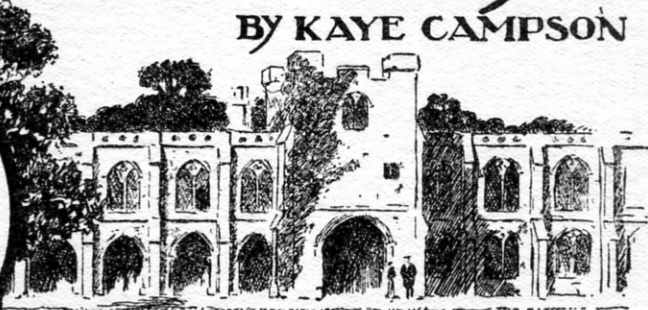


The 'Tec of St Tony's

BY KAYE CAMPSON



THE FIRST CHAPTER

THE STOLEN CUPS!

DOWN on the green cricket-field the click of a willow bat echoed sharply as it struck a leathern ball.

There came the pad of running feet, and a cheer that echoed up the hill like the cry of a flock of sea-gulls, in the hot sunshine of high summer.

From a grey, ivy-clad tower, a bell musically chimed the hour of four o'clock, and a scatter of rooks rose, circling and cawing softly, above the age-old buildings that were grouped about a cool, cloistered lawn.

On the slope of that hill, Frank Dare stirred himself and sat up, turning a length of grass meditatively between his white, even teeth.

He laughed shortly, but there was little mirth in the sound.

Beside him a figure stirred lazily, and one sleepy eye looked out from beneath the shadow of a wide-brimmed straw hat, which was tilted over the loungers' face.

"S'matter?" asked the sleepy one. "Has Jackson hit a boundary? You seem about as happy as a tragedy

The mystery of the missing school cups! How and by whom were they stolen from St. Anthony's School? It is a problem that gets everyone guessing—except Frank Dare, the 'tec of St. Tony's!

queen this afternoon, Frank. Yet, if I were in your place, I should be dancing for joy. You're leaving St. Tony's. And yet I've got another year to do in this lost and forgotten hole before I go up to Cambridge and really become conscious."

The Hon. Thomas Ethelbert Delaney rose to his feet, and dusted down an immaculately-cut blue jacket and a perfectly-pressed pair of silver-grey flannels, which were famous as the pride and joy of St. Anthony's School.

He was a middle-sized youth, with a round, good-natured face, upon which an aristocratic Grecian nose sat with a faintly comical air.

It was his habit to refer to himself as the "Last of the Delaneys."

He said that his "ancestahs," as he called them, revolved in their graves with astonishing velocity every time he got "swished" by a low-down, common person, such as a mere Housemaster.

But that was the Hon. Tom's

special form of humour. And in all St. Tony's there was not a better loved or more popular fellow.

He suddenly turned towards Frank and his good-natured, faintly comic face was twisted with shyness.

"I—look here," he burst out. "I know all about it, Frank. It's tough, your having to leave because your dad did not leave enough money to keep you at school! Perfectly awful! But I thought perhaps that, since we've been pretty thick together for the last three years, you wouldn't mind—you'd understand—I mean you wouldn't be all proud and ghostly if I—"

With uncertain hands, he pulled a wallet from his pocket.

"For goodness' sake, don't jump on me!" he exclaimed. "But I wrote to my comic old dad about you last week, and he sent—I mean, he asked me to ask you if you'd accept a loan—"

Frank Dare suddenly let out a yell of laughter, and grabbing his dear friend by the waist, thudded him impolitely to the ground.

"You ass!" he said. "You fat-headed, Roman-nosed, good-natured, idiotic goop! If there was anyone in this world I'd accept a loan from, it would be you—or your good old dad. But I'm not asking for loans. I'm going to find a job—can you get that into your thick head? I'm going to *work* for my living. I'm not going to live on other people's money."

He sat on the chest of the last of the Delaneys and bounced up and down.

"And that's that!" he said. "I just can't say thank you, Tommy. But there's no reason for anyone to worry about me at all. Mother's got enough to live on. All I've got to do is to look out for myself."

"Then look—look out for my ribs," gasped the Hon. Tom plaintively. "Get off, you elephant! Why don't you apply for a job in the police—you're hefty and awkward enough. Go and see old Warden Keyes. He's one of our old boys, and he'll probably recommend you for point duty, or something."

Frank Dare rose up, laughing.

"The amount of sense you talk when you're not thinking is just the outcome of not thinking what you're talking about," he said. "Warden Keyes is the greatest detective that ever happened, Tommy. He's marvellous! I've read all about his life, and I'm proud to have gone to the same school as he did! By jove, if that fellow would offer me a job, I'd stand on my head with delight."

"Then, for goodness' sake, ask him!" said the last of the Delaneys, rising and dusting himself down. "You've always been keen on amateur detective work. I still remember that pot of treacle I lost, which you traced to Baggy Porson's study. Dashed smart bit of work, I call that—I mean the good old sleuth, and what not. Dash it all, I'll go up to Warden Keyes myself and tell him all about you!"

As he spoke, both were approaching the big circular tent in which all the school trophies were on view, ready for presentation that evening.

All round the tent a dozen or so fags were standing on guard. Fifty yards away was the Head himself, a bent, silver-haired figure, deep in conversation with a tall, keen-faced man of perhaps half his age.

"There's Keyes," said the last of the Delaneys, starting forward. "Now, my hat, I'm going to do you a bit of good, Frank. Now—"

He was stopped suddenly by two



For a moment the Head stood transfixed as he stared at the cup plinths. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "The cups have gone." It barely seemed possible that the cups could have been stolen when a circle of boys had guarded them! But where were they?

muscular arms which whipped about his waist. Both his feet whirled in the air. And Frank Dare's voice spoke grimly, close to his ear.

"If you don't want to be shot, or bludgeoned, or cut up into little pieces and thrown to the fowls of the air," said Frank, "you'll keep your tongue still! Shut up, Tommy! If you go whooping to Keyes now, you'll spoil all my chances in the future. I'm going to study up this business, and go and see him when I know something about it. So be quiet, will you?"

With a muscular heave, he swung his friend past two grinning fags who were on duty outside the tent doorway.

Inside the warm, stuffy interior of the tent, Frank let the last of the

Delaneys go. And then stood grinning and staring round the dim interior.

Almost at once, however, his expression changed. In the centre of the tent were a couple of trestle-tables on which the silver and gold school cups had been piled.

The cups at St. Tony's were famous—and enormously valuable.

But now those trestle tables were empty! There was nothing on them except for the plinths on which the cups had stood.

"Well, well," said the Hon. Thomas, following his companion's look. "It seems that we've arrived too late. Dash it all, the balloon has already ascended. But I didn't think the Head was going to do the presentation

until six o'clock this evening. S'funny

"Funny!" echoed Frank.

He glanced all round the tent, and bent a look beneath the tables.

There was nothing there at all. A puzzled frown came over his face, and he darted to the door, swiftly questioning the two fags on duty.

"When were the cups taken out?" he asked. "Where have they been put for the Head to present them?"

Blank astonishment showed in the two youngsters' eyes.

"Taken out, Dare?" gasped one of them. "But they haven't been taken out, Dare! The Head hasn't told us to bring them out yet."

For a moment Frank hesitated, glancing back into that empty tent.

"Don't rag!" he snapped. "Those cups and trophies were taken out a little while ago. Where are they? Look here, who's been in here? Have any of you kids left your posts?"

"Oh, no, Dare!" gasped the other boy. "We've been here all the time. Lots of people have been in and out, of course. But the cups haven't been moved—"

His voice broke off in a yell of amazement as he craned aside and glanced into the tent.

His cry caught the attention of the Head, who immediately came across to see what the trouble was. And behind the Head came the tall, well-dressed figure of Warden Keyes.

Frank Dare stood aside in the tent opening.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, as the Head glanced at him. "But there seems to be some mistake. The school cups have been removed. I don't know if it was by your orders, sir."

"It certainly was not, my dear Dare," said the old man, looking

puzzled. "But are you sure? I certainly gave no orders—dear me! Bless my soul!"

For a moment he stood transfixed in the tent opening, staring at the empty tables within. Behind him, Warden Keyes stepped up swiftly and glanced over his shoulder.

"Do you mean that the cups have been removed without your knowledge, sir?" asked Keyes, in a low, vibrant voice. "But I understood that you had a circle of boys on guard."

The Head took off his glasses and polished them on a silk handkerchief. He perched them back on his nose, and assumed quite his grimmest expression.

"I certainly had," he snapped. "But I fear that they must have disregarded my orders. The cups have gone, Keyes. Bless my soul, they have—Dear me, they've gone! There's nothing in the tent. Here, Smithson—Parker—Jobling. Stand before me. Fetch your comrades. This is serious—most serious indeed."

Messrs. Smithson, Parker and Jobling scuttled in a scared manner around the tent. They fetched the rest of the fag guards, and the whole lot lined up in two rather self-conscious and frightened rows.

Frank Dare and the Hon. Thomas Delaney glanced at each other. The Hon. Thomas raised his eyebrows.

"One of these youngsters is going to catch the seat of his trousers against a cane, dear old boy," he murmured. "Dash it all, the little beggars have been skidding off to buy ice-creams from the tuck-shop. And someone's swiped the trophies."

But it appeared that the last of the Delaneys was far from the truth. The fags swore that they had been on duty all the time without leaving their

posts. They backed each other up solidly.

And those at the door were certain that none of the visitors who had entered the tent had come out again carrying anything suspicious.

At the end of the examination, the Head was beginning to get testy and heated. But Warden Keyes stepped forward suddenly and took charge of the situation.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "Forgive me—but I have had considerable experience of matters such as this. I trust these boys. I do not doubt that they have been in their places all the time."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"The value of that collection of cups was in excess of a thousand pounds," he said coolly. "That would make a good haul for any clever, professional thief. The robbery has been well planned."

His fine eyes half closed, and his clever, lean face set like a rock as he walked into the tent and glanced round.

"But how?" he murmured. "How? I came in to look at the cups myself half an hour ago. They were all here then. And I haven't been more than twenty yards away from the place ever since. The youngsters have been on duty—I noticed them."

He swung about suddenly and linked his hands behind his back.

"Will you entrust this matter to me, sir?" he asked the Head.

"My dear Keyes," said the old man. "Of course—of course! But this is most distressing. Bless my soul, I can hardly believe that it's possible. It seems a miracle!"

"Spades!" snapped out Warden Keyes. "Get spades, you two!"

He gestured towards Frank Dare and Tom Delaney.

"Hurry now!" he snapped. "No one can have got out of here with the cups. They're somewhere here still, or I'm a Dutchman."

Frank ran, and the last of the Delaneys ran beside him. They went into the hut in which the cricket groundsman's tools were kept.

But here, Frank suddenly stopped with a queer expression on his face.

"You take the spades, Thomas," he said. "You take them. I've got something to do. I've got an idea!"

And much to the Hon. Thomas' amazement, he ran straight out and made his way towards the big refreshment marquee.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

CAPTURED BY CROOKS!

THE last of the Delaneys perspired. He rested his aching back and regarded Mr. Warden Keyes with a most unfriendly eye.

For half an hour on end, the last of the Delaneys had been digging and turning over turf with a spade. Around him, a crowd of his school-fellows toiled in the same manner within that canvas circle of the trophy tent.

Warden Keyes moved amongst them and examined the broken ground carefully. He called for greater and greater efforts.

The Hon. Thomas Delaney made no protest, but his expression showed that he thought this occupation both exhausting and rather unnecessary.

Also, he was puzzled at the fact that Frank Dare was nowhere to be seen. Frank had always been such a keen amateur detective. His absence was puzzling.

It would have puzzled the last of the Delaneys a whole lot more if he had been able to follow his friend's movements step by step.

Frank went the round of all the tents that had been erected on the school cricket ground. He left the hubbub which centred around the scene of the robbery altogether.

And for a long time he roamed about the half-deserted cricket-field, deep in thought.

He was so occupied, indeed, that he hardly noticed the fact that the spade workers had finished their task.

Warden Keyes called them off when the whole circle of grass beneath the trophy tent had been turned over.

Meanwhile, the cricket match had been finished. Parents and boys were assembling at the grand-stand for the usual speeches and prize-giving which followed this match at the end of the summer term.

And as they assembled, a lorry drove up with half a dozen workmen, who streamed out across the grounds and asked permission to take the trophy tent down.

Warden Keyes nodded assent. He had questioned quite a hundred people already and had been over every inch of ground that that tent covered. The method of the robbery was still a mystery.

Undoubtedly, the cups had been removed. Undoubtedly there had been a gang amongst the visitors who had managed to spirit those trophies away without the guardian fags noticing anything unusual.

Keyes called the fags together as the tent was being pulled down.

He questioned them without getting much result.

Baffled, he walked amongst the parents and visitors, in the hopes that he might see someone whom he knew to be a suspicious character amongst them.

And as he did so, the tent was let down and folded up.

It was carried to the waiting lorry and loaded on board. But, as that lorry drove away out of the grounds, a figure scorched after it on a bicycle.

It was the figure of Frank Dare. And he pulled up with a quick skid beside the last of the Delaneys, as he passed.

"Tommy," gasped Frank. "Tommy, get your bike! Come on, follow me as best you can! I've suddenly seen the whole thing! I've got the right idea, I believe! But come on!"

"Whoa!" gasped the Hon. Thomas. "Wait a minute! Look here, Frankie, don't be such a comic, mysterious sleuth. I say, look here —"

But Frank Dare had gone. His bicycle-tyres fairly whizzed through the dust. And the last of the Delaneys was left staring after him rather in the manner of a stranded codfish.

Frank Dare, however, kept up full speed. Soon the school grounds were left far behind him, and he was following the path of that lorry to the near-by town.

Its greater speed carried it well ahead, of course. But Frank knew the address of the tent contractor, and so he went there without hesitation.

But when he arrived, he found the yard empty.

There was no lorry in there at all, and no one on duty. For a moment, he felt that the trail had come to a dead end. It was hopeless. But then he saw a farmer rattling along in a trap, and he dashed up to stop the man and ask questions.

A minute later, Frank was on his machine again and following the directions he had been given. The lorry had passed the farmer about half a mile ahead.

By questioning again and again, Frank kept to its trail, and finally traced it to a town about ten miles distant. There, he cycled round in a manner that looked somewhat aimless.

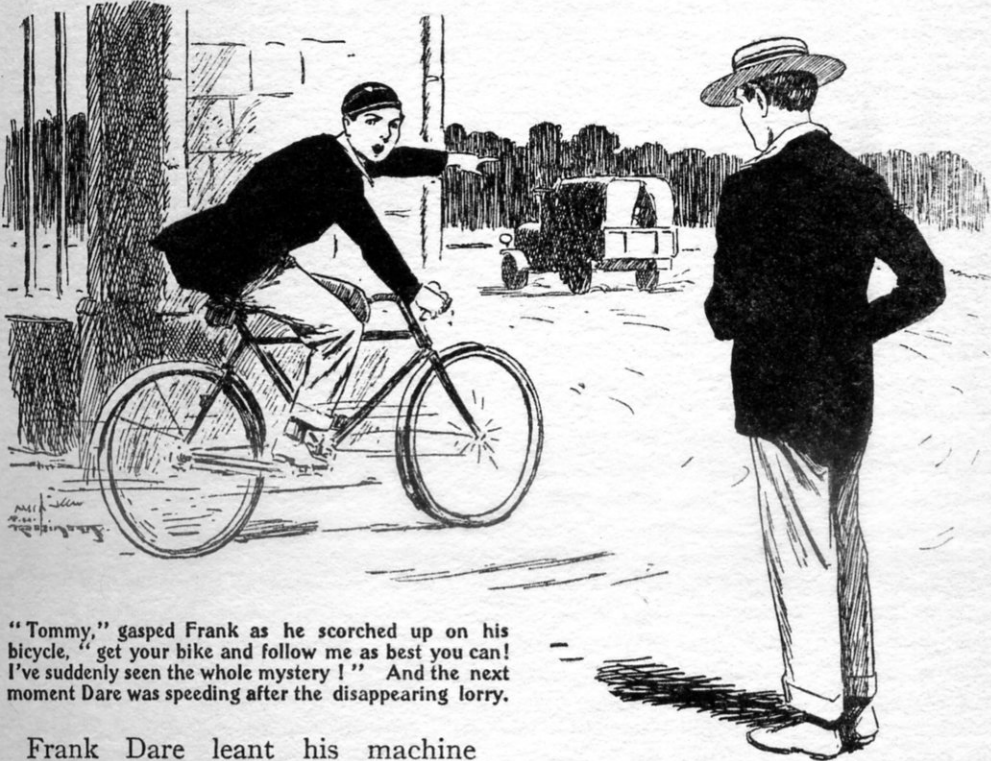
But he looked into every yard he passed. And, at last, his search was rewarded when he saw the lorry standing on an empty piece of waste ground, which was flanked by an unoccupied, neglected-looking house.

seemed to dance before his eyes and he pitched headlong across the floor. A stinging, crushing blow struck him on the back of the head.

And he remembered no more—until he realised that a half circle of grim-looking men were surrounding him.

He tried to start up, but found that he was bound to the chair in which he was sitting.

His head throbbed wildly and he



"Tommy," gasped Frank as he scorched up on his bicycle, "get your bike and follow me as best you can! I've suddenly seen the whole mystery!" And the next moment Dare was speeding after the disappearing lorry.

Frank Dare leant his machine against an outer wall, and ranged round that house like a bloodhound. He listened carefully and thought he heard voices from inside.

Then he found a ground floor window which answered to his pressure.

Silently he lifted it and climbed inside.

Whereupon, a thousand lights

felt sick and ill. Then one of the men spoke in a low, grim voice.

"College kid, boss," he said. "Here's his cap; I found it on the floor. He must have followed."

A man, who was slightly better dressed than the rest, looked at the cap which was held up and nodded coolly.

"Well, this is where he stops following," he snapped. "Tie his mouth up. Have you got the car ready, Lefty?"

A small, rat-faced member of the group, who also suffered from a squint, grinned and nodded.

"O.K., boss," he said. "We've clamped the false sides on the lorry and we've got the stuff neatly boxed up. Ready to go?"

Frank opened his mouth to speak, but before he could do so a cloth was whipped round it and tied behind his neck.

Then the men trooped out of the room, and he was left there to strain wildly at his bonds, and stare up at the small, narrow window, which gave the only light that the place contained.

The room was bare and unfurnished. He realised now that it was not the one by which he had entered.

Obviously, he had been carried inside the house and lodged somewhere above.

Fear gripped at his heart. Tied up and deserted here, he had no chance of making a sound to draw anyone's attention. The house was not occupied.

Weeks might go by—perhaps months, before he was found.

Death by slow starvation faced him. The only person he had spoken to when leaving the cricket ground was Tom Delaney.

And Frank knew that the Hon. Thomas was neither quick in action nor unusually bright when it came to thinking out unusual problems.

He tried to pull himself together and overcome the wild throbbing that beat within his head. He tore and wrenched at his bonds. He jerked about and tried to overturn the chair, with the idea of getting his face

close to the floor and rubbing that gag away from his mouth.

But then he found that the chair was tied to a ringbolt in the wall. It would not move more than a few inches.

And the footsteps of the gang sounded fainter and fainter as they went down several flights of stairs within the quiet dark recesses of the house.

But then, suddenly, there came a wild yell and those footsteps echoed in a mad scramble. There was a crash of revolver firing.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

DARE'S DEDUCTION

TWICE and three times a revolver fired and more yells followed.

There was a babble of voices and a crash, as of someone falling against a line of balusters and ripping them out.

Then came a commanding, ringing voice, which Frank recognised with a thrill of relief.

It was the voice of Warden Keyes, snapping out jerky orders as though he were leading a fight.

More crashes echoed up through the dark house, together with a volley of swearing.

There was a last scrambling rush, and a bullet whined through the door of Frank's dark room, flattening itself amidst a shower of plaster against the wall, a foot above his head.

Then two figures rolled in, fighting madly. Frank saw that one was the last of the Delaneys—and that the other was the squint-eyed member of the gang.

A third figure followed and dived upon them like a hawk. In a second that fight was over.

And Warden Keyes, breathing heavily, knelt upon the squint-eyed man's chest, ripping off his own

necktie and handing it to the Hon. Thomas with an order to bind the man's hands.

It was only a second later that the last of the Delaneys let out a wild howl as he caught sight of Frank tied up in the shadows.

Ten seconds after that Frank was free, but swaying giddily on uncertain feet as the detective held him up.

"Have you got them—all of them?" he gasped. "And the boxes, Mr. Keyes? The cups were in the boxes."

The detective stared at him in amazement, but turned aside to yell sharp orders through the door, where policemen could be seen struggling with those of the gang who had not yet been fully brought under control.

And then he turned back to Frank and there was admiration and astonishment in his smile.

"Steady, youngster," he said. "Sit down for a minute and don't talk. You've had a nasty knock. Quiet now, and I'll tell you my part of the story first."

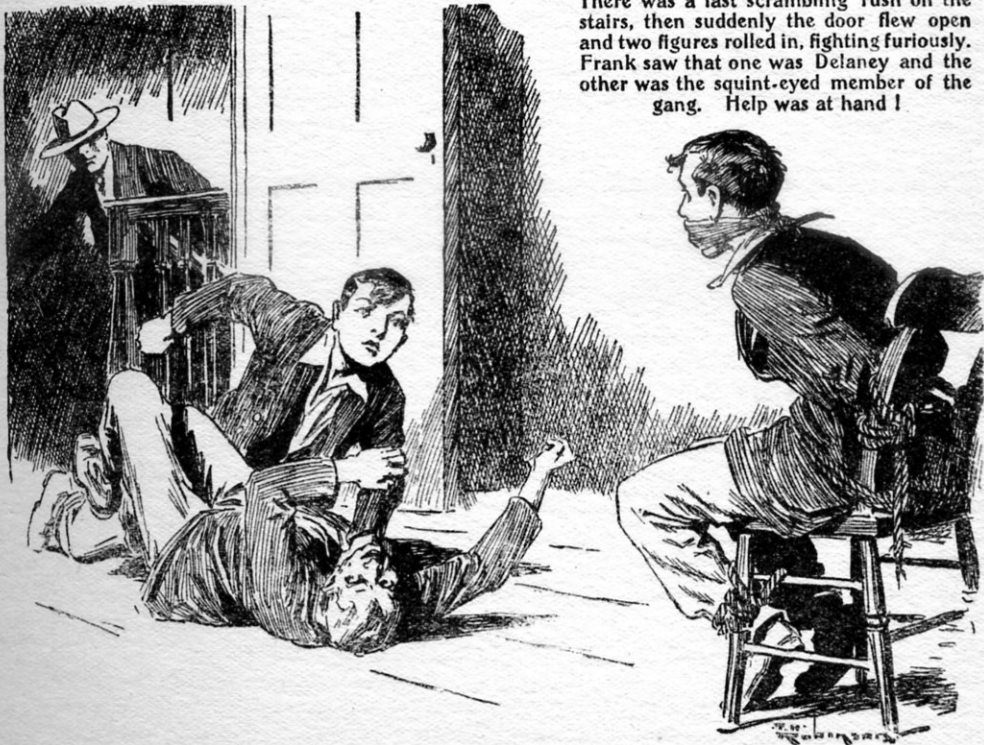
He nodded towards Delaney.

"Your young friend came and told me that you'd scorched off," he said. "So we followed as quickly as possible in my car. We lost your trail completely. And only because young Delaney saw your bicycle propped up here did we realise that you must be inside. Of course, we entered, and we were fortunate enough to meet the gang face to face. I recognised the leader—and he recognised me."

Keyes chuckled shortly.

"These fellows are all the same," he said. "They're too impulsive in a tight corner. I'd nothing to go on.

There was a last scrambling rush on the stairs, then suddenly the door flew open and two figures rolled in, fighting furiously. Frank saw that one was Delaney and the other was the squint-eyed member of the gang. Help was at hand!



I'd not the faintest evidence that you were kidnapped, and I couldn't arrest that fellow because he's only been out from his last stretch of imprisonment for a couple of months, and there was nothing against him. But he pulled a gun directly he saw me."

"And, by jove, Mr. Keyes was wonderful," panted Tom Delaney admiringly. "He dived straight at that gun, Frank. I swear the bullet couldn't have missed his head by an inch. But then he got the fellow down. I sailed in, just to keep the pot boiling, and I yelled fit to bust for the police. Luckily, there was a Robert on duty near by. He started playing tunes on his whistle——"

Warden Keyes laughed shortly.

"Well, well," he said. "All that doesn't matter very much. The great thing is that we've got the gang. But how did you know about them, youngster? What on earth gave you the idea that they'd got the cups? And, above all, how did they get them?"

Frank Dare looked up with a faltering smile.

"The cups were in the tent roof, sir," he said. "I didn't realise it until almost too late. I *knew* that those cups couldn't have been taken out. I knew that if you didn't find them buried under the grass, they must be somewhere in the tent. And then it suddenly occurred to me that the trophy tent was the only one which was *lighted* inside. There were small lamps hung over the trestle tables."

A look of genuine admiration came over the detective's face.

"Go on, youngster," he said quietly. "And what did you think the lamps meant?"

"They wouldn't have meant any-

thing, sir," said Frank, "if they had been in *all* the tents. But since they were in only one, it was obvious that that one tent was unusually dark. Now in the ordinary way canvas tents are not dark. The canvas is semi-transparent. It lets in a lot of light."

"I'm beginning to see," said Keyes in a low tone. "By jove, I'm beginning to see. Youngster, that's one of the smartest pieces of deduction I've ever known. I'll frankly admit I didn't think of it. And you mean——"

"I mean," said Frank, "that the tent had a false roof—a double roof. I'll bet it had, sir. One of the gang waited inside until there were no other visitors present. Then, by a special pulley, he let down the false roof and chucked the cups inside it. He pulled it up again—and walked out as innocently as possible."

"Great jumping Jehosophat!" exploded the last of the Delaneys. "Frank, you're a marvel. I see the whole idea. The cups were hung up inside that double roof, and the gang came and pulled down the tent and carried it away, cups and all. My hat, it's that double roof which made the tent dark, so that they had to have lamps inside there."

Frank Dare shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well," he said, "that's how I looked at it. I'm afraid I wasn't very bright. The beggars were actually carting the tent away before I'd tumbled to the whole idea."

It was whilst he was speaking, however, that a couple of policemen toiled into the room, carrying between them two or three small packing cases.

Gold and silver glinted within those half-opened boxes.

Keyes patted Frank on the back and nodded the policemen out of the room.

"Well, there's the end of your story, young man," he said. "And a very fine story it is. By jingo, that was as smart a piece of work as I've ever known in all my career. You've got a head on you, my boy. And you oughtn't to go wasting it in some stuffy bank or office when you leave school."

"He's leaving *now*, sir."

The words came from the Hon. Thomas Delaney, who looked rather pink in the face, and whose eyes refused to meet those of the gesturing Frank.

"I don't care," went on the Hon. Thomas. "You can do what you like to me afterwards, Frank, but I'm going to speak up now. Mr. Keyes, Frank's leaving the school to-day because his dad's—his dad's died, and there's no money left. Frank's got to work for his living. The frightful ass wouldn't accept any kind of loan from me, but he's mighty keen on being a jolly old sleuth-hound and what-not. So I thought I'd tell you. I know he'll probably break my neck for doing so, because the silly ass is as shy as a giddy schoolgirl, and——"

"And I certainly will, Tommy,"

breathed Frank wrathfully. "I'll scrag you when I've got over this headache."

But Mr. Warden Keyes took him gently by the arm.

"This is interesting," he said. "It's so interesting that we'll have a little chat, my young friend. I don't mind admitting that pressure of work has made me wish I had a bright, keen assistant during the last few weeks. I couldn't think of anything better than choosing a fellow from the old school. And I couldn't think of any fellow better than you. Come along now, we'll chat this over, and then I'll go and see the Head."

Gaspingly Frank Dare was led away to chat.

And next morning, when he left the school, amidst a cheering crowd of the fellows who came to see him off, his bags were labelled to a certain address in Baker Street, London.

Curiously enough, Mr. Warden Keyes lived in Baker Street also. And that was the beginning of the famous firm of Keyes and Dare, private investigators, at the mention of whose name every crook in Europe is said to tremble like a leaf.



AN ODE TO AN ORATOR!

by
MONTY LOWTHER



UNDER a spreading chestnut tree
That fathead Skimpole stands ;
The chump—a silly ass is he—
Has a volume in his hands
About Determinology,
Which no one understands.

He shouts, as all good speakers do,
He roars and bangs his fist ;
The listeners are looking blue
And urge him to desist
(A thing not done by any true
Determinologist).

“ This is, my friends, no time for mirth ! ”
Shouts Skimpole, blithering.
“ A message of tremendous worth
In simple words I bring.
It’s—down with everything on earth ;
Yes, down with everything ! ”

“ Hear, hear ! ” shouts Digby. “ I suppose
We’d better start with you ! ”
An egg takes Skimpole on the nose
And makes him shout “ Yaroooh ! ”
The crowd all chuckle, “ There he goes ! ”
As he drops out of view.

And now a prefect wanders by,
A frown is on his face ;
He gives the crowd his gimlet eye,
And they fall back a pace.
He says, “ If you want thrashing, why,
You’ve come to the right place ! ”

Then Skimpole cries, “ I beg to state
That I shall not obey
Such orders as you may dictate ;
I do not own your sway !
The prefect system’s out of date,
And down with it, I say.”

The prefect, with a thoughtful frown,
Whips out a cane, and—well,
Poor Skimpole startles half the town
With his terrific yell.
Again the first thing that’s put down
Is Skimpole of the Shell !