Levison came towards the Terrible Three in the Common-room; and they promptly turned their backs on him. Levison stopped, a deep flush coming into his face. But he did not speak. Without a word, he turned and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER 7.

Early Birds!

TOM MERRY stirred in his bed and awoke.

It was night, and the stars glimmered in at the high windows of the Shell dormitory in the School House. From the other beds came the deep breathing of the sleeping juniors.

Tom Merry turned his head on his pillow. He wondered what had awakened him. It seemed to him that he had heard some unaccustomed sound in the silence of the dormitory.



He started suddenly. In the silence there came an unmistakable sound. It was a soft footstep, and it was followed by a creaking of a bed. Tom Merry sat up.

"Hallo! Who's there?" he asked.

There was no reply.

"Some of you fellows out of bed?" demanded Tom Merry.

Deep silence.

Tom Merry looked round in the dimness of the dormitory. The glimmer of the starlight at the high windows did not dispel the darkness, and he could barely make out the next beds.

"Hallo!" yawned Lowther's sleepy voice. "Who's that jawing?"

"Me," said Tom Merry. "I thought I heard someone moving about."

"Oh, rot! You're dreaming!"

The silence was unbroken, and Tom concluded that his imagination had played him false, and settled his head upon his pillow again. He had suspected for a moment that it might be a raid of the Fourth Formers; but there was no alarm, and he soon dropped off to sleep.

He did not awaken again until the rising-bell was clanging out.

He sat up in bed. One fellow was already up and nearly finished dressing. It was Talbot. Tom Merry rubbed his eyes and looked at him.

"Hallo! You're an early bird," he remarked.

"Yes; I was awake early," said Talbot carelessly.

"Might have given me a call," said Tom.

"You were sound asleep."

"Well, I'm up now," said Tom, jumping out of bed. "Going down? I'll be with you in two ticks."

"Right-ho!" said Talbot. "I'm going into the quad."

The Shell fellows turned out of bed, and Talbot, having finished dressing, quitted the dormitory before the rising-bell had ceased to ring.

He was first down of the Shell; none of the others was likely to follow for ten minutes, at least. The door was not yet open. Talbot hurried downstairs, as if he had some reason for haste that morning. He started a little as he saw that he was not the first fellow down.

Levison was in the Lower Hall.

Talbot looked at him in surprise. Levison was by no means an early riser,

as a rule. He was generally a slacker, and stayed in bed as late as he could. But on this particular morning he must have been up and dressed long before Taggles began to ring the rising-bell, as he was down before Talbot.

He nodded to the Shell fellow.

"You're down early," he remarked.

"Yes," said Talbot curtly. "So are you, it seems."

"Perhaps we're both down early for the same reason?" suggested Levison.

"I don't understand you."

"I thought there might be some more chalked figures on the door," said Levison coolly. "Did you think so, too?"

"Why should there be?" said Talbot; and Levison smiled at the evasive reply.

"Well, it's possible. The fellow who put those figures there yesterday morning may have had another message to deliver," said Levison. "It's possible, anyway. I'm going to look as soon as the door's opened—before anybody has had a chance of rubbing them out, you know."

Talbot bit his lip.

"Why should anybody be in a hurry to rub them out, if they're there?" he asked.

"One never knows," said Levison.

Toby the page came yawning along the hall, and removed the chain from the door, and inserted the big key and unlocked it.

Levison swung the door open.

"My hat, I was right!" he exclaimed.

"My word," said Toby, looking in astonishment at the row of chalked figures on the door, "somebody's been at them tricks again!"

Levison scanned the figures eagerly.

They were not the same figures as on the previous morning. If it was a message, the message was shorter now. The figures were in two distinct rows—the upper row neatly written—the lower row roughly scrawled. It looked as if the two rows had been chalked there by different hands, as Levison noted at once.

The upper row of neatly written figures ran:

"5 9 3 18 3 7 3 10 60 9 7 7 3 45 24 4 18 11 24 45 9 18."

Below them, in scrawled chalk:

"3 10 16 7 18 7 4 4 20 15 16 20 15 16 10 16 7 18 66 4 24 60 10 4 9 2 6 3 4."

Talbot's eyes were fixed upon the lower row of figures, as Levison noted instantly.

"Can you read them?" asked the Fourth Former.

"They are plain enough," said Talbot.

"I mean, can you make out what they mean?"

"That is not so easy."

"Of course, it's a cryptogram," Levison observed, his eyes still upon Talbot's face.

"I should say so."

"If one had the key, it would be easy enough," said Levison. "Of course, the figures represent letters."

"No doubt, if it's a cryptogram."

"A certain set of letters, each with a number," said Levison—"easy enough to send messages in a cipher like this. All you need is for both parties to have a copy of the key—the set of letters to which the figures correspond."

"Yes, I suppose that's the usual way."

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"I see you're taking a copy," said Levison.

"Why not?"

"You're going to work it out?"

"Yes."

"I say, you're only copying down the lower row!" said Levison. "Don't you want the upper row, too?"

Talbot coloured.

"Yes, of—of course."

He copied down the upper row of figures also upon a leaf of his pocket-book.

Levison did the same.

By this time, several fellows were coming downstairs. It did not appear to have occurred to anyone beside Talbot and Levison that there might be another chalked cipher on the door, and no one had come for that purpose. But by the time the cipher had been copied down by the two juniors, several "early birds" had descended, and there were loud exclamations of surprise at the chalked figures on the door.

"Hallo!" said Blake. "The giddy joker has been at work again!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Levison.

"Dash it all, this ought to be looked into!" said Blake. "We can't have a stranger scouting into the school grounds of a night, and chalking up figures on the door. What the dickens can it mean?"

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, joining them. "At it again, the boundah! Anybody guessed what it means yet?"

Talbot quietly left the group of juniors gathered at the door.

"Well, this beats the band!" said Tom Merry, when the Terrible Three came down. "Who the dickens can it be doing this?"

"It isn't the New House boundahs," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "It must be somebody from outside St. Jim's."

"Looks like it. Perhaps the Housemaster ought to be told," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

Levison started a little.

"No good bothering Mr. Railton with it," he said. "Better rub it out before he comes down."

"Why?" asked Blake.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Kangaroo, as Levison suddenly took out his handkerchief and rubbed at the chalk marks on the door. "Stop that! We want to copy it down!"

"I've got a copy," said Levison.

"But what are you rubbing them out for?" demanded Tom Merry. "Why shouldn't the Housemaster see them?"

Levison made no reply. The figures were quite indecipherable now, and it was too late to stop Levison. He finished rubbing the door clean.

"Like your beastly cheek, I think, Levison!" said Herries. "Why couldn't you let it alone?"

Levison made no reply. He walked away; and the juniors stared after him, in surprise and exasperation.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Why doesn't Levison want the Housemaster to see that cryptogwam? There's somethin' wathah fishy in this."

"I've got it!" exclaimed Blake, a sudden idea coming into his mind.

"Got the cipher, deah boy?"

"No, ass; I think I've guessed it. It's one of Levison's silly tricks," said Blake. "Levison's the chap who chalked it on the door."

"Gweat Scott!"

"It's a trick to mystify us, though I don't see where the joke comes in," said

Blake. "As soon as he thought the Housemaster might start looking into the matter, he rubbed the blessed figures out. What would it matter to him if Railton saw them—unless he put them there himself?"

"Bai Jove! I think you're wight, deah boy. It's one of Levison's twicks!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I shouldn't wonder," he assented. "He's as full of tricks as a monkey, and it's just like him to pull our leg in this way."

"But the figures were there yesterday morning before Levison came down," said Digby.

Blake sniffed.

"He could have sneaked out of the dorm in the night to write them, fat-head! Any fellow could get out of the dorm, couldn't he?"

Tom Merry started. He remembered the movement he had heard the previous night in the Shell dormitory. That certainly could not have been Levison, as Levison slept in the Fourth Form quarters. But it might very easily have been some practical joker—Croke, for example, who was a fellow after Levison's own heart.

"Hallo! What have you got in your noddle, Tommy?" asked Lowther.

"Somebody was moving about in our dorm last night," said Tom Merry, with conviction. "I called out, but he didn't answer."

"I remember," said Lowther. "I answered you. I didn't hear anybody moving, though."

"Well, I did, and if he wasn't up to some trick, why couldn't he answer?" said Tom Merry. "It's some blessed practical joker, I think. He came down and scrawled this on the door and came back to the dorm!"

"Then it couldn't have been Levison," said Blake, puzzled.

"No, it couldn't, if it was a Shell chap," said Tom. "Croke, perhaps, or—"

"Rats!" said Croke. "I don't know anything about it; and I didn't get out of bed last night. I know that. Perhaps it was Lowther."

"I?" said Lowther.

"Yes; you're a funny merchant, and it's just what you might do," said Croke. "It seems you were awake when Tom Merry woke."

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Lowther. "Tom woke me up, calling out."

"Bai Jove! I should not be surprised if it was Lowthah! Lowthah is an awfully silly ass, and full of twicks—"

"Fathead!"

Tom Merry glanced curiously at his chum. Monty Lowther was the humorist of the Shell, and some of his little jokes took extraordinary shapes and forms.

"I—I say, Lowther, it wasn't you, surely?" asked Tom.

"No, it wasn't!" growled Lowther gruffly. "I don't know anything about it. I think it's the work of some silly practical joker, and I think it's Levison, myself."

"Rats!" said Mellish of the Fourth. "It's you right enough, Lowther. I advise you to stick to the comic column in the 'Weekly,' and chuck this kind of thing."

"I tell you it was not me!" shouted Lowther.

"Bow-wow!" said Mellish.

"Honour bright?" asked Blake.

"Yes!" growled Lowther.

"That settles it!" said Tom Merry. "I think it's a rotten joke myself, if it is a joke. And if I catch any joker

playing this little game, I shall give him a thick ear!"

"Same here!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, and so will I!"

"Good!" said Lowther. "Then he'll have three! And I'll give him one to make four!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd in the doorway broke up, puzzling over the queer incident; but the general opinion was that the figures on the House door were the work of a practical joker, whose object was to mystify them. But there were two fellows, at least, in the School House who did not think so. One was Levison of the Fourth and the other was Talbot of the Shell.

CHAPTER 8.

Figgy's Little Joke!

"**H**A, ha, ha!"
Thus Figgins of the Fourth.

Figgins & Co. were strolling in the quadrangle after morning lessons, when George Figgins suddenly broke into a merry chuckle.

The Co. looked at him in surprise. They could see no reason for that sudden outburst of merriment on the part of the chief of the New House juniors.

"What's the joke?" asked Kerr.

Figgins chuckled gleefully.

"They've been finding some more ciphers this morning on the door of their giddy casual ward over there," he said, with a nod in the direction of the School House. "I heard it from Skimpole."

"I heard it from Mellish," said Kerr. "They think it's some practical joker trying to mystify them. Some of them think it was a New House chap; but we know that it isn't!"

"No reason why we shouldn't take a hand, though," said Figgins.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, as they're looking for giddy cryptograms, and trying to work them out, we might provide 'em with another one," grinned Figgins. "We can make up an easy one—a cipher that they can spot quite easily—and then they can read it—a complimentary message from the New House. See?"

Kerr and Wynn chuckled.

"Good egg!" said Kerr. "It will be worth a guinea a box to see their faces when they work it out. Must make it pretty easy, though—School House brains aren't up to much."

"You bet! Make it as easy as falling off a form, and leave 'em to puzzle it out," said Figgins.

And the Co. promptly set to work.

Figgins wrote out the alphabet from A to Z, and numbered the letters. Then he proceeded to make up a sentence, using the figures instead of the letters—thus: 1 for A, 2 for B, up to 26 for Z. It was the simplest form of a numeral cryptogram, and certainly presented no great difficulties in unravelling.

When Figgins had written out his specially constructed sentence; however, it certainly looked extremely mysterious, simple as the cipher was.

"19 9 12 12 25 1 19 19 5 19 7 15 1 14 4 5 1 20 3 15 11 5 19 9 7 14 5 4 6 9 7 7 9 14 19."

Figgins & Co. surveyed their handiwork with considerable satisfaction.

Simple as the cipher was, the cryptogram looked as mysterious as those which had been found chalked up on the door of the School House.

"We can't shove this on the School

House door," remarked Figgins. "They'd spot us. Better put it somewhere where they can find it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Got a piece of chalk!"

Kerr had a piece of chalk. Figgins quitted his chums and sauntered towards the School House. Certainly, it would not have been easy to chalk an inscription on the House door without detection.

But Figgins was not thinking of that. He sauntered into the House. Most of the fellows were out of doors, and Figgins found the passages deserted.

He walked quietly along to the Junior Common-room.

The door was closed, and there was no one in the passage just then. Figgins took out his chalk, and the copy of the cryptogram, and proceeded to chalk the figures in a row along the middle of the Common-room door.

It did not take him many minutes.

Then, putting chalk and paper out of sight, Figgins sauntered away. But he was not to get out of the School House undetected. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy met him in the Hall, and turned his eyeglass upon him suspiciously.

"Hallo, you New House boundah!" he remarked.

"Hallo!" said Figgins cheerily.

"What do you want on the respectable side of the quad?"

"How's your foot getting on?" asked Figgins affectionately.

"Bai Jove! It's weally vevy good of you to come ovah and inquiah aftah my foot. deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, who was still limping a little. "It's goin' on all wight, but there's a beastly big bwaise on my ankle, you know. Hewwies has vevy big feet, and he came down wathah heavily, you know."

"Too bad," said Figgins. "I suppose it interferes with your running."

"Yaas; I shan't be able to wun for some time," assented Arthur Augustus. "It's all wight for walkin', but I can't wun."

"Couldn't run a foot-race with me now?" suggested Figgins.

"Wathah no!"

"Oh, good! If I bolted now, you couldn't run after me?"

"Certainly not. My ankle—ow-ow-ow! You ass! You wottah! Gweat Scott! Oh cwumbs!"

Arthur Augustus staggered back in astonishment as Figgins jerked out his necktie, ruffled his hair, and pushed him against the wall. Then the merry Figgins took to his heels. He had acted so suddenly that the astounded swell of St. Jim's had no time to resist. But he made a bound in pursuit, and then his ankle brought him up short.

"Ow! You wottah! Gwoogh! Oh, you spoofah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, realising at last the reason why the playful Figgins had asked him all those affectionate questions about his damaged ankle.

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Blake, coming along. "What on earth are you going about like that for, Gussy? Trying to look like Tired Tim or Dismal Dutchy?"

"Gwoogh! That beast Figgins—he asked me whethah I could wun, and tweeked me in this disrespectful mannah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I see nothin' wath- evah to laugh at—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake evidently saw something to laugh at; and he laughed. Arthur Augustus started for the Common-room, to put his collar and tie straight before the glass. He stopped short at the door, forgetting all about his collar and tie.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

Blake looked round.

"Blake, deah boy, this weally beats ewevythih! It's anothah cwypotogwam!"

Blake was on the spot in a moment, staring at the cipher on the door of the Common-room. And in a few minutes more a dozen fellows were gathered on the spot.

CHAPTER 9.

Signed—Figgins!

"IMPOSSIBLE!"

"But it's there!" said Tom Merry.

"Impossible!" repeated Talbot. "How could it be there? I—I mean, it's extraordinary, anyway. Let's go and see!"

He hurried along the passage with Tom Merry, who had called to him the news of the latest cryptogram. He pushed his way through the crowd of juniors and stared at the figures chalked on the door of the Common-room. There was a startled, almost dazed expression on his face.

"This is getting thick," remarked Monty Lowther. "Who could the fellow have been? And what do those idiotic figures mean?"

"How could he have got here without being seen?" asked Blake. "It must be some practical joker, as I said."

Levison came quickly up the passage.

He stared at the inscription on the Common-room door, and his jaw dropped in astonishment.

"Who's done that?" he asked.

"Nobody knows."

"It—it can't be the same chap!" exclaimed Levison. "It can't! He couldn't come here in the daylight—it's impossible—"

"How do you know?" growled Blake. "What do you know about it, anyway?"



"Oh!" roared Levison, as he was swung through the doorway of the dressing-room. "You rotters—yaroooh!" Half a dozen football boots were planted behind him, and the cad of the Fourth shot out of the pavilion like a bullet from a gun!

Levison coloured.

"I—I mean, a stranger couldn't come here without being seen. I can't understand this, Talbot—"

"I don't understand it, either," said Talbot curtly.

"You've taken a copy of it?" said Levison.

Talbot nodded and walked away. But the other fellows remained, scanning the queer row of figures, trying to work some meaning out of them. Levison made a hasty copy of the cryptogram, and then followed Talbot. The Shell fellow had gone to his study; and Levison thought he could guess what he had gone there for.

Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, came along the passage. He paused at the sight of the crowd of juniors, and blinked at them through his glasses.

"Dear me! What is the matter?" he asked. "What is all this crowd for? Is anybody hurt?"

"No, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul! What is this?" exclaimed Mr. Lathom, catching sight of the row of figures on the Common-room door.

"It's a cryptogram, sir," said Blake. "Somebody's chalked it up, and we can't make out what it means."

"Dear me, what an extraordinary idea!" said Mr. Lathom. "The doors should not be chalked upon in this way. Such an exercise for ingenuity, my boys, is quite commendable—but such things should not be chalked upon the doors. Who did this?"

"Nobody knows, sir," said Tom Merry. "This isn't the first we've found. The others were on the House door. Perhaps you could help us see what it means, sir."

Mr. Lathom smiled benignantly. He was always good-natured, and he was not adverse to showing the juniors his superior brain powers. He took out a pencil and a paper.

"Certainly, my boys; I have very little doubt that I can decipher it," he said. "I do not suppose that it is a—ahem!—very abstruse cryptogram, as it is the work of a schoolboy. We will see. Ahem! Now, in a case like this, it is best to begin with the simplest methods, and then proceed to more difficult methods if required. The simplest method, of course, is to take the alphabet numbered in order of the letters, from one to twenty-six."

"I've tried that, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "At least, I tried it on the other cryptogram, and I suppose this is on the same system."

"Well, we will see," said Mr. Lathom benevolently.

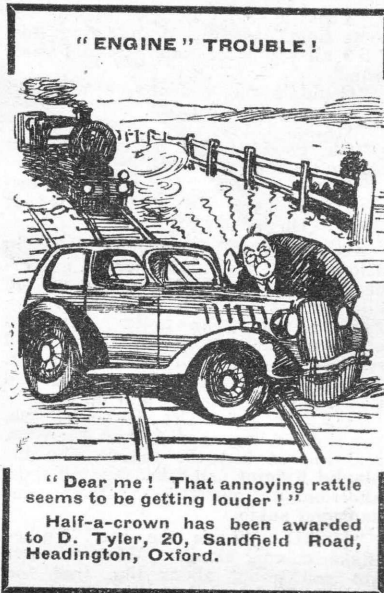
The juniors stood round respectfully while Mr. Lathom methodically wrote out the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, and numbered them from A to Z. They did not think that so simple a key would be found to the cipher; but as Mr. Lathom was a Form-master, it was necessary to give him his head, so to speak. The master of the Fourth scanned the row of figures on the door again.

"Now," said Mr. Lathom, in his methodical way, "1 is A, 2 is B, 3 is C, and so forth. At that rate, taking the figures from the commencement, 19 is S, 9 is I, 12 is L, 12 repeated makes LL, 25 is Y, 1 is A, 19 is S, 19 repeated makes SS—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" suddenly yelled Blake.

Mr. Lathom broke off his calculation, and gave Jack Blake an exceedingly frigid glance.

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"What is the matter, Blake?"

"N-nothing, sir," stammered Blake, turning very red.

"Then pray do not interrupt me by foolish laughter."

"N-no, sir."

Mr. Lathom went on with his calculation. The juniors looked in surprise at Blake. The Fourth Former looked sheepish, but his eyes were twinkling.

"Weally, Blake," murmured Arthur Augustus, "it was wathah wude to intewwupt Mr. Lathom like that, and I weally do not see any cause for mewwiment."

"Fathead!" murmured Blake.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Take the letters already done, and see what they spell," whispered Blake. Arthur Augustus did so.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I—I—silly ass—ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Ya-as, sir."

"Pray be silent."

"Certainly, sir."

"There, I have finished," said Mr. Lathom, showing the interested juniors his written rendering of the cryptogram. "The letters, placed in the place of figures, run as I have written:

"SILLY ASSES GO AND EAT COKE SIGNED FIGGINS."

"It is now a question of spacing the letters out into words," said Mr. Lathom sagely. "If that can be done, it shows that we have hit on the correct solution of the cipher, my boys."

"Oh, yes, sir!" said the juniors, gathering round.

"I will now ascertain if the letters can be spaced out," said Mr. Lathom.

He dabbed at the line of letters with his pencil, and suddenly a frown came over his brow.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed irritably.

And Mr. Lathom threw the paper on the floor angrily and walked away.

The juniors looked after him in surprise.

"Hallo! What's he got his rag out for?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"What are you cackling at?"

The juniors hurriedly gathered up the sheet Mr. Lathom had thrown on the floor, and stared at it. Tom Merry spaced out the row of letters into words.

There was a yell. For the line, duly spaced out into separate words, read:

"SILLY ASSES GO AND EAT COKE SIGNED FIGGINS."

"My hat!"

"Figgins!"

"The cheeky rotter!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That's what that wottah was doin' here when I spotted him goin' out. Figgins!"

The School House juniors looked at one another with feelings almost too deep for words. The New House chief had put up that ridiculous cryptogram, and given them the trouble of reading it, and when deciphered it contained that absurd message.

"The—the cheeky beast!" growled Tom Merry, at last. "Let me catch him shoving any more beastly cryptograms in our House, we'll—we'll—"

"Squash him!" grunted Blake.

"The cheeky wottah!"

And the crowd of juniors dispersed. They understood now why Mr. Lathom had looked so cross when he interpreted the mysterious message. Some of the juniors went out into the quad to look for Figgins, but the astute Figgins was far away, in his own quarters. Tom Merry looked for Talbot, to tell him the result of the deciphering of the figures.

He found Talbot in his study. The Shell fellow was standing at the grate with a piece of paper in one hand and a lighted match in the other. He was just applying the match to the paper when Tom looked in.

"Hallo!" said Tom. "We've found out the giddy cipher this time. Is that what you've been doing?"

"Yes. It wasn't difficult. It was a message from Figgins, after all."

The lighted paper fluttered from his hand into the grate and burned away. Talbot turned away from the grate.

"I dare say the other ciphers were shoved on the door by some New House bouncer," growled Tom Merry. "Not Figgy—he told us it wasn't him—but some of the cheeky rotters. And if we'd bothered to find them out, it would have turned out to be something of this sort."

Talbot did not reply to that remark. "Let's get down and get some footer practice before dinner," he said quite abruptly.

"I'm your man," said Tom at once. And the chums went down the passage together.

Levison looked out of the study and watched them go down stairs. Then he glanced cautiously this way and that way. The passage was empty, and with a quick and quiet step, he hurried along to Talbot's study.

CHAPTER 10.

Part of a Clue!

LEVISON stepped quickly into Talbot's study and closed the door behind him.

Talbot had gone down to the football ground with Tom Merry, and so far as he was concerned, the spy of the Fourth was not likely to be interrupted. As for Gore or Skimpole coming in, he had to take his chance.

He did not lose an instant.

He was upon the same quest, whatever it was, that had brought him to the study the day before, and that had caused him to search Talbot's pockets in the dressing-room, with such painful results to himself.

He searched through the study rapidly and thoroughly.

Suddenly he uttered a sharp exclamation. His eyes had fallen upon the fragment of charred paper in the grate.

In a second he was on his knees at the fender, his eyes glittering at the burnt sheet, of which only a tiny corner remained unconsumed.

On that tiny unburnt corner there was no writing. But on the burnt part it was evident that there had been writing in ink, and as the piece, though crumpled by the heat, was still whole, it was not impossible to trace the black letters on the burnt paper.

Talbot had been careful—very careful—but he had not been careful enough. That burnt fragment was sufficient to put the spy of the Fourth on the track, if he could but decipher the letters upon it.

He did not touch the paper. He knew that it would crumple to powder at a touch, almost at a breath.

He bent down till his face almost touched it, holding his breath in his eager anxiety. Dark on the burnt fragment appeared the letters, in Talbot's hand, but each letter written unconsciously. And under each letter of that word was a number.

"F R I E N D S
1 2 3 4 5 6 7."

Levison's eyes gleamed with exaltation. It was the key—the long sought key to the cipher!

That word was not all, of course. There had been a dozen words or more written upon the burnt paper, most of these completely obliterated by the burning.

But farther on Levison distinguished another word, with the numbers written underneath the letters in due order:

"B U R Y
45 46 47 48."

Rapidly the junior transferred the letters and numbers with his pencil to a leaf of his pocket-book. His heart was beating faster with excitement and the fear of interruption at any moment.

More obliterated words, but a little farther on he found a single letter, with the number under it—"R"—the number under it being "54."

Then at the end of the lines on the burnt paper, he was able to distinguish:

"S E H I M
64 65 66 67 68."

That, he could see, was the conclusion of the lines of writing and numbers. The whole of the key, therefore, contained sixty-eight letters.

Levison, still taking the utmost care not to disturb the burnt fragment, scanned it for more letters with puckered, anxious brow and eager eyes. In the middle of it he succeeded in tracing another letter, with a number below:

"C
49."

That was all. So far, he had copied down in his pocket-book the extent of his discoveries. But if he could take the burnt fragment away to his study and examine it at his leisure, there was a chance that more might be distinguished.

He rose to his feet, and looked round for some receptacle in which to convey the burnt fragment. An empty biscuit-tin served his purpose. With sedulous care, Levison placed the open end of the biscuit-tin on the hearth beside the

burnt paper, and gently, with his breath, wafted the letter into the tin.

It was wafted in without breaking. Carefully he lifted the tin to carry it away. He bore it carefully to the door and stepped into the passage, and almost ran into Gore of the Shell, who was about to come into his study. He had to stop, and Gore stared at him in surprise.

"What the deuce are you doing in my study?"

"I—I came to speak to Skimpole," muttered Levison. "He—he's going to lend me a book—"

"You came in to scoff my biscuits, you mean," said Gore wrathfully, as he caught sight of the biscuit-tin. "Hand that over, you cheeky rotter!"

"It's not biscuits!"

"Hand it over!"

"It's an empty tin, you duffer—"

"Yes, I believe you've sneaked into my study to collar an empty tin!" jeered Gore. "Hand it over, I tell you!"

And, without waiting for further argument, George Gore rushed at Levison and collared the biscuit-tin, wrenching it away. Levison gritted his teeth with rage. Gore stared at the fragment of burnt paper which fluttered to the ground crumbling into pieces.

"Hallo! It's really empty!" exclaimed Gore, in astonishment.

"You fool! You imbecile!" said Levison, hardly able to control his rage.

"Well, I thought you were scoffing my tommy," said Gore. "You're such an awful liar, you know. Here, you can have the tin if you like. I don't want it."

"Go and eat coke!" growled Levison; and he strode away.

It was not the biscuit-tin he wanted, and the crumbled fragment of paper was useless now. Gore looked after him in surprise, shrugged his shoulders, and tossed the tin into the corner.

Levison hurried to his own study and locked himself in. He did not want to be interrupted in the work he had now to do. He opened his pocket-book and took out his fountain-pen, and drew towards him a sheet of impot paper. Although Gore's unfortunate intervention prevented the possibility of further clues, he had made enough discoveries to give him a start.

He was certain that the lines Talbot had written out, of which he had numbered the letters, furnished the key to the cryptogram that had been chalked on the School House door. Otherwise, why should Talbot have written them out?

He would not write out lines by chance and number the letters. His writing them out and numbering them showed that, as Levison had suspected from the first, Talbot was in possession of the key to the cipher. Talbot knew what letters were represented by that apparently meaningless array of figures on the School House door; but, of course, he could not carry

them in his memory. Each time that he had to decipher a message he had to write out the words of the key, number them, and then compare the numbers with the numbers written in the cryptogram.

Levison had already deciphered and thrown aside the cryptogram chalked by Figgins on the door of the Common-room. That had not taken him long. He had been astounded to find it there, but he had guessed almost at once that it was the work of a practical joker trying to mystify the School House fellows. He grinned as he reflected how Figgins had unconsciously helped him.

For Levison had calculated at once that Talbot would decipher the new cryptogram—that, for that purpose, he would write out the key of the cipher and number the letters—and then he would discover that the cryptogram did not correspond with his key, and would tumble to Figgy's little joke. But Levison had hoped to discover the key he would write out.

He had tried to find it before and had failed. Convinced as he was that Talbot possessed a key to the cipher, and wrote it out for guidance whenever it was a question of reading the chalked message, Levison had been unable to make any discovery. The Shell fellow had been too careful in covering up his tracks. The search in Talbot's study, the search in his pockets in the dressing-room, had been in vain. Evidently Talbot was cautious enough to destroy what he had written when it had served his purpose.

But this time Levison had partly succeeded. Talbot had burnt the paper he had written, but the remaining fragment had furnished a clue.

Was that clue sufficient to read the cryptogram? That was what Levison now had to find out.

He added together the numbered letters he had distinguished, and found that he possessed a list of seventeen, as follows:

"F R I E N D S B U R Y
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 45 46 47 48

C S E H I M
49 64 65 66 67 68."

If it was indeed the key, there was something to work upon. Seventeen letters should furnish a clue to at least

(Continued on the next page.)

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part of the cryptogram. Levison took out his copy of the original cryptogram which had first been seen on the door of the School House, and wrote it out fresh.

The original ran as follows, in figures:

"18 15 1 1 20 15 16 10 16 7 18
66 4 24 60 10 4 20 4 7 9 2 5 9 66
9 9 14 4 20 16 11 24 14 4 2."

Underneath that apparently meaningless line, Levison wrote the same figures, with the letters inserted where he possessed them, so that the line now ran:

"18 15 F F 20 15 16 10 16 S 18
H E 24 60 10 E 20 E S 9 R N 9 H
9 9 14 E 20 16 11 24 14 E R."

Or putting in dots where the letters still missing were represented by figures, Levison obtained the following:

"... F F S . H E . . . E . E
S . R N . H . . . E E R."

Levison wrinkled his brows over that somewhat meagre result. Certainly it was not easy to detach any meaning from it. There was not a single complete word, and the letters, as they stood, although they doubtless formed parts of words, gave no clues to what the words might be.

But Levison was not beaten yet. He ruminated deeply.

"I know this was addressed to Talbot. I'm sure of that. He gave himself away when he saw the first cryptogram. The other fellows didn't see it, but I did. Besides, who but Talbot would be receiving such a message here? Only Talbot could be in connection with the kind of people who use secret ciphers. It was a message to Talbot from some member of the old gang, who knows he's here, but dares not come—and dares not write, haunted by the police most likely—Hookey Walker, perhaps! He wants Talbot for something—to help him escape—to join in some villainy—goodness knows what."

Levison nodded with satisfaction as he thought that out. He was convinced that he was on the right track.

"Now, there's a double 'F' in the first word, and two blanks in front of it," went on Levison, his eyes gleaming. "Those rotters always call Talbot the Toff—that was his name in the gang. That's how they addressed him in the secret cipher. It isn't very hard to guess, then, that the two blanks in front of 'FF' will be filled by the letters 'T O'. The first word is 'Toff.' And that gives me two more letters to go on with—if it's right, and I think it is. 18 stands for 'T', and 15 for 'O'."

And Levison went over the line again, putting in "T" and "O" wherever he found 18 or 15. The result was:

"T O F F S T H E . . . E .
E S . R N . H . . . E E R."

Levison pondered over that perplexing result. That he was upon the track he was certain, but he had to confess that he could not yet read the message. He laid it aside, and turned over the leaf where the second cryptogram, discovered that morning on the School House door, was written out.

The original ran: "5 9 3 18 3 7 3 10 60
9 7 7 3 45 24 4 18 11 24 45 9 18."

This was the first part of the second cryptogram, which, Levison had noted, was written neatly in chalked figures, very different from the sprawling figures of the rest. He proceeded to put in the letters, as far as his key furnished them,

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putting dots to mark where the rest were missing. It read, when he had finished:

"N . I T I S I . . . S S I . . E T . .
B . T ."

Levison grinned.

"T-dot-dot-B-dot-T," he muttered. "If that doesn't make 'Talbot,' I'd like to know what it does make. It's clear enough. Talbot read the first message, and the next night he came down while the other fellows were asleep. Tom Merry woke up, from what I hear, and heard him; but he doesn't guess that it was Talbot who was up. He came down and got out of the House, and chalked his answer on the door in the same cipher. He knew that the man, whoever he was, was coming for the answer. No doubt that's their rule in using the cipher, to put the answer in the same place. That accounts for that row of figures being done neatly. Talbot did them. That was his answer—signed. And then the man, having read that reply, wrote under it the rest of the figures—the big, scrawled ones. I've got them here."

Levison, with great excitement, which he tried to suppress, scanned the rest of the chalked inscription that had been found on the School House door that morning. It ran, in the original figures:

"3 10 16 7 18 7 4 4 20 15 16
20 15 16 10 16 7 13 66 4 24 60
10 4 9 2 6 3 4."

Levison went over it carefully, putting in the letters he was in possession of, as in the previous cases, and marking the blanks with dots. The result was surprising.

"I . . S T S E E . O . .
O . . . S T H E . . . E R
D I E."

Levison started violently. The flush of excitement died out of his face, and he became pale.

"Good heavens!" he muttered.

He stared at the last three letters he had written. Those three letters, taken by themselves, formed a word—the word "DIE."

What fearful threat, then, was conveyed in that secret message?

Was Talbot's life in danger?

Levison sat staring at the papers before him blankly. If only he had the rest of the key! He figured it out in his mind. Talbot had read the first chalked message on the door. The next night he had gone out and chalked his reply there. The unknown had written this under it—dissatisfied, evidently, with Talbot's message. Talbot had come down early in the morning to see if there was an answer from the unknown, intending to rub it out before anybody else came down.

Levison had forestalled him in that. But for his going down early, he was quite sure that no eyes but Talbot's would have seen the second inscription on the door. And the peril that hung over Talbot—for Levison was convinced that peril threatened him—what precaution was the fellow taking against that? None!

The dinner-bell was ringing now. Levison hastily rose and crumpled the papers into his pocket. Later on he

would work at them again—in time, perhaps, to discover what Talbot's peril was. And what then?

He smiled grimly as he left the study. The other fellows were already in the dining-room, in their places, and Mr. Lathom, at the head of the Fourth Form table, frowned at Levison as he came in. Blake was beside him, and he ostentatiously turned his shoulder to Levison. D'Arcy was on the other side, and he ignored Levison's existence completely.

The bitter smile came on Levison's thin lips again.

He was ignored—sent to Coventry! And it was he—and he alone—who could step between Talbot and the hidden peril that threatened him.



With the patience of a cat Levison waited in the recess in the sound. Levison drew back closer into the recess as, in the dark

CHAPTER 11.

Down on Levison!

"**W**HEREFORE that worried look, Skimmy?" asked Monty Lowther jovially, smiting the genius of the Shell upon the shoulder with a mighty swipe. Skimpole had an extremely thoughtful expression upon his face, and he did not notice the approach of the Terrible Three until Monty Lowther humorously smote him. Then he gave a yell, stumbled forward, and fell upon his knees.

"Ow!" Skimpole blinked round at Lowther in surprise as he scrambled up.

"My dear Lowther, whatever—"

"That was only a friendly greeting," explained Lowther.

"Ow! Really, I should prefer you to be unfriendly, Lowther," said Skimpole, dusting the knees of his trousers.

"I consider—"

"But why the worried brow?" asked

Lowther. "Have you struck upon a specially knotty point in the thousand-and-three-hundred - and - sixty - eighth chapter of your tremendous book?"

"Really, Lowther—"
 "Or are you trying to work out what Professor Balnycrumpet really means?" asked Lowther. "My dear chap, give it up! What's the good of trying to work out what a Determinist means? You will tie your mighty brain up into a knot."

"I was thinking of Levison, my dear Lowther. He has been questioning me again, and really he is so persistent that he has driven weightier matters from my mind," said Skimpole. "It is really ridiculous of Levison, for how can he expect me to remember such

as usual. What lines from Shakespeare are you burbling about, Skimmy, old man?"

"I really do not know, Lowther. I know that Talbot had written down some lines from a play of that writer, when he was trying to work out the cipher, but, of course, I did not make a note of them. Why should I? How can I retain such trifles in my mind, when I am occupied by weightier matters? Besides, why should Levison suppose that the key of the cipher is contained in a quotation from Shakespeare, even if Talbot happened to write it down on the same paper? Really, Levison is absurd! There is no reason to suppose that Talbot has the key to the cipher."

"So Levison supposes that Talbot has the key to the cipher, does he?"

"Apparently he does, Merry; and he has urged me to try to remember the lines that were written on Talbot's paper, which he put into his pocket afterwards, yesterday. Really, it is a great bother. I was thinking out the subject for my four-hundredth chapter, and Levison has quite driven it out of my mind with his nonsense."

"The rotter!" said Tom Merry wrathfully.

Skimpole blinked at him in surprise.

"It is certainly inconsiderate of him, my dear Merry; but I should not exactly call him a rotter, although he has completely driven from my mind all—"

"Ass! I wasn't thinking of your rubbish!" said Tom, and he walked away with Manners and Lowther, leaving Skimpole blinking after him in surprise.

Tom Merry's brows were knitted.

"You see, the cad is at his old tricks again!" he exclaimed. "He's making out now that Talbot has the key to the cipher, and is trying to find it out from him. That's why he was going through Talbot's pockets in the dressing-room, I suppose."

"But why should the ass think that old Talbot knows anything about it?" said Manners.

Tom made an angry gesture.

"Don't you see? He's got an idea in his beastly, suspicious head that that cipher message on the door was intended for Talbot."

"Oh!"

"It must have been put there for somebody to read," said Tom. "My idea is that it was a silly practical joke—like Figgy's cryptogram on the Common-room door—only we don't know yet who did it, or what it means. But that theory isn't good enough for Levison. He's working it out to his own satisfaction that there's something shady in it, and that Talbot knows about it. I shouldn't wonder if he thinks that Talbot is still in connection with the old gang, and that that is a message from some of the cracksmen."

"Phew!" said Manners.

"I—I say, it does look rather queer, now one thinks of it," said Monty Lowther, with a soft whistle. "Dash it all, Tommy! A message in a secret cipher—it looks—"

Tom Merry uttered an angry exclamation.

"There you go! You're Talbot's chum, and you think that! What will the other fellows think when Skimpole has babbled this all over the school?"

"Oh, don't scalp me, old chap!" said Lowther good-humouredly. "I don't think anything against Talbot. Still, I must say it might look as if some of his old pals are trying to get into communication with him."

"I suppose that's Levison's dodge," said Tom, clenching his hand. "Once that gets started in the House, the fellows will jump to the conclusion that Talbot is mixed up with the old gang—Hookey Walker and the rest."

Lowther started.

"That rotter, Hookey Walker, is out of prison," he remarked, in a low voice. "He might try to get into touch with Talbot. I'm blessed if I like the look of this, Tom!"

Tom Merry frowned.

"Don't be an ass, Monty! Talbot has promised that he will not have anything to do with Hookey Walker or the rest of the rotters, that he won't see them or help them, or have anything to do with them."

"Well, that's all right. We know his word is as good as gold."

"But the other fellows don't," said Tom, frowning. "It looks to me as if Levison is taking advantage of this rotten cipher bisney to revive all those rotten stories about Talbot, and start the fellows suspecting him. And I'm jolly well going to see Levison about it!"

"Go easy," said Lowther. "Levison acted very well for Talbot once. No good forgetting that—the time he was accused—"

"I haven't forgotten it. But he's beginning his old tricks again," said Tom Merry savagely, "and the sooner he stops the better."

Tom Merry strode away in search of Levison. Manners and Lowther, perplexed and uneasy, went with him. The Terrible Three did not find Levison in the quad or in the School House, and when they went up to his study, they found the door locked. Tom Merry rapped on it sharply.

"Hallo! What's wanted?" came Levison's voice from within.

"I want to speak to you!" called back Tom Merry.

"Sorry! I'm busy!"

"Unlock the door!"

"I tell you I'm busy!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"I shall wait here for you, Levison, if you don't open the door!" he said.

"Wait as long as you like," answered Levison. "I'm not coming out till the bell goes for classes!"

"Why can't you let me in?"

"I told you I'm busy. Besides, you haven't been so jolly anxious to talk to me lately," said Levison sneeringly.

"What's the hurry now?"

"Very well, I'll wait!"

"Wait, and be banged!"

Tom Merry waited, his temper growing sharper with every minute of waiting. Fortunately, it was not long to afternoon lessons. The first bell began to ring, and he heard a movement in the study, and the sound of papers being put away. The door opened and Levison appeared.

"Well, what do you want with me?" he asked.

"I want to speak to you," said Tom Merry, striding into the study, and



in the passage. Midnight had sounded when there was a slight darkness, he saw a dim figure pass silently along the passage!

trivial matters as lines from Shakespeare, when—"

"Lines from Shakespeare?" said Tom Merry in astonishment. "What on earth does Levison want you to remember lines from Shakespeare for?"

"It is in connection with the cryptogram," said Skimpole. "But, for my part, I do not see any reason to suppose that Talbot has the key to the cipher, and really I do not feel inclined to trouble my head about it."

"Talbot?" repeated Manners.

"Yes. In fact, I have spoken to Talbot about it, and he simply requested me to depart, and masticate a substance which is certainly not intended for human provender—I mean, coke. Talbot was quite snappy, in fact, and really I shall lose my patience with Levison if he bothers me any more." And Skimpole shook his head solemnly.

The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

"Levison again," murmured Lowther. "And going for old Talbot,

forcing Levison to give ground. "I've been talking to Skimpole."

"Indeed! I hope you had a good time!" said Levison, with a yawn.

"He's let out the reason why you were spying into Talbot's pockets."

"Really?"

"Yes," said Tom, his eyes flashing and his anger growing at Levison's contemptuous nonchalance. "You've got an idea in your beastly suspicious mind that Talbot has the key to that ciphered message on the door."

"Well?"

"Well, that means you believe the message was addressed to Talbot."

"Suppose I do?"

"Well, if you do, from whom do you believe that message came?" demanded Tom.

"That's my business!"

"It's my business, too, as Talbot's chum!" said Tom Merry. "If this begins to be talked about, there will be a general idea that Talbot still has something to do with that cracksmen gang—Hookey Walker and the rest. I suppose that is your object?"

"No," said Levison quietly. "That isn't my object."

"Then what is?"

"I may tell you some time—when it suits me," said Levison coolly. "At present I don't intend to be questioned."

Tom Merry clenched his hands hard.

"You can bully me if you like, but you won't get a word out of me," said Levison. "You have made up your mind that I am Talbot's enemy—"

"You have always been that, except on one occasion—"

"But not since that occasion," said Levison quietly. "And now I am not his enemy; I am his friend—and a better friend than you are!"

"Was it as a friend that you came spying into his study, and turned out his pockets in the dressing-room?" said Tom scornfully.

"Yes."

"What!"

"I did it as a friend," said Levison. "Now I've answered your question. Are you satisfied?"

"No, I am not satisfied. A friend doesn't spy on a chap and turn out his pockets secretly. It's a queer way of showing friendship, anyway."

"I have some queer ways, you know," yawned Levison. "Anyway, I am not answerable to you. Go and eat coke!"

Tom Merry made a fierce stride forward, but Manners and Lowther caught hold of him and pulled him back. Levison surveyed them with a bitter look.

"Hold on, Tommy!" said Lowther. "After all, there may be something in what the fellow says. He can't help doing things in his own caddish way, and we know that he helped Talbot once. Let him alone."

"The bell's gone for classes," said Manners. "No good getting old Linton's hair off. Come on, Tom!"

Tom Merry paused. Never had the desire been stronger to take Levison by the scruff of the neck and wipe up the floor with him. The mere thought that Levison should take advantage of the cipher affair to spread unpleasant talk about Talbot exasperated the captain of the Shell. Was the Toff never to be suffered to live down the past, and to see it consigned to oblivion?

Manners and Lowther drew their angry chum out of the study. Tom allowed himself to be persuaded.

"I won't handle him," he muttered; "but—but the cad ought to be sent to Coventry! It's his old rotten tricks over again! He's not fit for a decent chap

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to speak to, and I won't speak to him, for one—"

"And I can make up my mind to forgo the pleasure of his conversation," said Monty Lowther, with a grin. "Leave him to stew in his own juice, my son. That's the best way to deal with a chap like Levison."

And that was what the Terrible Three resolved to do, and their example was followed by others. Levison had been generally cut since the incident in the dressing-room, but now it became more acute, and that afternoon the cad of the Fourth made the discovery that he was sent to Coventry by nearly everybody in the House. And, hardened as he was, he did not find it pleasant.

CHAPTER 12.

In Coventry!

"WILL you lend me your Shakespeare, D'Arcy?"

Levison asked the question when the Fourth Form had come out after lessons.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was about to reply benignantly, "Yaas, deah boy," when he suddenly remembered himself. So, instead of thus replying, he jammed his eyeglass into his eye, surveyed Levison from top to toe with a freezing stare, and turned upon his heel.

Levison flushed crimson.

"You thumping ass!" he exclaimed wrathfully.

Arthur Augustus spun round angrily.

"Weally, you wottah—"

"Shut up, Gussy!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I wefuse to allow that wottah to apply oppwobvious epithets to me, even if he is in Coventry!"

"Kin on!" said Blake cheerfully. And he linked his arm in that of the swell of St. Jim's and walked him away.

"What's the matter with the duffer?" said Levison, turning to Reilly of the Fourth.

Reilly stared at him and walked off. Levison bit his lip. He realised that the sentence had gone forth—he was in Coventry.

He went moodily along the passage. A group of Shell fellows were chatting near the doorway, and they ostentatiously turned their heads away as Levison came by. The cad of the Fourth paused, and gave them a bitter look.

"So this is your little game, Tom Merry?" he asked.

No reply.

"And you're all in it, I suppose, you rotters?"

Freezing silence.

Levison stalked out into the quadrangle. He spotted Talbot there, and bore down upon him.

Talbot gave him a curt nod.

"Are you in it, too?" asked Levison bitterly.

"In what?" asked Talbot.

"I'm sent to Coventry!"

Talbot coloured a little.

"No," he said, after a pause: "I'm not in it. I think you have acted in a beastly mean way, Levison. But I can't forget that you did me a good turn once. It was a jolly good turn, and I'm not likely to forget it in a hurry. And, whatever you do, I shan't turn my back on you, for one!"

Levison drew a deep breath.

"That's decent of you," he said.

"And it may mean that I can do you another good turn, too—better than you think."

Talbot smiled slightly.

"I don't see how you can," he said.

"You don't feel inclined to take me in your confidence?"

"On what subject?"

"You can guess that. On the subject that's been in your mind for the past two days," said Levison meaningly.

Talbot's handsome face hardened.

"I won't ask you what you're driving at," he said; "but I suggest that you mind your own business, Levison. That's all I've got to say."

And Talbot sauntered away towards the School House. There he was pounced upon immediately by the Terrible Three.

Monty Lowther shook a warning finger at him.

"You've been talking to Levison," he said.

Talbot nodded.

"He's in Coventry!" said Tom Merry abruptly. "Let him alone, Talbot! A week or two in Coventry will do him a heap of good."

"But why?" asked Talbot. "Because of that affair in the dressing-room, you mean?"

"Yes; that and other things. The fact is, Talbot, his tongue has got to be stopped. There's a rumour starting already that you know something about that cipher on the door, that it was addressed to you from some unknown person. The rumour was started by something that Levison said to Skimpole and Skimpole has babbled about. Mellich and Crooke have got it out of Skimmy, and now they're making a tale of it. It means all that rotten old story being dragged up into the light again—and it has all started from Levison. Nobody but Levison thought of connecting you with that cryptogram; and, of course, we know that you don't know anything about it."

Talbot did not reply.

"So the cad has been sent to Coventry," said Tom. "The proper place for him, too. And you, least of all, ought to have anything to do with him."

"So take your kind uncle's advice and let him alone," chimed in Monty Lowther.

"I—I can't cut him," said Talbot awkwardly.

"And why not?"

"Because he did me a good turn."

"He's doing you an ill one now."

"I don't know; he mayn't mean any harm," said Talbot. "He never can mind his own business; and he's as inquisitive as a monkey. I don't bear him any ill-will. And I can't cut a chap who has done me a good turn, even if he shows the cloven hoof afterwards."

"Look here, Talbot—"

"Shush!" said Lowther. "Don't you begin to rag, for goodness' sake! I think Talbot is an ass; but a wilful duffer must have his way."

"I'm sorry to disagree with you," said Talbot, "but—"

"Oh, you're an ass!" said Tom Merry irritably. "However, you can do as you like!"

"Only want to do what I think is right," said Talbot, in a low voice. "I can't forget what Levison did for me once, when I needed it. That is all."

Tom Merry's face relaxed.

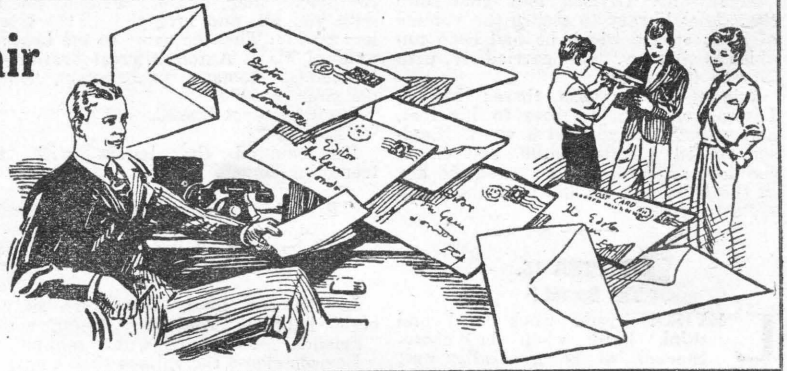
"Well, that's right enough. Still, never mind, talk to the cad if you like, but I shall jolly well let him alone."

Talbot nodded, and the subject dropped at that.

(Continued on page 18.)

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal.
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters to:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, Chums! Here we are again after a week's absence from my usual place. During the last few days there has been a very perceptible increase in my mail, which is mainly due to the popularity of the "Toff" series. There's no doubt that Talbot has a big pull with all readers, and he must be one of the most striking characters Martin Clifford has ever conceived. His peculiar past and reformation certainly offer our author plenty of scope for working out and developing thrilling themes.

But in next Wednesday's great yarn,

"STANDING BY THEIR SKIPPER!"

Talbot doesn't play such a prominent part as he has done during the last few weeks. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, has the chief role—yet, due to no fault of his own, it's not a happy one.

The trouble is started by Gerald Cutts, who, feeling embittered towards Talbot since Tresham, his pal, was sacked, makes persistent sneering remarks about the Toff's past.

Of course, Tom Merry & Co. don't intend to stand for that, and they scheme to make the obnoxious Cutts "sit up." But, unfortunately, in carrying out their plan, Kildare becomes involved in it, with the result that the juniors make a startling discovery regarding the St. Jim's captain. What it is I will leave Martin Clifford to tell you about next week. But Tom Merry & Co. decide to keep their discovery strictly to themselves and stand by their skipper.

Believe me, chums, you will enjoy every word of this powerful yarn. And so you will

"THE MYSTERY RAIDER!"

next Wednesday's exciting Greyfriars story. This is a mystery yarn of an unknown midnight marauder, who breaks open the school pantry and scoffs a large pie. It sounds very much like the work of Bunter! But the Owl protests his innocence, and Harry Wharton & Co. realise that he

wouldn't have had the pluck to commit such a theft in the dark at midnight. Who is the raider? It is definitely established that one of the Remove is the culprit—but who? See whether you can spot the raider when you read Frank Richards' grand yarn next week.

But don't forget, chums, there's a big rush on the GEM these days, so order your copy early

Now, as I have a lot of letters to answer, I will get down to my weekly

REPLIES TO READERS.

H. Dyson, Nelson, Lancs.—Yes, back numbers of the GEM and "Magnet" cost twopence each, plus postage. The Back Number Dept., The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, is the place to write to for all back numbers. I am sorry, but I haven't the space to publish the lists you want. Your joke didn't quite make the Jester smile. Try again, old chap!

W. A. Hancock, Ilford, Essex.—Glad to hear that the GEM comes to you "as a blessing in disguise" every week. Lowther is 15 years 11 months; Figgins, 15 years 3 months; Kerr, 15 years 5 months; Wynn, 15 years 4½ months; Kildare, 17 years 8 months; and Cutts, 17 years. Your "Pen Pal" notice will be published as soon as possible, but not so your jokes. Have another try!

D. Ludgate, Chinnor, Oxford.—The story of Johnny Bull's arrival at Greyfriars will not be published for some considerable time. Wun Lung, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, Dicky Nugent, Hop Hi, Vernon-Smith, and several others arrive before Bull does.

G. Robinson, West Chislehurst, Kent.—I am pleased to know that, as a new reader, you greatly enjoy the GEM. I'm afraid you won't see your joke in the old paper. It was rather "a chestnut." Better luck next time!

PEN PALS COUPON

20-3-37

PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest with each other. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and posted to the address given above.

Miss E. Taylor, 10, Mimosa Street, Fulham, London, S.W.6; girl correspondent; age 17-20.

Billy McDermott, 116, Duke Street, St. John, N.B.; age 11-14; stamps, aviation; Africa, England, Australia.

Miss C. K. Harrison, Avondale, Martlet Road, Minehead, Somerset; new members wanted for the International Friendship and Social Service Club; apply above address.

Miss Joyce Wells, 78, Tenyson Street, East London, South Africa; girl correspondents.

Miss Doreen Matthews, 388, Main Street, Johannesburg, South Africa; girl correspondents.

George Butler, 21, Quinn Buildings, Popham Street, Islington, London, N.; pen pal in Bowery district of New York.

J. Farrington, Windsor.—The very story you want for curing your love-lorn Form-fellow appeared in the GEM dated Jan 9th. It was called "Gussy's Latest Love Affair!" If you want this issue, write to the address given in Reader Dyson's reply.

P. Smyter, Streatham, S.W.16.—Yes, that was a slight slip on Martin Clifford's part. It shows you are a keen reader to have noticed it. I am sorry, but back numbers three years old cannot be supplied. Thanks for your suggestions. I will consider them. Kildare is 17 years 8 months.

L. Lyon, Carlton, Yorks.—A picture of Frank Richards appeared in the "Magnet," dated Jan. 2nd. Martin Clifford is too modest to permit me to publish his photograph. The oldest boy at St. Jim's is Kildare.

J. Kirkwood, Glasgow, E.1.—Glad to hear you enjoyed "The Housemaster's Peril!" Why not compile the list of St. Jim's names you want as the characters figure in the stories? You had hard luck with your joke. Another reader beat you by a "short head" in sending in the same one!

Miss S. Eaden, Leicester.—Very many thanks for your letter. Glad you have been a reader for fifteen years. Don't let another fifteen years elapse before you think about writing to me again.

B. Tyrrell, Canton, Cardiff.—Johnny Bull has not arrived at Greyfriars yet. Ernest Levison went to Greyfriars first, but was expelled. (The story of his expulsion will be coming along in due course.) He then joined St. Jim's, where he has been ever since.

Miss "J. B.," St. Helens, Lancs.—No, the St. Jim's characters are not real people. They were born in the fertile imagination of Martin Clifford.

R. Stedman, Manor Park, E.12.—Pleased to hear that you have become a reader of the GEM. Your pal did you a good turn when he gave you those "Toff" stories to read. Your joke has been published in the GEM before, but try again.

All the best, chums!

THE EDITOR.

Gunner Harry Miller, 16/15 Brigade R.A.; Jubulpore, India; pen pals; age 16-23; views, music, photography.

D. McCrimmon, 105, Clifton Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada; pen pals; overseas.

James Windsor, 113, Cobden Street, Miles Platting, Manchester; pen pal interested in kings of the world, stamps, GEMS.

Norman Rosenbloom, 7025, St. Urbain Street, Montreal, Canada; age 18-17; stamps.

Miss Edith Gill, 8, Creskell Road, Hobb, Leeds, Yorks; girl correspondents; age 12-14; collecting autographs; U.S.A. or Canada.

(Continued on page 28.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,518.

Meanwhile, Levison had gone into the school library to secure the volume of Shakespeare which he had been unable to borrow. He carried it with him to his study.

Lumley-Lumley was there; but as Levison came in he rose to his feet, and walked out without a word. Levison smiled a bitter smile, and closed the door after him. He turned the key in the lock, and sat down at the study table to work.

CHAPTER 13. The Secret!

LEVISON could work hard and think hard when he chose. Slacker as he generally was, he had a great power of concentration of mind, when it pleased him to exert it. And he was working now—hard.

The ciphered message still puzzled him; and, with the sheets spread upon the table before him, he worked at the puzzle with the determination to penetrate the secret.

The clue he had obtained from the burnt fragment of paper in Talbot's study had stood him in good stead. It had enlightened him, at least, as to part of the message; it had confirmed his suspicion that the message was addressed to Talbot under his old nickname of the Toff.

And the last word of the second message from the unknown had buried itself into his mind. For he knew that the word "die" must stand by itself in the message. It was not the conclusion of another word. There was no word ending in the letters "RDIE." The last three letters had to be taken by themselves—and they hinted of a terrible threat.

He pondered deeply over the figures for a long time, and raised his head at last, with a sigh. It was necessary to renew the attempt in a different direction.

"Skimpole—the idiot!—said that Talbot had written lines from Shakespeare," so Levison's thoughts ran. "He numbered the letters in the lines; those lines were the key to the cipher! But how to find them?" He cast his eyes upon the volume of the works of the great poet. "Tens of thousands of lines to choose from! I might take a month—or a year. And if Talbot is in danger—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But the fool said he thought the lines were from 'Julius Cæsar,' though he can't remember them. I'll try 'Julius Cæsar' first. I've got the first and the last letters in the lines, anyway, and that is the clue. They begin 'FRIENDS,' and they end 'SEHIM,' and the total number of letters is sixty-eight. I've got to find a passage in Shakespeare containing sixty-eight letters, and beginning with the word 'Friends.' If it isn't in 'Julius Cæsar,' I'll read the whole volume from end to end, and every time I come to a line beginning with 'Friends,' I'll test it with the cipher."

It was a heavy task—a task that might prove lengthy and troublesome enough. But Levison was ready to work.

He began with "Julius Cæsar," reading the play carefully from the beginning. At the line, "And, friends, disperse yourselves," he paused, and referred to the cipher; but the letters did not tally. Again, at "Good friends, go in, and taste some wine with me," he paused, again to shake his head and

continue. Then, again, "Friends am I with you all, and love you all!" Useless again. Then he came to the beginning of Mark Antony's great oration—"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!"

Levison's eyes blazed.

"Eureka!"

He counted the letters with a trembling finger.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!
I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him."

In the two lines there were sixty-eight letters! And they began with "Friends," and ended with "sehim." Levison closed the volume with a snap. He had found it!

The key to the cipher was in his hands.

Carefully he wrote out the two lines, and under each letter he placed the number, in order, from 1 to 68.

Then he simply had to place the letters where their numbers stood in the cryptogram, and in a few minutes he had done so.

The message read off easily then.

Levison read them as he jotted the letters down, and the colour wavered in his face.

The cryptogram which had puzzled Tom Merry & Co. hopelessly was deciphered. And Levison read it from beginning to end.

He had been right. Talbot was in danger!

And he alone, beside Talbot himself, knew of the peril; he alone could intervene and ward it off.

Levison smiled at the thought.

He gathered up the papers as he heard a step in the passage, and put them into his pocket. The handle of the door was tried.

Levison rose and unlocked it. Mellish came in. He sniffed, expecting to scent tobacco-smoke as the door had been locked.

But there was no tobacco-smoke. The black sheep of the Fourth had not been indulging in a cigarette.

"What were you locked in for?" asked Mellish.

Levison grinned.

"You can speak to me here," he said. "Downstairs I thought you'd forgotten you knew me."

"Well, you—you're in Coventry, you know," stammered Mellish. "A chap can't go against all the fellows. I—I don't mind speaking to you in the study."

"You needn't trouble, however," said Levison coolly, and he walked out of the study.

He went into the quadrangle with a thoughtful brow. Now that he was in possession of the secret cipher, it was necessary to decide what to do. That required very careful thinking out.

Levison burst into a chuckle suddenly. Some scheme had evidently been born in his fertile brain. The clouds cleared from his brow. He sauntered into the Form-room, and secured a fragment of chalk from the cupboard, and slipped it into his waistcoat-pocket. After that, he went into the Hall to tea, the atmosphere of his own study being decidedly chilly.

During the evening Levison remained in that unpleasant quarter known as "Coventry," but he did not seem to mind.

When the Fourth Form went up to their dormitory, he was left severely alone, even Mellish forgetting to say good-night to him in the presence of the rest of the Form.

Levison turned in without a word.

But he did not sleep.

When half-past ten chimed out from the clock tower, Levison sat cautiously up in bed and listened.

The Fourth Form dormitory was buried in profound slumber.

After listening a few moments, Levison slipped out of bed, and quietly dressed himself in the darkness. There was no sound, save that of steady breathing from the other beds. With a stealthy step Levison crossed to the door, opened it, and slipped out.

The light had been turned out in the dormitory passage. Levison felt his way along to the corner, where there was a recess by the window. In the recess he unconcerned himself, and waited.

The night grew older. But Levison had the patience of a cat. Midnight had sounded, when there was a slight sound from the direction of the Shell dormitory.

Levison smiled in the darkness, and drew back closer into the recess.

In the darkness he saw a dim figure pass him, and he knew that it was someone from the Shell dormitory.

He waited. Half an hour slowly passed; the minutes seemed to crawl. Then there was a soft step in the passage, and the dim figure passed again. A few moments and there was a slight sound from the door of the Shell dormitory. Whoever had gone out had returned, and was now in the dormitory again.

Then Levison, at last, left his hiding-place. He softly descended the stairs, made his way to the lower box-room, and opened the window, and in a few minutes was on the ground. He stole softly round the great mass of the School House. Not a single light gleamed from a window. The whole House was buried in darkness and slumber.

Quietly, softly, he made his way to the door of the School House. There he turned on the light of a little electric flashlamp. On the old oaken surface of the door appeared a row of figures.

Levison smiled, and copied them down into his pocket-book. They ran: "3 6 4 1 20 20 9 16."

Levison took out his handkerchief and rubbed the chalk figures out. Then he took the fragment of chalk from his pocket and carefully chalked in a new row of figures, as follows:

"10 4 4 18 10 4 9 5 18 66 3 7 7 60 9 18 11 5 66 9 32 35 4 1 9 2 4 6 11 16 5."

Then he turned off the light instantly.

With stealthy steps he moved away, and hurried round the House, and in a few minutes more he had climbed in at the box-room window, and was stealing back to the Fourth Form dormitory.

CHAPTER 14. Caught!

JACK BLAKE started in his sleep. "Groogh!" he murmured drowsily.

Then he became aware that someone was shaking him, and he lifted his head from his pillow, and blinked round him in the darkness.

"Groogh! Lemme alone! 'Tisn't rising-bell!"

"Wake up!"

Blake jumped. He was wide enough awake now; for the whispering voice in the darkness was Levison's.

"Levison! What the deuce—"

"Hush!"

Blake sat up in bed and peered at Levison in amazement.

Levison was fully dressed, as Blake could see even in the gloom.

"What are you waking me for?" demanded Blake.

"I want your help."

"How—why—what's happened? What blessed tricks are you playing now?" muttered Blake.

"Shut up and listen. Do you want to save Talbot's life?"

"Talbot! Save his life?" gasped Blake. "What on earth—"

"If you do, you'd better get up and not make a row. It will be dawn in less than an hour and a half," said Levison. "If we don't act at once, there might be an attempt on Talbot's life before the morning."

Blake caught his breath. Levison's voice was low and quiet, but it was intensely earnest. Blake peered at him almost dumbfounded.

"But—but who is Talbot in danger from?" he stammered.

"You have heard of a man Hookey Walker?"

"Of course."

"He is here."

Blake started violently.

"Here!"

"Outside the House," said Levison quietly. "Don't be alarmed! Look here, there's no time to talk. I'll explain afterwards, if you like. I'll tell you this. Hookey Walker has threatened to kill Talbot unless he helps him, and Talbot has refused. And an hour before dawn the man will be waiting in the porch outside. You know the kind of man he is, and whether he is likely to try to carry out his threat or not."

"How—how do you know?"

"I told you I'll explain afterwards. Will you call some of the fellows, and come with me and collar him?"

"Collar him!" muttered Blake.

"Yes, and hand him over to the police. It's the only way to keep Talbot safe from him."

"Have you told Talbot?"

"No. He would not help to seize the rotter. He won't help him, but he would not help against him. I tell you, the man has threatened to kill him!"

"I—I suppose you know what you're talking about," muttered Blake. "You—you don't sound for once as if you were telling lies. But if you are pulling my leg—"

"If you won't come with me, I shall go alone," said Levison coldly. "And as he is sure to be armed, it will be risky. You take the responsibility if I have had luck."

Blake slipped out of bed.

"I'll take your word for it, and I'll come," he said. "If you're spoofing, I'll settle with you afterwards. I don't see how you know anything about it. But I'll take your word. We can call Tom Merry—"

"We can't do that without waking Talbot; and he's best left out of it. No need for him to come into the matter at all. But for that, I should have called Tom Merry instead of you," said Levison.

"Oh, would you?" growled Blake. "Still, there's something in what you say. I'll come, and some of the chaps, too."

"Don't wake the whole dorm."

"Bow-wow! Leave that to me."

Blake promptly awakened Digby, Herries, D'Arcy, Reilly, and Lumley-Lumley. He explained to them in whispers what Levison had told him. There was a good deal of incredulity among the juniors; but they turned out of bed willingly enough. As Arthur Augustus said, it was better to turn out on a false alarm, than to risk the happening of a tragedy while they were lying in bed asleep.

The half-dozen juniors dressed themselves quickly. They left the dormitory without waking the other fellows. It was intensely dark; the darkest hour coming before the dawn. Levison led the way to the lower box-room, and the juniors slipped one by one out of the window to the ground.

"Careful, now!" said Levison. "I'll get ahead and scout, and you fellows can follow; only don't let him hear you. He's got years of penal servitude before him when he's caught, and he'd shoot you as soon as look at you. We've got to take him by surprise."

"Bai Jove!"

"If anybody is funky he can turn back," said Levison sarcastically.

"You uttah wottah—"

"Don't jaw!" said Blake sharply. "Nobody here's funky, unless it's yourself, Levison. If the man's there we'll collar him fast enough. Jolly glad of the chance of laying him by the heels, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Sure, but we ought to have brought some cricket stumps with us!" said Reilly.

"There are enough of us to collar him if we take him by surprise," said Levison. "You fellows keep behind me and rush up when you hear me speak. It's too dark for him to see you, and if you don't make a row—"

"That's all vewy well, Levison; but it appeals to me that it would be bettah for me to take the lead—"

"Cheese it!" said Levison roughly. "I'm taking the lead now—and you fellows can send me to Coventry again to-morrow, after I've saved Talbot's life," he added bitterly.

"Bai Jove! I—"

"Nuff said! Come on!"

Levison led the way; and the Fourth Formers, with mingled feelings, followed him.

It was deeply dark in the quadrangle, but they knew the way well enough. Levison passed ahead of the juniors, approaching the big door of the School House. As he came up to it there was a hoarse whisper in the darkness.

"That you, Toff?"

In the deep silence the husky voice thrilled the juniors. They knew that it was Hookey Walker, and that he was expecting Talbot.

Levison did not reply, but, guided by the voice, he made a sudden rush.

"Come on!"

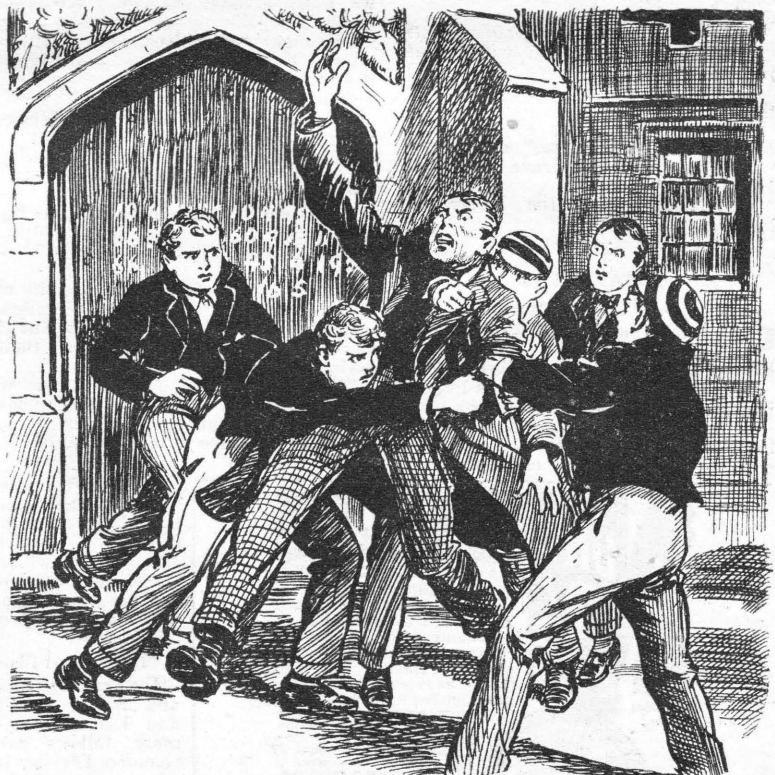
There was a sharp, fierce exclamation from the shadowy figure by the door; but before Hookey Walker could resist, four or five pairs of hands were upon him, and he was hurled violently to the earth. He struggled furiously under the juniors, seeking to get out a weapon, but Levison had his right wrist in a firm grip. There was a silent, furious struggle for several minutes, and then the efforts of the ruffian relaxed. He was powerless under the weight and the strong grasp of the juniors.

"Hold him!" muttered Levison. "I've got a cord here!"

"You young 'ound!" panted Hookey Walker. "Toff, you've sold your old pal! I—I—"

"The Toff isn't here," said Levison coolly, as he passed a slipknot over Hookey Walker's wrists and drew it tight. "You're not sold; you're caught. Tie his feet, too."

A couple of minutes more and Hookey Walker, bound hand and foot, lay panting on the ground, a helpless prisoner. Levison turned on the light of his flash-



"Come on!" exclaimed Levison, making a sudden rush. There was a fierce exclamation from the figure by the School House door. But before Hookey Walker could resist, he found himself struggling in the hands of four or five juniors.

lamp, and Blake uttered an exclamation.

"Look—on the door—"

"Bai Jove! It's anothah cwypotgwam!"

Levison smiled and rubbed out the chalk figures. In the gleam of the light the bound ruffian glared from face to face above him. He was searching for the face he expected to see there, but it was absent.

"Where's the Toff?" he muttered. "Where's the young 'ound who's sold an old pal?"

"You're mistaken," said Levison coolly, looking down on the ruffian with grim satisfaction. "The Toff knows nothing of this; he's in bed, asleep."

"It's a lie!" said Hookey Walker savagely. "A durned lie! Nobody but the Toff and me knows the cipher, now old Captain Crow is dead—"

"It might be found out," said Levison—"by me, for instance."

"You?" muttered Hookey Walker.

Levison nodded.

"Yes. I found it out, and I wrote that message on the door for you. Talbot knows nothing about it. I fancy he'd be ratty if he knew that I had chipped in. He told me to mind my own business when I asked him about it. You knew him well enough, you rascal; you knew he wouldn't betray you, for the sake of old times! But, you see, he's got friends to look after him—whether he likes it or not."

"You?" said Hookey Walker, with a baleful glance at Levison. "Then I owe this to you? I'll remember this!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Remember it as long as you like! You'll be pretty well taken care of for a few years, anyway."

The ruffian relaxed into sullen silence.

"Well, we've got him!" said Blake cheerily. "Now what are we going to do with him?"

"Hand him over to the Housemaster."

"Bai Jove! Waitton will be surprised—"

"And he'll rag us for being out of the dorm," chuckled Digby.

"Well, he can't rag us very much for catching a burglar," said Blake. "Anyway, we can't leave him here. Here goes!"

And Blake rang the House bell loudly.

CHAPTER 15.

Levison Explains.

ST. JIM'S was astonished the next morning.

Most of the fellows knew nothing about the night's happenings until they came down in the morning, and then they gasped when they heard the astonishing news.

Hookey Walker—the cracksman who

had long before attempted to rob the school, the rascal in whose power the Toff had been—was captured, and the capture had been effected by half a dozen juniors of the Fourth Form.

The School House buzzed with the news.

A crowd of fellows saw Hookey Walker marched off to the station by the police in the early morning light. He went to receive his deserts, and he did not even see the Toff—Talbot avoiding seeing him.

Talbot had received the news with surprise and a painful shock, but he could not help feeling relieved. Well he knew the desperate and relentless character of the ruffian who had threatened him, and that he was not secure so long as Hookey Walker was outside prison walls.

Blake & Co. were surrounded by an eager crowd of inquirers after the ruffian had been removed. The chums of Study No. 6 were elated. They had effected that great capture, and it was a feather in the cap of their famous study.

Mr. Railton had reprimanded them for coming down in the night to deal with the man, but his reprimand was very gentle, and then he had complimented them on their pluck. He had inquired how they knew that he was there, and they had to call on Levison to explain that, and Levison remained alone with the Housemaster to explain. And when he left Mr. Railton's study, the juniors saw with surprise that the School House master shook hands with him. Evidently Levison was in high favour.

"How did you know the rotter was there, Blake?" demanded the Terrible Three at once.

"Ahem!" said Blake. "I—I suppose we must give Levison the credit of that? It's jolly queer. He woke us up in the night and told us. That's all we know. Then we came down and bagged the rotter!"

"But how did Levison know?"

"Haven't the least idea," said Blake. "Better ask him."

"Here he is!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Levison, you bouncer, explain—"

"Can't!" said Levison coolly.

"Why not?" demanded a dozen indignant voices.

"I'm in Coventry!"

"Oh!"

And Levison walked away, in spite of the beseeching questions of the juniors, who were quite willing to let him out of Coventry in order to have their curiosity gratified.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"The boundah! He's got the uppah hand now, you know. I weally think, deah boy, it's time to let Levison off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

going to explain," said Blake. "As for Coventry, that's off. We let you off, in consideration of what you've done."

"You needn't trouble," said Levison coolly.

"Ahem! We—we—"

"Still, I'll explain, if only to show you what silly, thumping asses you were!" said Levison unpleasantly. "I've only done what any of you might have done if you'd had brains enough."

"Bai Jove!"

"How did you know that the man was there at that special time?" asked Monty Lowther.

"I told him to be there."

"You—you did?"

Levison nodded.

"But—but why—why should he be there because you told him?" gasped Tom Merry.

"I'll explain. It was through the cipher."

"The cipher? But you don't understand that."

"I found it out."

"You found it out?" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! Why couldn't I find it out? Weally, this is vewy astonishin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison took the papers from his pocket, and the juniors gathered round eagerly. As a matter of fact, Levison was not averse to displaying his cleverness. He enjoyed the limelight, and he had a full share of it now.

"In the first place," he said, "I knew that the first cipher message was addressed to Talbot—"

"To Talbot?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yes. He was the only fellow here who was likely to get a message in a secret code—that kind of thing is mostly used by criminals—"

"Take care what you say about Talbot, Levison!" said Tom Merry fiercely.

"I'm not saying anything against Talbot," said Levison composedly.

"He used to have criminal associations, you know that. I noticed that Talbot was struck all of a heap by the cipher message on the door—the first time it was found there. For that and other reasons I concluded that it was addressed to him, and, therefore, that he had the key to it. But I did not, as some silly fools have supposed, believe that Talbot was hand-in-glove with the old gang. I believed that a member of the gang was trying to get at him and threatening him. And I made up my mind to find out the cipher and help him."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

"As I believed that Talbot had the key to the cipher, I knew he must write it out and number the letters when he wanted to decipher a message. As the simplest way of finding out the key, I tried to find the paper Talbot had written it on. I looked in his study, and I looked in his pockets in the dressing-room."

"Bai Jove!"

"I questioned Skimpole, who told me something—and might have helped me more, if he hadn't been such a thumping ass—"

"My dear Levison!" murmured Skimpole. "You really—"

"Finally, I found a bit of burnt paper in Talbot's study with part of the key on it. It didn't help me to read the cryptogram; but it showed me enough to know that the man who wrote out the cipher message was threatening Talbot's life. And while you fellows were sending me to Coventry," went on Levison, with a curl of the lip, "I was cudgelling my brains to find out

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"Well, after what he's done, he ought to be let out of Coventry," said Monty Lowther. "And he's got to explain, anyway, or we'll bump him baldheaded."

"Hear, hear!"

The Terrible Three and Study No. 6 and half a dozen more fellows surrounded Levison in the quadrangle. Levison regarded them with cool nonchalance.

"Now you are

the whole of the cipher, so that I could save Talbot from danger."

"I—I see now," said Tom Merry slowly. "Why couldn't you tell us?"

"You wouldn't have approved of my methods," sneered Levison. "Talbot told me to mind my own business. You would have minded your own business."

"Ahem! I suppose I should."

"Talbot refused to have anything to do with the fellow—and risked his revenge."

"I knew he would do that," said Tom Merry.

"I knew he would do it, too," said Levison, "and that's why I was determined to lay the rascal by the heels and get him put where he couldn't do any harm. And I did it by finding out the cipher."

"But—but—how—what is the cipher?" asked the puzzled captain of the Shell.

"A couple of lines from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him,'" said Levison. "Take those letters and number them, and you can read the cipher messages."

"My hat! You mean to say that that ruffian, Hookey Walker, used lines from Shakespeare?"

"Fathead!" said Levison. "He didn't invent the cipher. It was used by him, that's all. I fancy it was made out first by Talbot's father—in fact, Hookey Walker said as much last night, when we caught him. It's a good cipher, too—easy and simple, and yet impossible to guess, unless one has the key. Well, I found the key to it. Now look at this."

Levison held out the sheet upon which he had written the two lines, with the letters numbered from 1 to 66.

"Now take the first cryptogram. Put the letters, instead of the figures that correspond with the letters in the key."

The juniors eagerly scanned the sheet.

F R I E N D S , R O M A N S ,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13
C O U N T R Y M E N , L E N D
14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27
M E Y O U R E A R S , I C O
28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40
M E T O B U R Y C A E S A R ,
41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54
N O T T O P R A I S E
55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65
H I M .
66 67 68.

There was the key, as Levison had written it out. And the figures of the first cipher message ran:

18 15 1 1 20 15 16 10 16 7 18 66 4 24 60
10 4 20 4 7 9 2 5 9 66 9 9 14 4 20 16 11
24 14 4 2.

Changing the figures into letters, as was easy by reference to the key, they ran:

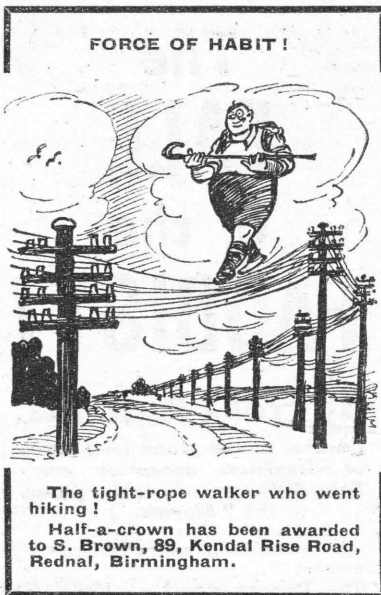
TOFFYOU MUSTHELPMEYESOR
NOHOOCEYUALKER."

Spaced out into words, it made:

TOFF YOU MUST HELP ME,
YES OR NO—HOOCEY UALKER."

"You see, the key does not contain the whole alphabet," explained Levison. "There is no 'K,' and there is no 'W,' so, in signing his name, Hookey Walker had to use a 'C' for a 'K,' and a 'U' for a 'W.' Of course, it's equally easy to read."

"Toff, you must help me. Yes or no. Hookey Walker!" repeated Tom Merry. "My hat! It's simple enough—now we know!"



"Yaas, I'm wathah surprised that I did not hit on that at once, you know," Arthur Augustus remarked, with a puzzled shake of the head. "It is weally vewy remarkable; but I nevah thought of it."

"Go hon!" murmured Lowther.

"Then comes the second cryptogram," said Levison. "There were two rows of figures, you remember. Here's the top line: '5 9 3 18 3 7 3 10 60 9 7 7 3 45 24 4 18 11 24 45 9 18.' Now look at the key, and you make 'NOITISIMPOSSIBLETALBOT'—or you can space it out into 'No. It is impossible. Talbot.'"

"Bai Jove!"

"Good old Talbot!" said Blake. "So that was written by Talbot, for the rascal to find when he came back for his answer the next night."

Levison nodded.

"Exactly! And when he read that reply he wrote under it this: '3 10 16 7 18 7 4 4 20 15 16 20 15 16 10 16 7 18 66 4 24 60 10 4 9 2 6 3 4.' That's the rest of the second cryptogram. Now read it with the key."

"IMUSTSEEYOUYOU MUSTHELP MEORDIE."

"I MUST SEE YOU. YOU MUST HELP ME OR DIE."

"So, you see, it looked as if he meant business," said Levison, while the juniors exchanged startled looks. "Well, I guessed that Talbot would answer that—telling the rotter to go and eat coke, or something to that effect. And last night I cleared out of the dorm and heard him go down—"

"Talbot?"

"Exactly. And after he'd gone back to bed I got out, and saw chalked on the door these figures: '3 6 4 1 20 20 9 16. IDEFYYOU.' Space it into words, and it makes—"

"I DEFY YOU!" said Blake.

"Good old Talbot! He defied the rotter," said Tom Merry. "I knew he would. But he ran an awful risk. I suppose he can't be blamed for not calling in the police; but—but it was frightfully risky—"

"I thought it was rather too risky," said Levison coolly, "so I rubbed out his message and wrote another one, in the same cipher."

"My hat!"

"This is what I wrote: '10 4 4 18 10 4 9 5 18 66 3 7 7 60 9 13 11 5 66 9 32 33 45 4 1 9 2 4 6 11 16 5.' Put that through the key, and it makes: 'MEET ME ON THIS SPOT AN HOUR BEFORE DAUN.' And an hour and a half before dawn I woke up Blake and the rest, and we came down and nobbled him."

"My hat! He must have believed that that message was from Talbot!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Of course he did—that's what I wrote it for. He knew that Talbot wouldn't betray him, and he was taking a rotten advantage of it to threaten him into helping him to escape from the police. He's been hiding in this neighbourhood, of course, on purpose to get help from Talbot. He wanted clothes and money, and help generally to get clear. He couldn't come here, and he couldn't write, so the only thing he could do was to chalk his message on the door in cipher—Talbot was bound to know of it and to read it," said Levison. "He thought no one but he and Talbot knew the cipher, and so he felt safe. He knows different now."

And Levison chuckled.

The juniors looked at Levison with real admiration.

He had solved the mystery that had puzzled them all, and he had turned the cracksman's cunning contrivance against Hookey Walker himself, and led him into a trap.

There was a long silence.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last. "I can't say that I approve of all Levison's methods of findin' out things—that would be goin' wathah too far—but, weally, I must say that we have w'onged him. He was weally playin' up jolly well to help old Talbot out of a beastly fix, and we—"

"You sent me to Coventry," said Levison.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Well, we didn't know—and you were so jolly secretive about it," he said. "Still, I admit, for one, that we were in the wrong; and—and I ask your pardon."

"I apologise, deah boy!"

"Same here," said Blake. "Even Study No. 6 makes mistakes at times. It's rare, but it occurs. Sorry, Levison!"

"Bai Jove! Here's Talbot!"

Talbot had been looking on quietly, unnoticed by the eager juniors. He came forward with a quiet smile.

"Levison's quite right," he said, "and he's got me out of a bad scrape. Perhaps it would have been better if I'd told you chaps about it all." He coloured. "Only—only I hoped the man would clear off when he found out I wouldn't have anything to do with him, and that would have saved any talk about it."

"You uttah ass!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "You ought to have confided in me, at least. You have been wunnin' a fearful wisk."

"I think I have," said Talbot. "If I have, Levison has saved me from that."

"Yaas, wathah! Gentlemen, I pwopose a cheeah for Levison!"

"Hurrah!"

And that cheer, heartily and spontaneously given, rang very pleasantly in the ears of the junior who had been sent to Coventry.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday: "STANDING BY THEIR SKIPPER!" Look out for this great yarn of Tom Merry & Co. Order your GEM early.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,518.

WHAT HAPPENED LAST WEEK.

At a meeting of the Greyfriars Remove to find a way of curbing the activities of Mr. Chesham, the juniors agree to Harry Wharton's wheeze of passively resisting the faddist Form-master.

Under Mr. Chesham all meals have been cut down, study feeds forbidden, the tuckshop barred, and many other cranky rules imposed on the Removites.

The juniors start their passive resistance by refusing to touch the meagre tea provided for them. The faddist cannot punish them, and he is at a loss what to do.

The Remove don't intend to go hungry, of course, and a big feed is smuggled into a box-room for them by Upper Fourth fellows. Mr. Chesham comes on the scene, but the door is locked on him, and the Remove finish their feed.

Later the faddist returns to the box-room, to find many signs of what his Form has been doing. He thereupon decides to give them all a dose of medicine that night.

(Now read on.)

No Medicine for the Remove!

"I SAY, you fellows, that was ripping!" said Billy Bunter, with a sigh. "But when shall we get another?"

Bunter was referring to the feed in the box-room. In spite of Mr. Chesham's theories, the Removites felt all the better for that surreptitious feast.

"Thinking about the next feed already?" said Bob Cherry. "And you haven't got over this one yet."

"Well, I can't help thinking that the Chesham ass will be on the watch now," said Billy Bunter, "and he'll take jolly good care that we don't have any more feeds in the box-room."

"The carefulness will be terrific," said Hurree Singh.

"Then what are we going to do?"

"My hat!" said Nugent. "The young cormorant has eaten enough for the whole Remove, and now he's worrying over the next meal."

"Well, you see, you have to think of these things—"

"Well, you can think of them. I'm going down to the cricket."

The chums of the Remove spent a pleasant hour at the nets until the waning light stopped cricket practice.

Mr. Chesham looked at them curiously when they came in. He knew that most—if not all—of the Form had been in the box-room when he knocked at the door. But he made no remark. He was busy now thinking of the remedy he meant to give to the rebellious Removites.

There was more passive resistance at the supper table. A single slice of bread-and-butter and a small piece of cheese was the supper allotted to each junior by the vigilant master. The morsels were not touched, but the abstinence required no effort on the part of the Remove. They had been feasting during the evening on the remains of the box-room spread.

At bed-time the Remove went up to the dormitory in a rather gleeful mood. They had passively resisted the obnoxious Form-master and had enjoyed a good spread. But their gleefulness was speedily brought to an end.

Mr. Chesham saw lights out himself in the Remove dormitory, instead of leaving the task to a prefect. When he came in to extinguish the lights, the Form-master was carrying a large green

The FALL of the FADDIST!

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

bottle in one hand, and a tablespoon in the other.

The Remove stared at him. The juniors were wearing their nightcaps, by order of the faddist. Mr. Chesham knew perfectly well that when lights were turned out the nightcaps would be hurled away, but there was no preventing that. The juniors looked very curious in the nightcaps as they eyed their Form-master with uneasy glances.

"I have a little medicine for you here, my boys," said Mr. Chesham, beaming at the uneasy juniors. "It will counteract the effect of any reckless gorging upon unwholesome food."

There was a general gasp from the Remove.

"The—the utter beast!" murmured Bob Cherry. "This is to make us sit up for that feed in the box-room!"

"I'm not going to take any of his rotten medicine!" growled Bulstrode.

The whole Form looked towards

The passive resisters of the Remove are determined to beat their cranky Form-master—but the fall of the faddist comes sooner than they expect!

Harry Wharton, waiting for a word from their leader. The Remove were in a dangerous temper—as they had been for some time past. At a word from Harry Wharton, and they would have refused to take the medicine, and, indeed, would probably have thrown the faddist out of the dormitory.

"Bunter!"

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, hastily thrusting a pork-pie out of sight under his pillow.

"You will require a large dose. It is easy to see from your appearance that you have recently been eating—"

"Only a mere snack, sir—"

"Open your mouth!"

"My—er—mouth, sir?"

"Yes; at once!"

Mr. Chesham uncorked the bottle and poured out a tablespoonful of a thick greenish liquid.

Billy Bunter eyed it in utter dismay. He had been eating very heartily and had, in fact, almost finished up the provisions he had saved from the feed. He felt that if he swallowed that

horrible-looking compound the result might be serious.

"Am I—to—to take that, sir?" he stammered.

"Yes, certainly! You will take three tablespoonfuls—"

"Eh? Three tablespoonfuls?"

"That is the dose required to meet your case, as you are of a heavy, lethargic disposition, partly caused by overeating—"

"But, really, sir—"

"The dose for the average boy is one tablespoonful. Bulstrode will require two."

"Shall I?" murmured Bulstrode.

"You will need three, Bunter. This will quite counteract the effects of the overfeeding. Open your mouth!"

"D-d-d-does it taste nasty, sir?"

"It is mere nonsense to care whether medicine tastes unpleasantly. Open your mouth immediately!"

"You see, sir—"

"If you do not obey me instantly, Bunter, I will cane you!"

There was no help for it. Billy Bunter opened his mouth and gasped like a fish as the tablespoon approached his lips. Another second and the compound—whatever it was—would have been in his mouth. But in that second a pillow whizzed through the air from one of the beds behind Mr. Chesham and caught him on the back of the head.

"Oh!" gasped the Form-master.

The sudden shock hurled him forward upon Bunter, and he embraced the fat junior round the neck. The tablespoon dropped into the open neck of Bunter's pyjamas, and he gave a squeak as the sticky liquid trickled down his chest.

The bottle of medicine dropped from Mr. Chesham's hand and crashed upon the floor, and was instantly smashed into a dozen pieces.

The Form-master embraced the wriggling Bunter for a moment, and then disengaged himself and turned a furious face on the grinning juniors.

In a moment every grin had given place to an expression of almost preternatural solemnity.

"Wh-wh-what?" gasped Mr. Chesham. "What? Someone hurled a pillow at me—who did it?"

Silence.

"Who threw that pillow?"

Still silence.

Mr. Chesham looked at the grim faces of the Remove, then at the smashed bottle of medicine, and then at Bunter, who was rubbing the stickiness off his chest with the corner of the blanket.

"Boys! I demand to know the name of the perpetrator of this outrage. The medicine has been wholly wasted before a single dose has been taken—and I have no more in the school."

"Jolly good thing, too," said a voice.

Mr. Chesham looked round quickly.

"Who said that?"

Silence.

The Form-master turned red. He realised that the position was ridiculous, and that he was making himself absurd. It was useless to ask questions when every boy present was determined not to answer. It was a contest of will between master and pupils—and a contest which ought never to have arisen but for the tactlessness of the master.

"I demand to know the name of the boy who assaulted me!" said the Form-master, deeply incensed.

Stony silence.

"Was it you, Levison?"

"No, it wasn't!" growled Levison.

"Was it you, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton did not speak.

THE CRANKY FORM-MASTER OF THE REMOVE MEETS WITH DEFEAT IN THIS EXCITING YARN OF THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.

"I order you to reply, Wharton!"
 "I have nothing to say, sir."
 "Did you throw that pillow?"
 Harry Wharton set his lips tight.
 "Very well," said the Form-master.
 "I take silence as a confession of guilt. You will take a thousand lines, Wharton, and remain in after school for two hours every day till they are written out."

"Very well, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"That you won't!" broke out Bob Cherry. "It was I, sir, who threw—"

"Shut up, Bob!"
 "Shan't! It was I who threw the pillow, sir."

"Oh, it was you, Cherry! I am glad you have had the courage to own up to your fault—"

"I don't consider it a fault, sir. I owned up because Wharton was punished."

"Silence, Cherry! Wharton, you are excused from the imposition, which will fall to Cherry instead. The medicine having been wasted, I can give you nothing to-night, but I will procure some more as soon as possible. Good-night!"

And the Form-master turned out the light and abruptly quitted the dormitory.

The Detained Form!

"ROTTER!"
 "Ass!"
 "Chump!"
 "Beast!"

These were a few of the epithets that followed the master of the Remove as he closed the door of the dormitory. But many of the juniors were chuckling. Punishment had fallen heavily on Bob Cherry, but the faddist had been baffled, and the dreaded medicine

lay in a sticky mass beside Bunter's bed.

"I'm sorry, Bob," said Harry Wharton. "The rotter would have had my bolster in another tick, but your pillow went first."

Bob Cherry laughed.
 "That's all right. I can do the lines."

"Well, the medicine's gone, that's one good thing!" remarked Hazeldene. "It made me turn cold inside, the look of it."

"I wonder what it was?"
 "Something beastly."

"It's roughful on our esteemed friend Cherry to be detained every afternoon in the honourable classroom," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "The detainfulness will interfere with the cricketful practice and the riverful rowing."

"Can't be helped," said Bob Cherry. "I can stand it—and it was worth it to bowl that ass over with his giddy medicine."

"I say, Cherry, I wish you hadn't made him spill it on my chest, though. I can't get it all off, and it's as sticky as anything."

"I suppose you'd rather have it outside than inside, Bunter?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then don't grumble. If you had a thousand lines to do, you might growl!"

"We're all standing by Bob in this," said Harry Wharton. "It's the second move in the game, that's all. We shall all be detained with Bob in the classroom, and wait there while he does his lines."

"Precious good idea that is!" sneered Bulstrode. "What's the good of being detained?"

"It will show that the whole Form is standing together in the matter. Any punishment falling on one will be

shared by all the rest—that's settled! Besides, I imagine that Chesham will be rather staggered at the whole class detaining itself, and will, perhaps, see reason."

"I think so!" said Nugent, with a chuckle.

"Catch me staying in!" grunted Bulstrode.

"You will do as the rest do, Bulstrode. Any fellow deserting the Form in this fight will be sent to Coventry!"

"Right!" exclaimed a score of voices. And Bulstrode was silent.

The following morning the Remove came down with their meekest manners to the fore. They sat down solemnly at the breakfast table, and, at Mr. Chesham's orders, the plates were passed, but nothing was taken. The Form-master's brow contracted, but he had learned that it was useless to argue with the Greyfriars Remove.

The boys had a right to refuse to eat if they chose, and there could be no coercion. But the Form-master knew that they intended to obtain surreptitious supplies of food, and he became more watchful.

In the morning recess tabloids were served out to the hungry juniors. The tabloids were supposed by Mr. Chesham to contain as much nutriment as a pound of rump steak, but Bunter pathetically remarked that he would rather have had an ounce of the latter. The tabloids had never been eaten yet, and Mr. Chesham was growing suspicious on that point.

"You will put the tabloids in your mouths as I give them to you," he said.

The juniors obeyed. They put the tabloids in their mouths, as there was no help for it, but they did not allow them to dissolve. The tabloids remained there till they went out into



Another second and the medicine would have been in Bunter's mouth. But in that second a pillow whizzed through the air and caught Mr. Chesham on the back of the head. "Oh!" gasped the Form-master; and the bottle of medicine and the tablespoon dropped from his hands.

the Close, and then there was a general ejection of the unpalatable morsels.

The juniors formed in line for the usual exercise under the supervision of the Form-master. Mr. Chesham looked at them and frowned.

"You have not brought out the skipping-ropes," he said severely. The Remove was silent. They had had enough of skipping in the Close. It might be a good exercise, but for the Remove to skip in a row like a girl's school was too humiliating.

"Wharton!" rapped out Mr. Chesham.

"Yes, sir?"

"Go and fetch the skipping-ropes immediately from the box in the class-room."

"Yes, sir."

Harry Wharton went into the House. He came out in a couple of minutes, but his hands were empty and his face quite expressionless.

"Well, where are the skipping-ropes, Wharton?"

"I do not know, sir."

"I told you to get them out of the box!"

"They are not there, sir."

"Then they have been removed by some member of the Form," said Chesham.

"Did you remove them, Wharton?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know who did?"

Harry Wharton did not reply.

"Do you know who removed the skipping-ropes from their place, Wharton?"

Wharton's lips set hard, and no word came from them.

"Very well," said Mr. Chesham. "I shall find out who the culprit is, and severely punish him. You may now go through the customary exercises."

The Remove was quite willing to do that. They were grinning as they re-entered the class-room.

The skipping-ropes had been removed by Saunders—the quietest-looking boy in the Form, as the least likely to be questioned about it—and Harry Wharton had been able to say quite truthfully that he did not know where they were. He only knew that they had been safely disposed of. As a matter of fact, they were reposing at the bottom of a deep ditch outside the walls of Greyfriars.

Lessons for the rest of the day went off very grimly in the Remove-room. The Form-master was in a bad temper. The passive resistance of the Remove was beginning to worry him. The boys were by no means good-tempered. They had eaten nothing at the dinner-table, and were hungry.

The last fragments from the previous day's feed had been eaten and nothing was left. It was impossible to obtain supplies from the school shop, and Mr. Chesham was too watchful for anything to be obtained again by the kind assistance of the Upper Fourth fellows.

It was a curious situation, and no one knew exactly what would come of it; but it was evidently beginning to weigh on Mr. Chesham's mind, and that fact was encouraging to the Remove.

A few of the Form were grumbling. Bulstrode was in a vile temper, Levison was in a sullen mood, and Billy Bunter was very woeful.

Most of the fellows, however, were solid in backing up their leader, and Harry Wharton was grimly determined. If any Removite had deserted his colours, the sentence of Coventry would have been rigidly carried out. The faint-hearted ones knew it, and so they did not go further than grumbling.

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The clock indicated the half-hour, and Mr. Chesham closed his book. The Remove had a rather expectant look.

"You are dismissed," said Mr. Chesham coldly. "Cherry will remain for two hours and write out lines from the first book of the *Æneid*."

He turned away. The Remove did not rise. Each junior took his pen and dipped it into the ink and began to write on impot paper.

The Form-master glanced round.

"You are dismissed," he said, raising his voice.

There was no sound in reply save the scratching of pens. Mr. Chesham turned crimson.

"Boys, what does this mean? Answer me—you, Wharton!"

"We are detained, sir," said Wharton.

"You are not detained by me."

"We are detaining ourselves, sir. We prefer to share Cherry's punishment."

"Very well," said the Form-master.

"As you prefer to share his punishment, you shall do so. The whole Form will remain here and write from the *Æneid* for two hours."

And Mr. Chesham quitted the room and closed the door with unnecessary force. The bang of the door was inspiring to the chums of the Remove.

It showed that the Form-master was getting wound up, as Bob Cherry expressed it.

The activity of the pens ceased as soon as Mr. Chesham was gone. Bob Cherry went on writing, but the rest of the Remove gave it up. Bulstrode looked across cavagely at Harry Wharton.

"Nice mess you've got us into!" he growled. "Now we've got to stick here for a couple of hours with nothing to do."

"Oh, you can write out lines from Virgil."

"Hang Virgil!"

"No choice about missing tea this evening," grunted Nugent. "I say, the Chesham ass is beginning to get roused."

"But what are we going to do?" said Billy Bunter. "I'm famished."

"Famish quietly," said Bob Cherry.

"You'd be sorry if I were ill, Bob Cherry—"

"Oh, cheese it! I'm busy!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm awfully hungry—"

"So are we all," said Wharton. "It's no good grumbling, Bunter. We've got to stick it out."

"Blessed if I can see any sense in it!" growled Levison.

"Oh, you shut up!"

There was a buzz of voices in the Remove-room for the next hour, and, as it happened, the din caught the ear of Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, as he came along the passage at about half-past five.

The Head looked into the class-room in some amazement.

There was an instant silence at the sight of the familiar figure in cap and gown, and thirty-odd pens scratched away industriously.

Scratch, scratch, scratch! went the pens, while the Head stared at the industrious Remove in astonishment.

Unfortunate for Bunter!

DR. LOCKE looked at the Remove in silence for some moments, and then came farther into the room. He was evidently very much surprised.

"Wharton!"

Harry Wharton looked up.

"I believe you are head boy in this Form?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is the meaning of this? Is the whole Form detained?"

"Yes, sir."

"By order of your Form-master?"

Wharton hesitated for a moment. He did not wish to explain the circumstances to the Head, but at the same time anything like prevarication was impossible to a boy of his nature.

"Yes, sir," he said at length. "Mr. Chesham has instructed us all to remain here for two hours. But, as a matter of fact, we chose to remain with Cherry, who was detained."

"What? Cherry was detained, and the whole Form chose to be detained along with him?" asked the Head, in astonishment.

"Yes, sir."

"This surprises me very much, Wharton. I must say that I do not understand it. I will speak to your Form-master."

And the Head abruptly quitted the room. Bob Cherry whistled.

"The fat's in the fire now," he remarked. "The Chesham ass will have to explain, and that means climbing down."

The Remove waited for what would transpire. In a few minutes Mr. Chesham entered the room, and his face was rather flushed.

"You are dismissed, boys!" he said.

"All of us, sir?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes."

The Remove exchanged glances of satisfaction. Whatever explanation had passed between the Head and the Form-master, Mr. Chesham thought it advisable to let Bob Cherry off his punishment. It was victory for the Form, and the Remove were happy as they marched out.

"We've done the faddist!" grinned Nugent, as they discussed matters in the Close. "And I imagine that the Head will be rather on his track after this. He's bound to suspect that something is wrong."

"And the suspectfulness may be followed by the interferences," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "We don't want to get the Chesham ass into hot water with the Head. The Remove can stand up for its own rights. All the same, if the Head takes a hand in the matter it's the faddist's own look out."

"We can't help his troubles, certainly," said Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, I'm fearfully hungry! What's to be done?"

"Nothing."

"Think Temple and Dabney could get something for us?"

"The Chesham ass is too watchful," said Nugent. "He means to starve us out, I think. He looks worried about it, though."

"He's a kind-hearted chump, you see. He means no harm, only he's got to be restrained. A nice padded cell is what he really needs."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, don't keep on, Bunter!"

"I'm sorry, Cherry, but I'm hungry. I was only going to say that if you've got some cash I'll try to get some grub. Temple would get it, and I'm willing to stand the risk of Chesham confiscating it!"

"Not much risk for you to stand if it's somebody else's tin."

"Well, you see, I'm stony," said Billy Bunter. "I was expecting a postal order this morning, but there's been some delay, and it hasn't come yet. It's pretty certain to turn up in the morning, and then I'll square up."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"There's a bob, Bunter, if that's any good, and never mind the postal order. It's worth a bob to get you to shut up for a bit."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Cut along!"

Billy Bunter scudded off. He found Temple and Dabney in the Close. They had just had their tea. Bunter tapped Temple on the arm.

"I say, Temple, will you get some more grub in the school shop? I've got a bob—"

"Sorry, Bunter—"

"Oh, don't be mean, you know! I'm simply famished!"

"I'm sorry, but it can't be done! Mr. Chesham has spoken to our Form-master about it, and Capper's ordered us not to do anything of the kind. He's made us promise not to, else he was going to tell Mrs. Mimble she wasn't to sell us anything at the shop."

"The beast!"

"All masters are beasts, more or less," agreed Temple. "If you'd like some chocolate, here you are."

"Thanks awfully, Temple!" said Billy Bunter, taking a bar of milk chocolate extended by the good-natured chief of the Upper Fourth. "This will save my life."

"Will it?" said Temple, grinning. "Then I expect your studymates will be ready to jump on me for giving it to you."

But Bunter was too glad of the chocolate to mind the little joke. He walked away eating it, and, as luck would have it, almost ran into Mr. Chesham under the elms. The master of the Remove gripped him by the shoulder.

"What are you eating, Bunter?"

"Er—er—eating, sir?" stammered the fat junior.

"Yes. Is it chocolate?"

"I—I—I think so, sir."

"Give it to me immediately!"

"If you please, sir, I—I think you might buy your own chocolate, sir—"

"Bunter!"

"It was given to me, sir, and—"

"Do you think I could eat the stuff, you utterly stupid boy?" asked Mr. Chesham, taking the chocolate and flinging it away with all the force of his arm. "Don't you know—"

"My—my chocolate!" murmured Billy Bunter pathetically, as he tried to follow the flight of the chocolate through the air.

"Don't you know that that is a most unhealthy form of diet, you unfortunate boy? It may set up any or all of seven separate complaints in the internal organs."

"I like it, sir."

"You like many things that are not good for you, Bunter. Do you wish to sink into an early grave a dyspeptic invalid?"

"N-n-no, sir, but—"

"You may thank your good fortune," said Mr. Chesham, "that I came by in time to stop your eating that pernicious compound."

And the Form-master walked away. Billy Bunter looked after him with an expression which did not indicate that he was thanking his good fortune.

The chums of the Remove were at the cricket field, and Bunter disconsolately joined them there.

"Any luck?" asked Bob Cherry.

"The beast!" was Bunter's expressive reply.

"Matters are getting serious," said Nugent thoughtfully. "The utter ass must give in if we persist in going without grub. It will make some of the chaps ill in the long run, and we shan't be able to work to-morrow. I expect."



"Stop!" Harry Wharton & Co. stopped in sheer dismay as the sharp, clear voice rang out. Well they knew the figure that loomed up before them on the gravel path! "The Head!" they gasped.

Harry Wharton's face set determinedly.

"Whatever the result, we are going to hold out," he said. "It's the Remove against the faddist, and no surrender."

"Right-ho! No surrender."

"I think I shall probably die to-night," said Billy Bunter pathetically. "I have a feeling that I shall expire in my bed."

"Dear me!" said Bob Cherry, with equal pathos. "Is there anything we can do for you when you're gone, Bunt? Would you like me to plant a bunch of celery on your grave?"

"Really, Cherry—"

"We're going to get some grub in to-night," said Harry Wharton quietly. Nugent looked doubtful.

"We tried that before," he said, "and we were stopped. The German master stopped you and Cherry in the passage."

"That won't happen again—we shan't risk it. We can't be stopped if we leave the dormitory window on a rope."

"Good!"

"It's the only thing to be done, and we are going to do it."

And the chums of the Remove assented.

A Night Expedition!

TEA in Hall was the scene of further passive resistance, and at the supper-table the passive resisters came out equally strong. The table was spread sparsely, as usual, showing that Mr. Chesham had not given way, and the juniors grimly abstained from eating.

The Form-master was looking worried. It was useless to order the juniors to eat. If they could resist the inward craving for food, an order from him was not likely to have any effect upon them.

He knew that they had not been without food the whole day. They had obtained various items of refreshment in some quarters. Sympathetic fellows in other Forms had helped, and the house-keeper, who was far from agreeing with Mr. Chesham's views, had in several cases supplied the boys with sandwiches and cake. But it was certain that the Remove had not had sufficient sustenance for health, and the Form-master was anxious.

He was anxious for the well-being of the boys, and somewhat anxious for himself. He felt that if the rebellious Form persisted, the matter must sooner or later come before the Head. He felt, too, that the Head of Greyfriars was not likely to approve of the new regime when he knew the details of it.

Mr. Chesham thus had plenty of worries on his mind, and his temper was a little more acid than usual in consequence. But the Removites cared little for his temper.

They left the supper untasted, though Billy Bunter almost wept when he left the dining-room.

Mr. Chesham came up to see lights out as usual. He did not bring any medicine with him this time. He glanced up and down the dormitory and at once noticed that the nightcaps were missing.

"Boys, where are your nightcaps?"

The Removites were quite silent as usual, when Mr. Chesham addressed a question to them. Mr. Chesham repeated his inquiry, with the same result. Then, as usual, he turned to Harry Wharton.

"Wharton, where are the nightcaps?"

"I don't know, sir."

"The caps have been taken away," said Mr. Chesham. "Someone here must know what has become of them. I call upon the person who removed the caps to own 'em up."

But the person who removed the caps did not seem to be in a hurry to own up. Mr Chesham waited in vain for an answer.

"Very well, this will be inquired into," he said. And he left the dormitory without saying good-night.

"Sure, if he had asked me I could have told him!" said Micky Desmond. "His elegant nightcaps are in the pond in the Head's garden."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh, we shall tire him out in the long run!" said Harry Wharton. "By Jove, I'm hungry! We're leaving here at half-past ten."

"I experience also the hungerfulness in my inward regions," said the nabob. "I shall be glad to have the foodful refreshment."

Billy Bunter groaned.
"Get back as soon as you can, Wharton, if you want to find me alive."

"I don't particularly want to," said Harry, laughing. And Billy Bunter groaned again at the heartless reply.

The preparations for the expedition were finished before half-past ten. Harry Wharton had smuggled a rope into the dormitory and hidden it under his bed. It was knotted at intervals to facilitate descent. The end of it was firmly secured to a bedstead near the window, and Harry opened the window and lowered the loose end to the ground.

The night was fine and starlit; the Close silent and deserted. From a window here and there a light glimmered out upon the foliage of the old elms.

"Coast clear?" whispered Nugent.

"Looks like it."

"Down you go, then. I'll follow, and then Bob."

"Right-ho!"

Wharton clambered down the rope. He had a bag slung on straps over his shoulders, and all the cash the Form could raise in his pocket. His feet touched the ground, and he gave the rope a shake to indicate that he had alighted.

The dim form of Frank Nugent swung from the window-sill, and came slowly down the knotted rope. He joined Harry in the Close, and then Bob Cherry followed.

"All right," said Harry, in a subdued voice.

And the dusky hand of Hurree Singh waved from the window; the rope was drawn up and the window shut.

"Which way?" whispered Bob Cherry.

"Through the Head's garden, over the little gate, and past the new building," said Harry Wharton. "We're least likely to be spotted there, and it doesn't matter if it's a bit of a way round."

"Right you are!"

The three juniors cut off in the gloom. It was easy to cross the low wall into the Head's garden, and there a gravel path led them to the gate, and then on through the ancient Cloisters of Greyfriars. Beyond was the new building which was being erected between the school and the river. The Removites skirted it, and gained the road to Friardale, and scudded off under the stars.

"Safe, so far," muttered Bob Cherry.

"It's all right if the Chesham ass doesn't pay a surprise visit to the dormitory," Nugent remarked.

"Let's hope he won't. Now for a sprint."

The Removites kept on the run all the way to Friardale. They arrived

breathless at the village tuckshop. It was, of course, closed, but Dame Muffins was not likely to refuse admittance to three of her best customers.

At the third knock the door was opened, and the dame, who had served Greyfriars fellows at late hours before, quietly admitted the juniors, and supplied what they wanted, without asking for explanations.

Most of the cash in Wharton's pocket passed over the counter, and the bag he carried was filled to its fullest capacity. The pockets of the juniors also received a cargo, and they were pretty well loaded when they said good-night to Dame Muffins, and quitted the tuckshop.

The juniors tramped back to the school in a satisfied mood. Their mission had been quite a success, so far, and if getting in was as easy as getting out, all would have gone swimmingly.

They entered the Cloisters, looking dim and lonely in the starlight. A sound from the gloom caught Harry Wharton's ear, and he stopped suddenly.

"Hold on!"

He hardly breathed the word. Bob Cherry and Nugent stopped.

"What was it, Harry?" Nugent whispered.

"I heard something—"

"There can't be anybody here at this hour."

"There is! Listen!"

This time all three of the juniors heard the sound. It was plainly a footfall, and it was repeated. The tread was slow and measured, and they guessed that it was the tread of a man slowly pacing the Cloisters.

"Who can it be?" muttered Bob Cherry, perplexed.

Harry gripped his arm.

"Look!"

A form loomed up in the starlight from beyond a stone pillar. The Removites knew it at once. It was that of their Form-master.

"The—the utter ass!" muttered Nugent. "What is he doing here?"

"On the watch for us," said Bob Cherry.

"Doesn't look like it. Looks more as if he were thinking out some problem. He doesn't know we're here."

Mr. Chesham had walked towards the juniors till he was within a dozen paces of them, and the three crouched in the shadows. But he came no nearer. He turned round and paced back again with the same measured tread.

"Confound him!" murmured Harry Wharton. "I remember now hearing somebody say that he was in the habit of taking a turn out of doors before going to bed. I did not know he chose the Cloisters to ramble about in."

"The question is—how long is he going to stick here?"

"Oh, the dreamy ass may tramp up and down there for an hour!" said Bob Cherry.

"We're not going to wait here an hour."

Harry Wharton shook his head decidedly.

"We'll give him ten minutes," he said.

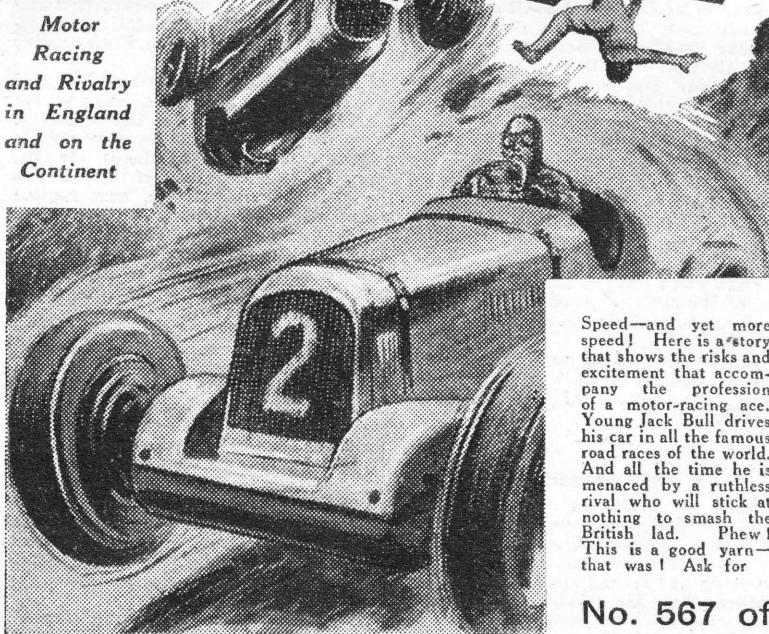
"And if he doesn't shift by then?"

"We'll shift him."

Bob Cherry and Nugent chuckled silently. They waited in the shadow of the stone pillars and watched. Mr. Chesham went on pacing up and down the Cloisters. It was impossible for the juniors to go on without being discovered.

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In the dim light Harry Wharton glanced at his watch. Ten minutes had elapsed, and Mr. Chesham showed no signs of intending to leave the spot. The juniors were growing more and more impatient.

"We shall have to shift him," murmured Nugent.

"Come on, then!" said Bob Cherry. "One rush, and we shall bump him over."

"Hold on, Bob! Bumping over a Form-master may mean something serious," said Harry Wharton. "He mustn't see us, at any rate. I've got an idea. Hold on!"

Wharton picked up a loose stone, and flung it to the far end of the Cloisters. It fell on the flags there with a loud noise.

Mr. Chesham started and looked round quickly.

"Who is there?"

There was no reply, save the echo of the Form-master's voice in the dim old Cloisters. Mr. Chesham stared intently into the gloom.

It was evident that his suspicions were aroused. He knew that the Cloisters formed the easiest avenue for breaking bounds in Greyfriars, and he knew, too, that the Removites would not leave any means untried for getting provisions into their dormitory. He listened for a few seconds, and then started with hasty strides in the direction of the sound.

"Come on!" muttered Harry Wharton.

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry.

It was the Removites' chance. While Mr. Chesham was investigating the cause of the sound at the end of the Cloisters the Removites had time to pass. They hoped to be safely through before he turned back.

But some slight sound caught the Form-master's ear, and he turned again, just in time to see three dim forms flit past in the starlight.

"Stop!"

"He's seen us," muttered Harry Wharton. "Run for it!"

The three chums dashed on. There was a sound of rapid footfalls behind, and they knew that the Form-master was in hot pursuit. Doubtless he guessed whom the three were, though he had seen them but dimly.

"He's after us!"

"Buck up!"

The three juniors scrambled over the gate into the Head's garden. Several articles dropped from Harry's bag, but there was no time to pick them up. The juniors dashed on up the gravel path.

"Stop!"

It was a sharp, clear voice—and it did not come from behind. The juniors stopped in sheer dismay. Well they knew the figure that loomed up before them in the starlight.

"The Head!"

The Faddist's Fall!

"WHARTON! Cherry! Nugent!"

The Head rapped out the names in quick succession, his angry glance scanning the three juniors from head to toe as they stood there in the starlight.

The Removites were silent. They were fairly caught. The footsteps of the Form-master, pounding through the Cloisters, were coming closer.

"Wharton, you, the head boy of your Form, breaking bounds at night! I am shocked!"

"I am sorry, sir—"

"I am afraid I cannot attach much importance to sorrows shown at the moment you are caught," said the Head sarcastically.

"You misunderstand me, sir," said Harry. "I mean, I am sorry you should have apparent reason to think badly of me—"

"What can I think of a boy who breaks bounds at night? I have lately been informed that a boy wearing a Greyfriars cap was seen leaving the Green Man in the village late one night."

"You cannot think I would go there, sir!"

"Then where have you been, Wharton?"

Harry held out the bag he was carrying. Dr. Locke glanced into it, and his face relaxed a little at the sight of the provisions with which it was crammed.

"You have been to the village shop?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have not acted in the blackguardly way I at first suspected, yet you have broken one of the most important rules of the school. You will come to my study to-morrow morning for a flogging. Is that you, Mr. Chesham?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped the Form-master, coming up breathlessly. "I see you have caught them."

"Were you looking for these boys?"

"Yes. I was taking a turn in the Cloisters, and they passed me. I was afraid they would escape before I could identify them. I am not surprised to recognise Cherry, Nugent, and Wharton."

"You may go, boys! Leave that bag here, Wharton. I cannot permit its contents to be eaten."

"I should think not," said Mr. Chesham warmly. "The contents are probably of the most unwholesome kind."

"Ahem! How did you get out of the dormitory, Wharton?"

"A rope from the window, sir," said Harry quietly.

"Mr. Chesham, please see these boys back to their quarters, and bring the rope away. I shall punish them severely for this escapade. The food provided at Greyfriars is amply sufficient for the most healthy appetites, and anything extra that is required can be purchased at the school shop, in the hours when it is open. There is absolutely no excuse for this flagrant breach of the rules."

Mr. Chesham looked uncomfortable. The juniors did not speak.

"As a matter of fact, sir," said the Form-master, "I have forbidden the boys of my Form to purchase food at the school shop."

The Head started.

"Why so, Mr. Chesham?"

"For the sake of their health, sir. I discovered that they purchased unwholesome pastries and sweets, and—"

"It is hardly the province of a master to look into such matters too closely, I should think," said the Head quietly. "However, we will speak of this matter further to-morrow morning. Please bring these three boys to my study after prayers."

And the Head turned away. Mr. Chesham and the chums of the Remove returned to the Form dormitory without a word being spoken on either side. Mr. Chesham opened the dormitory door, and a form that was leaning on the window-sill, gazing out into the dark Close, turned at the sound of it.

"Then you have returnfully arrived, my worthy chums," said the soft voice of the nabob. "I have been looking for you with careful watchfulness. I hope

you have successfully evaded the esteemed idiotic Chesham."

"You may get into bed, Hurree Singh," said Mr. Chesham.

The nabob gave a jump at the sound of the Form-master's voice.

"My turban!" he murmured. "It is the esteemed rotter himself."

"Get into bed, boys!"

The Removites obeyed. Mr. Chesham retired and closed the door. Then there was a general chorus of questioning. Harry Wharton concisely explained what had happened. Billy Bunter groaned dismally.

"I say, you fellows, did the Head confiscate the grub?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then good-bye! I feel that I shall not live till morning."

"But we had a lot of stuff in our pockets, and he never thought of that," went on Harry Wharton. "It won't be much, going all round the Form, but it's better than nothing."

"Rather!" exclaimed Bunter joyfully. "I don't care if it's only a snack. Hand it over!"

And in a few seconds Billy Bunter was at work upon a cold steak-pie, which vanished under his efforts at a marvellous rate of speed.

The Remove looked forward with some anxiety to the following morning. There was to be an explanation of some sort, and it could hardly fail to have some result.

When the boys came down to breakfast they took their usual places at the table, and saw that the sparseness of the "spread" had not been changed. Mr. Chesham was sticking to his guns, and the Remove consequently stuck to theirs. Not a mouthful was eaten at the Remove table.

After an early chapel, Mr. Chesham signed to the three delinquents of the previous night to follow him, and led the way to the Head's study.

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent followed, and Hurree Singh, Hazeldene, and Micky Desmond followed them. Then Russell, Skinner, and Price joined in, and then the whole Form. Mr. Chesham, quite unconscious of the numerous following, walked on to the Head's study and tapped at the door.

"Come in!"

Mr. Chesham opened the door and walked in. The delinquents followed. The Form-master, looking round, started in amazement as he saw the passage blocked up by the swarming Removites.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"We're all in this, sir," said Hazeldene. "We were all concerned in the affair of last night, and we are standing by Wharton."

"You should not—"

"Quite right!" said Dr. Locke, rising from his seat and coming towards the Removites. "I am glad to see you owning up so frankly. Am I to understand that the whole Form was concerned in this breach of the rules?"

"Yes, sir," said nearly every voice in the Remove.

The Head looked puzzled. There were seven or eight juniors in the study, and the rest had stopped in the passage. Mr. Chesham was looking red and uncomfortable.

"This is a very strange affair," said Dr. Locke, after a pause. "Wharton, what was your motive for going to the village last night for food?"

"We couldn't get it at the school shop, sir."

"Owing to Mr. Chesham's orders to Mrs. Mimble?"

"Yes, sir."

"But do you mean to say that you were in need of food, and that the ordinary school fare was not sufficient for you without this wild escapade to obtain a further supply?" said the Head sternly.

Harry Wharton coloured.

He knew instinctively that it would mean trouble for the faddist if he spoke out. He owed Mr. Chesham little consideration, yet—

"Answer me, Wharton!"

"It is my place to do that, sir," said Mr. Chesham quietly. "Wharton seems to feel a scruple about speaking but I am quite ready to explain. There has lately been a good deal of opposition to me in the Remove, and the juniors have refrained from eating at meal times, in order to defy my new regulations."

The Head looked astounded.

"Dear me! I knew nothing of this. And how long has this been going on?"

"A couple of days, sir."

"Bless my soul! They have had no food for two days?"

"Not exactly, sir," said Harry Wharton. "We have obtained a good deal from other quarters."

"But what are these new regulations, Mr. Chesham?" asked the Head. "Something to do with the diet of the Form?"

"Yes, sir. I have eliminated from the diet all the articles that I considered deleterious, such as bacon and eggs—"

"Eh?"

"And all sweets and pastries—"

"Are you serious, Mr. Chesham?"

"Certainly sir. I regard these boys as being in my care, and I consider it my duty to see that they have baths of a temperature suited to their various states—"

"Ah! Indeed!" murmured the Head. "And take light refreshment in the form of tabloids—"

"Excuse me Mr. Chesham! You may go, boys. I shall have something further to say to you on the subject, but I shall say it in the class-room."

The Remove marched off. They were in a state of suppressed excitement, but some, who had been watching the Head's face closely, declared that the faddist's day at Greyfriars was done. And they were right.

When the door had been closed behind the juniors, Dr. Locke gently but firmly pointed out to the Form-master that it really would not do. He explained that boys were boys, and required a treatment different from that required by a middle-aged man of quiet disposition.

He added that constant interference with juniors was likely to cause more evil than it could possibly cure. He went on to hint that Mr. Chesham's theories might be of great use and value in a suitable sphere, but that sphere was not to be found at Greyfriars.

Mr. Chesham was not convinced. A belief which springs from the heart is not likely to be affected by an argument which is addressed only to the brain. Mr. Chesham heard Dr. Locke out respectfully, but retained his own opinion.

"I am afraid that my views remain unaltered, sir," he replied. "But I fully understand that these views are not acceptable to you, and it is therefore impossible for me to carry them out in this school. Without acting as my conscience dictates it would be impossible for me to remain in charge of a Form here, nor would you ask it. I therefore resign my position."

The Remove waited impatiently in their room for the Head. His face was very grave when he came in. There was a hush at once.

"I regret to have to tell you, my boys," he said quietly, "that Mr. Chesham has found it necessary to leave Greyfriars. Your own master, Mr. Quelch, will be returning at the end of the week, and until then you will take lessons from me."

"Hurrah!"

It was an irresistible cheer from the Remove. "Silence, please! I wish to add that any boy in the class who feels hungry may ask the housekeeper for some sandwiches. I have instructed Mrs. Jarvis to prepare some."

The Head quitted the room. Billy Bunter was about a second behind him, and the rest of the Remove were very swift after Bunter. They discussed the sandwiches and the situation with great relish. The long contest was over, and it had ended in the triumph of the Remove and the fall of the faddist.

(Another exciting yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. next week. See that you don't miss "THE MYSTERY RAIDER!")

PEN PALS

(Continued from page 17.)

Miss Joyce Hester Storer, 20, Stead Street, Kimberley, South Africa; girl correspondents.

Miss Jean R. McKenzie, 4, Rose Street, Timaru, New Zealand; girl correspondents.

Arville H. Angworth, P.O. Box 1550, Durban, Natal, South Africa; stamps, topics of interest.

Miss Elna Moore, 136, Church Road, Islington, London, N.1; girl correspondents; films, dancing, music, sports.

R. Rich, 10, Wemyss Road, Blackheath, London, S.E.3; sports, stamps.

J. G. Bradshaw, 4, Hamel Street, Moonah, Tasmania, Australia; age 13-16; drawing, map-drawing, model boat building, books, swimming, engineering, gardening; France, Scotland, U.S.A., India, China, Egypt.

Miss Ethel Naylor, Uria, Leichhardt Street, Kings on, Canberra, F.C.T., Australia; girl correspondents; over 18 years' amateur photography, general topics.

Laurie Fair, 188, Bogor Road, Subiaco, Perth, Australia; age 14-16; stamps; New Zealand, Straits Settlements.

Alfred Clarke, Blackmans Road, Carrington's Village, St. Michael, Barbados; pen pals; U.S.A., England, British Empire.

Thomas Brady, 23, Emmet Square, Blackrock, Dublin, I.F.S.; stamps, view postcards. Miss Dorothy Potter, 33, Linden Drive, Alvaston, Derby; Canadian Girl Scout as correspondent.

H. Stretch, 154, Jackson Street, Petone, Wellington, New Zealand; age 11-15; stamps, exchange of photograph of surrounding countryside, etc.; Egypt, India, East Indies, South America, Mexico.

Don McDougall, Adelaide Road, Murray Bridge, South Australia, Australia; coins stamps, exchange jubilee; Gold Coast South Sea Islands.

Vasco Alves, Consulado Geral De Portugal, 1050, Que Lafagette, Shanghai, China; pen pals anywhere; age 12-15; boxing, swimming, etc.

Anthony Yeomans, 3, Dickens Square, Normanton, Derby, England; pen pals within ten miles of Derby, and in France.

B. Dallas, 11, Cloutsham House, 13, Hanson Street, London, W.1; pen pals at home or abroad; age 20 upwards; old "Neison Lee Libraries."

Arthur Wing, 38, Waltheof Gardens, Tottenham, London, N.17; age 14-16; aviation.

Miss Jill Atwood, 33, London Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent; girl correspondents; age 15-17.

L. Wilman, 19, Whirlow Grove, Sheffield 11; age 16-17; France, Germany, U.S.A.

Miss Margaret Nehan, 6, Shrubland Road, Dalston London, E.8; age 14-16, girl correspondents; films, sports, British Empire.

George Nehan, 6, Shrubland Road, Dalston, London, E.8; age 14-16; sports; U.S.A.

F. J. Dumbrell, 52, Victoria Road, Redhill Surrey; pen pal; stamps; British Empire.

Miss Gladys Jones, 11, Worcester Lane, Four Vales, Birmingham; girl correspondents; India, Africa.

Miss Eileen Ingram, Rosedale Station, Alberta, Canada; girl correspondents; hockey, films, overseas.

Miss Margaret Bailey, 7, St. John Street, Aylesbury, Bucks; girl correspondents; age 11-13; Great Britain.

S. A. Goodwin, 161, Columbia Road, London, E.2; pen pals; age 14-16; New Zealand, South Africa.

Miss Enid Hanson, Arlyn, Prince's Road, Bessacarr, near Doncaster; girl correspondents; age 15-17; home or abroad.

Jack Parker, 59, Renfrew Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; pen pals; sports, aviation.

P. K. Anthony Chea, C/O, P.O. Box 741, Sekond, Gold Coast; scouting, camping, swimming, photography; overseas.

S. Towers, 8, Carters Row, Darlington, Co. Durham; pen pal; age 17; cycling, films; Lancashire.

D. F. Roper, 60, Vickerman Street, Hopwood Lane, Halifax, Yorks; age 15-18; stamps, wireless, electrical engineering; British Empire.

Bryan Whinnett, 92, Shenley Road, Camberwell, London, S.E.5; age 16-17; films, books, music, radio, stamps.

K. M. Maradally, P.O. Box No. 401, Kobe, Japan; stamps, cycling, etc.; overseas.



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