

The Second Long Story.

Complete in this issue

THE MYSTERIOUS MOSSOO.

A Splendid Long, Complete School Tale.

CHAPTER I.

A Terrible Mistake!

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH came into the Third Form room at Netherby School with the air of one who has information to impart. The Third Form boys were discussing the latest item of school news the arrival that day of Monsieur Lavalle, the new French master—when the nabob came in. Owen Redfern was looking at the clock.

"Bedtime," he said with a yawn. "Hallo, Inky, where have you been? Wherefore that seraphic smile?"

The nabob grinned. "I have made the important discovery by the pure accidentalness," he explained, in his beautiful English. "The sublime Robinson is coming to visit us after we have wooed the balmy slumber. The respectable Hake is coming with him. Their august intention is to administer the severe castigation."

There was a buzz of interest at once in the Third Form room. There was something like warfare between the two junior Forms at Netherby, and Robinson and Hake, the leaders of the Fourth, had frequently come into collision with Redfern, the cock of the Third, and his chums. But Redfern had never expected that Robinson would venture upon so bold a step as that announced by Hurree Singh.

"I say, are you sure, old chap?" he asked. "How do you know? I shouldn't have thought either Robinson or Hake would have had the nerve to come into the Third Form dormitory after lights out."

"The certainty is extreme," said the nabob. "With my own ears I heard them speaking of it in the corridor. I did not let them see me, lest they should therefore abandon their benign intention. The forewarning is the forearming, and we shall be prepared for the visit of the excellent Robinson."

Owen Redfern chuckled gleefully. "My hat! We'll give him a reception!" he exclaimed. "I'll take up that old garden syringe, and if Robinson gets inside the dormitory, I'll make him sorry he left his own quarters."

"Bed, you kids!" said Lantham, the prefect, putting his head in at the door. "Get a move on you, if you don't want me to start on you."

"Right-ho!" said Redfern, undisturbed. "Keep your whiskers on! Come along, children."

And the Third Form marched up to their dormitory. Redfern was grinning to himself. Had he received no warning of the intended visit, Robinson would have had things all his own way. But now the case was reversed. As the Third were on their guard, the surprisers would be surprised. And Redfern meant that they should be surprised with a vengeance.

It was easy for him to smuggle the big garden syringe into the dormitory. Lantham was only anxious to get the youngsters to bed, and then to get back to his study. He had no eyes for anything. Redfern hid the syringe in his bed, and when the prefect turned the light out, a long row of heads



While Robinson, half-terrified and half-amazed, crouched as silent as a mouse, there was a footstep in the ruins, and a second figure appeared and joined the first. Then the amazed Fourth-Former heard a well-known voice. It was the voice of Monsieur Lavalle, the French master at Netherby.

upon white pillows looked as innocent as could be wished. Lantham did not guess that half the juniors were not dressed, and that one of them had an intention of going to sleep.

"Good-night, Lantham!"

"Good-night, kids!" grunted the prefect.

And he went away and closed the door, leaving the big dormitory in darkness save for the pale glimmer of the stars through the high windows.

His footsteps died away down the passage, and Owen Redfern sat up in bed.

His example was followed by Hurree Singh, Reggie Lawrence, Knowles, and half a dozen others.

"No balmy slumber to-night yet, any rate," grumbled Redfern. "Now, Inky, expound! Do you know what time

those kids of the Fourth intend coming here?"

"Yes. The august Robinson said that half an hour after lights out would be a good time, when the reposefulness of the dormitory would be extreme."

"I'll bet he didn't put it in those giddy words. Never mind. That means that we've got half an hour to wait. Considering what we're going to give Robinson, it's worth waiting for. Get out of bed. Have you got that bottle of ink, Reggie?"

"Rather!" said Lawrence.

"Then pour it into your water-jug, so that I can fill the syringe."

"Ha, ha! I'll pour it into yours, if you don't mind. The will do just as good, won't it?"

"Oh, yes, if you like. Anything for a quiet life."

The ink gurgled out of the bottle into the water in Redfern's jug. Then the cock of the Third filled the syringe with the inky water, and laid it ready for use.

"We'll wait for them on the landing," giggled Redfern. "It's as dark as pitch there, and Robinson won't see what's going to happen until he gets it in the neck. Some of you get your towels knotted ready, in case this doesn't stop him."

"Good!" said Reggie. "We don't want to make a mistake with that stuff here, but on the stairs it doesn't matter. I fancy that if old Robinson gets that, he won't want anything more to-night."

When the school clock boomed out the hour of ten, the ambulance was ready in the darkness of the landing.

The Fourth Form quarters were on the floor below, with most of the masters' rooms, though some of the latter were on the same floor as the Third Form dormitory. Close to the landing was the door of the room occupied by the French master at Netherby. It was fortunately empty just now. The French master had arrived at Netherby that day, and the boys had seen little of him as yet. He had gone out early in the evening, and had not yet returned. But the Third Form youngsters were not thinking of M. Lavalle, but of the intended raid of the Fourth Form leaders.

As the last stroke of the clock died away Redfern heard a faint sound below. The upper staircase was in darkness.

Some distance down it made a bend, and beyond that was a glimmer of light. But where the waiting juniors crouched in ambush all was gloom.

"Sh!" murmured Redfern. "Here they come!"

There was a sound of someone quietly ascending the lower stairs. Redfern gripped his syringe, filled to the nozzle with ink water, ready to shoot. The juniors round him gripped their knotted towels and pillows.

Nearer came the footsteps. Whoever was coming up the stairs was evidently treading quietly, so as not to awaken any of the sleepers in the various rooms.

Redfern needed no more proof than that, that it was Robinson. Indeed, it never even crossed his mind that it might be anybody else. Who else could be coming so cautiously up the dark stairs at that hour?

Nearer and nearer! The juniors crouched with bated breath. The newcomer had almost reached the landing of the upper flight.

"It's Robby," murmured Redfern. "Old Hake's funk'd it, I suppose. The bouncer seems to be alone. I'll give him a lesson!"

A form loomed faintly and indistinctly in the gloom.

"At him!" suddenly shouted Redfern.

He sprang up, the syringe at a level. Swish! In a swift jet the ink water shot out of the big syringe, and splashed into the face of the enemy. There was a terrific yell.

"Ciel! Mon Dieu!"

It wasn't Robinson's voice. It was no voice that the juniors knew. But the words used made it easy to guess to whom it belonged.

"My Aunt Matilda!" gasped Knowles. "It's the new French master, and you've slopped it all over him! Crumbs! this is where I do a bunk!"

And Knowles bolted for the dormitory. The others were swift enough to follow, but Knowles was an easy first. He plunged into bed and drew the clothes round him.

"My hat!" gasped Reggie Lawrence, as he followed Knowles's example. "You've done it now, Reddy, and no mistake."

Redfern growled.

"How was I to know it wasn't old Robinson?" he exclaimed. "What a hullabaloo the man's making. Hark to him!"

There was indeed a disturbance in the corridōr.

"Mon Dieu! Help! A moi! Ciel! I am drench! Help!"

The Frenchman was making the building ring with his startled cries. Knowles chuckled.

"There's a row coming over this!" he exclaimed. "Fancy squirting that stuff over a master in the dark. You'd better strike a match next time, Redfern. You'll get skinned for this."

"Oh, shut up!" said Redfern. "Nice sort of a Job's comforter you are!"

"Ha, ha! He'll wake the whole school!"

Pretty nearly all Netherby seemed to be awake already. Voices were calling and lights flashing in every direction. Some of the Sixth, who had not yet retired for the night, came on the scene dressed, while a crowd of Lower Form boys appeared in nightshirts and pyjamas.

"I say," growled Redfern, "it'll look suspicious if none of us wake up. They'll think we know something about what's happened. Come along, some of you!"

"Oh, all right," said Knowles. "But if there's any questions asked, mind, you're the chap who sent the stuff over Mossoc."

"Do you think I should try to put it on anybody else?" demanded Redfern wrathfully.

"Oh, don't get ratty! I only——"

"Oh, shut up!"

Hurree Singh and Reggie Lawrence, Knowles, and half a dozen others, followed Redfern from the Third Form dormitory. There was already a crowd on the scene of the "accident," and as the juniors joined it, in spite of the seriousness of the situation, they could not help grinning at what they saw.



Devereux stared at the two Fourth-Formers in blank amazement. "Why are your hands tied together in that manner? What does it mean?" he said.

CHAPTER 2.

Mossoo's Mishap—Redfern Owns Up—A Real Brick!

"CEL! Mon Dieu!"

In the midst of a crowd of grinning boys stood a strange, weird figure. It was that of the new French master at Netherby.

M. Adolphe Lavallo was a little man, with skinny legs and arms and a narrow face adorned with a pointed tuft of beard. That face was now the colour of ink.

Redfern's aim had been good, in spite of the dimness on the stairs, and the jet of inky water intended for Robinson of the Fourth had caught M. Lavallo fairly on the nose, and splashed all over his face.

The little Frenchman was gesticulating wildly, and seemed to be excited to the point of frenzy, and hardly to know whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Mon Dieu! What has happen? I am drench—I am assault! Help!"

"Ha, ha!" cried Devereux, the captain of Netherby. "I beg your pardon, Mossoo, but you do look funny! Somebody has been squirting ink over you."

"I am drench!"

"You are, and no mistake. Did you see who did it?"

"I see nothing. I come up ze stairs, and all of a sudden zere is swish!—and I feel ze torrent smite me viz ze stunning force!"

The Frenchman rubbed the ink and water from his eyes with his knuckles, and blinked round him at the smiling faces.

He was beginning to recover his self-possession, but it was evident that he was very angry. His appearance was so utterly comical that even Redfern, who had misgivings as to what would come of the catastrophe, could not help chuckling.

But the sounds of mirth died away as an awe-inspiring figure rustled up the stairs.

It was Dr. Lisle, the Head of Netherby.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the doctor, starting back.

"What is this? Who—who is this negro?"

"It ain't a nigger, sir," said Devereux, nearly choking. "It's M. Lavallo."

"M. Lavallo! Impossible."

"It is, sir."

"M. le Docteur—"

"Ah, now I recognise the voice. It is indeed M. Lavallo. Monsieur, I demand an instant explanation. How came you in this state? You have been absent from the college this evening. Is it possible that you have returned in this—this shocking condition?"

The little man gave a howl of indignation.

"Monsieur, I have been assault! I have been drench!"

"It's a trick of some of the juniors, sir," said Devereux.

The doctor's brow became black as a thundercloud.

"Is it possible that any of the juniors would venture to serve a master in such a way? The delinquent shall be severely punished. Who is it?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Who hurled that—that abominable concoction over you, M. Lavallo?"

"In ze dark I see noting. I suddenly feel myself smite viz. ze torrent, and zen somevun un avay viz myself."

The doctor's stern face swept over the now serious faces round him.

"If the culprit is present, I command him to stand forward and own up to his fault. He shall be most severely flogged."

Redfern grinned slightly.

He naturally wasn't taking an offer of that kind. He didn't think it good enough.

"Speak up, I command you," exclaimed the doctor sternly.

"Otherwise, there will be an inquiry into this outrage, and the culprit will then be dealt with more severely. If he is not forthcoming, the whole of the junior Forms will be detained on half-holidays until the truth becomes known."

The Third Form boys cast very expressive looks at Owen Redfern.

Redfern understood what was expected of him, and he did not hesitate. He stepped forward, rather red in the face, but self-possessed as usual.

The doctor fixed a frowning glance upon him.

"Well, Redfern, am I to understand that it was you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You had the—the unparalleled audacity to hurl an admixture of ink-and-water over the person of a master at Netherby!" thundered the Head.

"I didn't know it was a master, sir."

"Ah! Then this abominable outrage was intended for someone else?"

"Yes, sir," said Redfern meekly. "I wouldn't have done it if I had known it was Mossoo. I couldn't see him in the dark, and I took him for Bob—for a chap I've been having some rows with."

"I commend your frankness, Redfern, and I believe your explanation," said the doctor. "I believe that you assaulted

M. Lavallo by mistake. That, however, is very little excuse, since you intended to treat someone, even a junior, in such a manner. I shall leave your punishment, Redfern, in the hands of M. Lavallo. He will deal with you in the morning."

Redfern looked dismayed. He did not exactly yearn for a flogging at the doctor's hands, but he would rather have received that than have been left to the tender mercies of the gentleman who had caught a stream of inky water with his face.

The doctor smiled grimly as he noted the boy's look.

"You have yourself to thank for this, Redfern," he said. "I trust that you will in future reflect before playing these foolish tricks."

And Dr. Lisle rustled off.

"Mon Dieu!" murmured M. Lavallo. "You will come into my study after prayers to-morrow morning, Redfern, and ve will see about zis matter. I zink I will teach you a lesson, mon garçon!"

"Yes, sir," said Redfern.

The French master went into his room, and the boys dispersed to their quarters.

"Well, you've done it this time, Reddy," said Knowles. "Still, it was decent to own up."

"Which you wouldn't have done," said Reggie Lawrence. "I think the lot of us ought to go and see Mossoo with Reddy in the morning. We were all in it."

"You can go if you like," said Knowles. "I sha'n't."

"Oh, I shouldn't expect you to. I shall, and so will Inky."

"The similar thought has traversed my brain," said Hurree Singh, in his purring voice. "In the sincere truth it is myself who am to take much of the blamefulness, for is it not that I imparted the misleading information?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Redfern. "I expect Robinson was scared off by seeing the French master there. Mossoo came in at a beastly unlucky moment, and that spoiled Robinson's game—and ours, too. But I for one don't see what Lavallo wanted to creep upstairs for like a giddy burglar."

"Perhaps he had the considerate fear of disturbing the balminess of the slumberous repose," suggested Hurree Singh.

"Talk about balminess," muttered Knowles. "That chap's English would give me the lockjaw."

"More likely he didn't want anybody to know he came in so late," said Lawrence. "It's his first day at Netherby, and perhaps he's been out on the randan. Anyway, it was beastly unlucky that he should come up without a light and creeping so quietly. It was his own fault, really."

"You'd better tell him so," yawned Knowles. "Now shut up. I want to go to sleep."

The Third Form were soon in the arms of Morpheus. The thought of the morrow's hour of reckoning could not keep Redfern awake, and he slept like a top till the rising-bell went. But as soon as he was out of bed he remembered his appointment with the French master.

"We're coming with you," said Reggie Lawrence, as they left the hall after prayers. "Ain't that the programme, Inky?"

"Such is the determined intention," said the nabob. "Perhaps the august Mossoo will be content to divide the severe punishment equally amongst the three of us, and therefore it will fall more lightly upon the separate individuality."

"Well, I know it's no good talking to you," said Redfern. "So come along."

The three chums of the Third presented themselves at M. Lavallo's door. They found the French master waiting for them. A cane lay on his table.

This was the first time the juniors had had a chance of getting a good look at the new master. Redfern rather liked his looks, as a matter of fact. His face was thin, and slightly worried, but his round eyes were kindly, his look good-natured. He nodded to the boys in a way that rather raised their spirits.

"Ah, you are prompt," he said. "Good-morning, mes garçons. But why is it that three of you shall come to me?"

"We were all in it, sir," said Lawrence, before Redfern could reply. "We are all as much to blame as old Reddy—I mean Redfern, sir."

"Ciel! I like to hear you speak like zat," said the French master. "I zink you say last night, Redfern, zat you not intend to trow ze inky vattair ovaiv me?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"You intend it for someone else?"

"Yes, sir," said Redfern, encouraged. "A chap in the Fourth, who was coming to play a little game on us. I never dreamed it was a master."

"Zen it would not be just to punish you for zat mistake," said M. Lavallo. "Last night I was very angry, and ven I am angry I am terrible. But now I zink you not so bad after all, and as ze doctor has left ze punishment in my hands, I shall pardon you, if you say zat you are sorry."

The chums of the Third stared at one another in amazement. This was a stroke of good luck they had been far from anticipating.

"Oh, I say, sir, that's awfully good of you," said Redfern.

impulsively. "I am sorry we treated you so badly, sir, by making that beastly mistake."

"We're very sorry," said Reggie Lawrence, sincerely enough. Hurree Singh placed his hand upon his heart.

"The regretfulness is extreme," he exclaimed. "The unintendedness was complete, but the apologise is of the greatest."

M. Lavalley smiled.

"Ze mattair is end," he said. "I hope, my boys, zat ve shall like vun anozer as ve get on togezer. You may go."

"Oh, I am sure we shall, sir," said Redfern.

And the chums of the Third left the room well pleased with their escape, and with the new French master.

"We've got a prize-packet this time in Lavalley," exclaimed Redfern. "He's a brick—simply a brick! And look here, we're not going to rot him in class like we do the German master, kids. One good turn deserves another."

And Reggie and the nabob concurred.

CHAPTER 3.

Something Like a Mystery!

"WHAT'S the matter with Knowles?" asked Owen Redfern.

It was some days after the adventure of the French master.

The promised visit of Robinson and Hake had not been paid to the Third Form dormitory, though Redfern had been ready for it to come off. The cock of the Third was beginning to think that the Fourth Form champions had abandoned their intention.

Redfern was usually serenely oblivious of Knowles, but Knowles, just now, was exciting his curiosity. Knowles was the Peeping Tom of the school, and he always knew everything about everybody. And when he came into possession of any piece of information, he was accustomed to impart it with an air of great secrecy to about half the Form.

"What's the matter with the image?" said Redfern. "He's had something on his mind for the last day or two. He's going about looking as mysterious as a giddy Italian Anarchist."

"I've noticed it," said Reggie Lawrence, with a nod. "I suppose he's on the track of something, the silly ass. He can never mind his own business."

"I believe it is something to do with the new master," said Hurree Singh. "When he went out of the school this afternoon I saw Knowles expedite himself in the similar route. It was borne upon my mind that he was following the revered instructor of French."

"Following Mossoo! What could he be doing that for?"

"That is unknown to me, but I think he was doing so. Is he not always playing the part of the august Sherlock Holmes?"

"He's always playing the giddy ox!" growled Redfern. "Mossoo's a good little chap, and I'm not going to have Knowles watching him about. I believe Mossoo's got some trouble on his mind, he always looks so worried when he thinks nobody can see him!"

"Yes, Knowles mentioned that to me," said Reggie.

"I think we'll interview Knowles," said Redfern. "Mossoo may have something on his mind, but it's no business of that cad, and he's not going to watch him about! Let's go and find Knowles!"

They ran Knowles to earth in the Third Form room. It was evening, and the preparation was over. Knowles had evidently just come in, for it was raining, and his boots were wet. There was a satisfied smile upon his face.

"Hallo!" said Redfern. "What mean trick have you been playing, Knowles?"

Knowles started.

"What do you mean, Redfern? How do you know I've been doing anything?"

"You look so jolly satisfied with yourself."

Knowles grinned.

"I know what I know!" he replied.

"That's likely enough, but I don't suppose it amounts to much. What have you found out about Mossoo?"

It was a shot at a venture, but it made Knowles start again. "So you've noticed it?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes," said Redfern easily, "and now I want to know all about it!"

"I don't mind telling you," said Knowles mysteriously, "but you'd better keep it dark. Mossoo is a beauty, and no mistake!"

"What do you mean? He's a good little man, and much nicer than the French master we used to have."

"I'm not saying he isn't nice, but—"

"Oh, get it off your chest! I'm not going to believe anything against him, for one!"

"Perhaps you will when I tell you what I know," said Knowles snappishly. "I thought it a bit funny his staying out so late the night he came here, and creeping up to bed so quietly without wanting to wake anybody."

"Well, I don't see what you can make out of that!"

"It isn't only that. Night before last I happened to be out of bounds, going down to the village to see about my new bat, when Mossoo passed me in the lane. He didn't see me."

"I've no doubt you took precious good care of that!"

"I nipped into the hedge as soon as I spotted him. But I don't suppose he would have seen me, anyway; he was thinking of something else. He was muttering to himself, and gesticulating, and what do you think I heard him say!"

"'Mon Dieu,' I expect, or 'Ciel.'"

"No, I didn't. He said: 'Ze disgrace—ze terrible disgrace,' and then something about his getting kicked out of Netherby."

Owen Redfern looked very grave.

"Are you telling the truth, Knowles, or are you romancing?"

he demanded.

"I'm telling the solid truth. Those were his very words. He was muttering as if he was half-beside himself, and he looked it. Haven't you noticed how worried he has been in class?"

"Yes, I've noticed that."

"He's got something bad on his mind. Well, after hearing that I thought I'd just see where he went to—yes, you can sneer as much as you like, Redfern, but if the man's a black-guard he ought to be exposed and kicked out of Netherby."

"He's a good little chap, and I like him," said Redfern stoutly; "but go on!"

"I tracked him down. He went straight to the village, and entered the Green Man!"

Redfern gave a jump.

"The Green Man! That awfully low public-house!"

"Yes. I watched him go in."

The chums of the Third were silent. They did not know what to say. They liked the French master, and they were loyal. But what could Mossoo have wanted in the Green Man, a public-house which bore the worst character of any for miles round, and which was the resort of all the betting men and blackguards in the neighbourhood.

Knowles smiled triumphantly as he saw the impression he had made.

"What do you make of that, Mr. Clever Redfern? I meant to keep my eye on him after that. And—and I've just spotted him again."

"Where have you been?"

"I saw him go out, looking jolly mysterious, and I thought it was another visit to the Green Man coming off. But he only went across to the old chapel, and I saw him meet a man there under the trees. I couldn't hear what they said."

"I'll bet that wasn't your fault!" said Redfern contemptuously.

Knowles flushed red.

"I think we ought to get at the truth, and show him up," he said. "I couldn't hear anything, but I saw money pass between them. Mossoo gave the other chap some money and I believe it was gold."

"I'd like to know where he got it from, then," said Redfern incredulously. "His screw here isn't a big one, and I know he's poor. He dresses worse than any of the other masters, and never seems to spend anything."

"Perhaps he has to save up to pay that chap, whoever he was," said Knowles. "Anyway, he gave him money. Then I got closer, and as they parted I heard the other chap say to him something—I couldn't catch the words—and Mossoo said 'Vendredi.'"

"What the dickens did he say that for?"

"Why, it's plain enough. That means Friday, and it means that he was going to see the man again on Friday, either at the Green Man or here in the ruined chapel."

"Well, I don't know why he shouldn't see him, and give him money, too, if he likes!" said Redfern. "Maybe, it's some poor relation of his."

"Why should he meet him so secretly, then?"

"Well, perhaps it's an old creditor."

"What about the disgrace, and being kicked out of Netherby?"

"Oh, rats! What do you make of it all, then?"

"Why, I think it's plain enough. Mossoo has got into the betting set at the Green Man."

"He must have been jolly quick about it, then, as he hasn't been here a week."

"He may have known them before he came here. We don't know what his antecedents are, and he's probably taken the doctor in. Now he's in debt to some of the gang, and they're blackmailing him, threatening to show him up to the doctor if he doesn't square them."

"I don't believe anything of the kind! Mossoo looks about the last man in the world to bet or anything of that kind."

"Well, you can think what you like, but I've got my own opinion," said Knowles angrily. "And I think the boulder ought to be shown up!"

"I don't envy you if you start showing him up. You're

pretty certain to find a mare's nest, and a chap who spies on a master is likely to catch it hot."

"Well, I know that, and I shouldn't speak without proof."

"I don't see where you're going to get any proofs. I don't see what business it is of yours, at all."

"Any decent fellow would—"

"Yes, but you're not a decent fellow, so that doesn't hold water. There's one thing I've got to say: don't let me catch you watching poor old mossoo about!"

"Why not?"

"Because if you do, you'll get it where the chicken got the chopper—in the neck," said Redfern impressively. "Mossoo may be as mysterious as he pleases, but he's a little brick, and if he's got any worry on his mind, there's no need for you to go meddling and making matters worse! You're an inquisitive beast!"

And Redfern, leaving Knowles to digest that, marched off. As a matter of fact he was a little troubled in his own mind. Knowles's disclosures certainly gave matters a very peculiar look.

"Still, there can't be anything in it," argued Redfern, "and if there is, it's no business of ours or of Knowles's. Mossoo's all right. Which reminds me, I've got some beastly lines to take to him."

Redfern's championship of the little Frenchman was really generous, for only that afternoon he had received an imposition of fifty lines from the Henriade for inattention in class. However, he had knocked them off with the help of his chums, hoping that mossoo would not examine them closely enough to observe the difference of handwriting. He now took the impot and marched off to mossoo's study with it.

He knocked at the door, and received no reply. He knocked again, more loudly, and still there was no answer.

"Hallo, he's out!" murmured Redfern. "I suppose I'd better leave them on his desk. He'll find 'em there when he comes in."

He opened the door of the study and stepped in.

"Mon Dieu!"

It was a low, muttering voice, and it made Redfern start. The study was not unoccupied, as he had deemed.

M. Lavalle sat in his chair at the table, upon which his elbows rested. His face was in his hands; his whole attitude was that of one crushed beneath the weight of some terrible mental burden. He was evidently too preoccupied to notice Redfern's entrance, and had certainly not heard his knocks at the door.

"Mon Dieu!" muttered the French master again.

Redfern stopped short in dismay. His first thought was to retreat without allowing the Frenchman to know that he had entered the room at all.

He saw that M. Lavalle, believing himself to be alone, and unobserved, had allowed himself to give way utterly to the secret trouble that was preying on his mind. If he saw Redfern the position would be very painful for both of them.

Redfern stepped quietly back towards the doorway. But some slight sound must have caught the Frenchman's ear, for he gave a start and raised his head from his hands.

He looked straight at Redfern, and their eyes met. The boy stood still in dismay. For a moment M. Lavalle sat still, his white face motionless; then, with a cry, he sprang to his feet.

CHAPTER 4. Robinson's Raid.

REDFERN! What are you doing here? How dare you enter zis study vizout my permission!" Mossoo rapped out the words. Redfern had never heard him speak so sharply, almost savagely, before.

The boy coloured to the ears.

"I am sorry, sir!" he faltered.

"Explain yourself at once!"

"I knocked, sir, and as you did not answer I came in, to put my lines on your desk. That's what we always do, sir."

The paper in Redfern's hand bore out his statement, but that was really not needed, for M. Lavalle had already learned something of his character, and knew he could take his word.

The little Frenchman's face was already clearing. His anger never lasted long.

"Close the door, Redfern," he said, in an altered voice, "I want to speak viz you."

Redfern, wondering what was coming, closed the door of the study. The French master signed to him to approach.

"Did you hear me say anything, Redfern?"

"I had only been here a few seconds, sir."

"Yes, but did you hear me say anything?"

"Only 'Mon Dieu!' sir."

The Frenchman looked relieved.

"I know I can believe you, Redfern. You are a ver' truthful boy."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You—you have seen me in ze moment of trouble," said the little man nervously, while a flush passed over his pale face.

"You must tink it ver' strange, Redfern—"

"It's no business of mine, sir," said the junior eagerly. "I never trouble my head about other people's affairs."

"That is right, mon garçon. But you tink it ver' strange!"

Redfern was silent.

"I will explain," said the French master. "My heart is heavy zat I leave my native land. I sigh for la belle France. I am depress; zat you English people call ze blue demon."

Redfern could not help smiling.

Monsieur Lavalle smiled, too, and continued in a more cheerful tone:

"Perhaps zere is anozer reason why I am depress. Ve all have worries. I speak to you like zis, Redfern, because you have seen me so sad. In my country zere is ze old mozzer who is not rich—hein?—and whose heart is ver' heavy becausa her son is far away in ze foreign land. You understand zat, and you feel in your heart? Zat is good! You not laugh at ze French master because he is sometimes sad to zink of his own country and his old mozzer. And you not talk about zat to ze boys."

"Not a word, sir."

"Zat is right. Perhaps zere is annozzer reason I am depress, but zat is no matter. You are a good boy Redfern. Zat is all. Leave ze lines zere."

Redfern laid down the inkpot and left the study.

As he closed the door he heard the little Frenchman heave a heavy sigh.

The junior went away in a very puzzled frame of mind. His promise to the French master prevented him from confiding what had happened to his chums, and so he could not get their opinion upon it.

But it seemed to be pretty certain that there was something in Knowles's allegations after all. The Frenchman was not so deeply troubled simply by grief at leaving his fatherland and his old "mozzer"—indeed, he had said as much himself, for he seemed to be an almost painfully truthful little man. He was certainly poor, and he probably had relations in France dependant upon his spare earnings as a French master in an English school. In that case, the fear of losing his post at Netherby would be enough to depress him. But why should he be afraid of that? He could not have obtained it, in the first place, without excellent recommendations. Why, then, should he be afraid of having to leave Netherby if he did his duty there, as he certainly did, for he was the most conscientious of little men?

There was something behind it all that Redfern could not understand; but he still clung to his belief that it was nothing against mossoo. He was far more inclined to think that the harmless little man was the victim of some unscrupulous rascality.

"Hallo, wherefore that solemn aspect?" exclaimed Reggie Lawrence, when Redfern rejoined his chums. "You look as if you had lost the last 'bus home."

"Bosh!" said Redfern cheerily. "Hallo, it's close on bedtime! I wonder whether Robinson is ever going to pay us that visit. He seems to have dropped the idea, doesn't he?"

"Well, I should say he'd come sooner or later," said Lawrence. "What do you think, Inky?"

"The probability of the fructification of the scheme appears to me to be great," said the nabob. "The sublime Robinson will honour us with his charitable presence in the fulness of time."

"Well, I don't see the fun of waiting up for him any more," said Redfern. "And we can't lock the dormitory door, you know. We shall have to fix up some alarm to wake us if the Fourth Form bounders come along."

Redfern thought over that idea, and he had made his plans by the time the Third went up to bed.

After lights out, Redfern rose and lighted a candle-end, and drew a ball of stout cord from his pocket.

"What are you up to now, Reddy?" demanded Reggie Lawrence.

"Laying a little trap for the sublime Robinson," chuckled Redfern. "With a cord and a couple of boxes, a fellow of genius can work wonders."

He dragged a couple of boxes towards the door, and fastened the cord to them, so that it stretched between them at a height of about a foot from the floor.

The cord was so arranged that the opening door would not touch it; but anybody walking into the dormitory in the dark could not fail to walk straight into it.

The Third-Formers, who were watching Redfern's proceedings with deep interest, broke into giggles as they saw his scheme.

Redfern surveyed his handiwork with much satisfaction.

"If old Robby comes in here to-night," he remarked, "I don't see how he's to see that cord, for he won't dare to carry a light. And if he walks into that taut cord, my children, there will be a heavy fall in Fourth-Formers. What?"

"Good wheeze," chuckled Lawrence. "He knows which

is your bed, and he's certain to come straight for it, and he can't fail to take a tumble."

"The immensity of the surprise is in store for the august Robinson," grinned the nabob. "We can compose ourselves to the peacefulness of the balmy slumber."

And he proceeded to do so.

"If anybody comes in here and wakes us up," giggled Redfern, "we shall be justified in taking him for a burglar, and treating him accordingly. That's the wheeze."

He blew out the candle and tumbled into bed.

In five minutes the Third Form were sleeping the sleep of the just.

The hour of ten boomed out from Netherby Tower, but it did not disturb the slumberers of the Third Form dormitory. They slept on. But there were wakeful individuals close at hand. A few minutes after the last stroke died away, a slight sound of stocking feet was audible on the landing, had there been anyone there to hear it.

"Quiet," whispered Robinson, the captain of the Fourth—"ku-ku-ku-quiet, Hake! The beastly Frenchy is in that room, and I believe he's a light slip-slip-sleeper."

Robinson was afflicted with a stammer.

Hake gave a growl.

"All right; I'm quiet enough. If Frenchy hears anybody, it will be you, getting out those blessed words on the easy instalment system."

"Do you want a th-th-th-thick ear?"

"No, I don't; nor any blessed stuttering either. Let's get to work!"

"Have you got the cuc-cuc-cuc—"

"Good gracious, I shouldn't carry a cuc-cuc-cuc about with me in the middle of the night, whatever it may be—and blessed if I know."

"The cuc-cuc—"

"You've said that before."

"The cuc-cuc-cane!" gasped Robinson, getting it all out at last.

"Of course I have. Feel."

"You, you idiot!" mumbled Robinson, as Hake gave him a cut across the calves with the cane, by way of assuring him that he had not forgotten it. "Mind, I'm to lug the bed-clothes off that cheeky young rascal; and you're to lather him. There's light enough from the windows to see; and I know Redfern's bib-bib-bed. Don't hit him too hard, but give him just a touching-up, you know."

"I know. Get on, do!"

Robinson opened the door of the Third Form dormitory.

All was gloomy within. In the faint starlight of the windows the row of glimmering white beds could be made out.

Robinson stole in.

"Come on," he whispered, "it's all serene! I— Yow—ow!"

He gave a yell as his foot caught in the unseen cord, and he went stumbling forward, wildly throwing out his hands. Down he went, with a thump that made the floor shake.

"Well, of all the silly cuckoos," exclaimed Hake, "I never— Oh—ow!"

His foot had caught in the cord, and he staggered blindly. He made a desperate effort to retain his balance, but in vain. He went over helplessly, crashing on Robinson as the latter made an effort to rise. Robinson was flattened down again, and he gave another yell.

Needless to say, all the Third had awakened at the first sound.

Redfern knew that the foe had come at last, and that his little trap had caught them. He was the first out of bed.

"Hallo! Burglars—by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Wake up, you fellows! Burglars!" He grasped the bolster from his bed and rushed towards the door.

Robinson and Hake were struggling up, hardly knowing whether they were on their hands or their heels.

Redfern's bolster caught Hake round the neck and sent him flying; and in a moment more a second swipe sent Robinson to the floor again. Then Redfern jumped on the captain of the Fourth and pinned him down.

"Buck up, you chaps!" he shouted. "Burglars—I've caught one!"

The Third were not long in bucking up. They swarmed over the two hapless intruders; and Robinson and Hake were pinned down by sheer weight of numbers.

"Got 'em!" exclaimed Redfern, with much satisfaction. "Won't the doctor be pleased when he knows we caught the burglars?"

"You silly ass!" came Robinson's muffled voice from under half a dozen of the Third. "You little bib-bib-beast, I'm not a burglar! I'm Rob-Rob-Rob—"

"A robber, are you?" exclaimed Redfern. "Well, I know you are; you needn't tell us that."

"I'm Rob-Rob-Rob—"

He keeps on saying he's a robber, chaps. He's a hardened criminal as plain as anything. I dare say he's been wanted by the police a long time. They'll be glad to get hold of him."

"Lemme go! I'm Rob-Rob-Rob-Rob—"

"No, you're not robbing," said Redfern. "You were going to, but you've been caught in the act. You won't do any more robbing for a long time."

"I'm Robinson!" shrieked the unhappy victim at last.

"Robbing who?"

"I'm Robinson!"

"Whose son are you robbin'?" demanded Redfern.

The Third-Formers were shrieking; but Redfern was as grave as a judge.

"I'm Robinson of the Fourth! I'll skin you for this, you young beast!"

"Well, well, it does seem to me that your voice is sort of familiar," exclaimed Redfern, as if he had just made the discovery. "I never thought you would take to this life, Robinson. I always knew you were a measly sort of a rotter, but fancy becoming a burglar!"

"I'm not a bib-bibby—"

"I never said you were."

"I'm not a burglar! I'm Robinson of the Fourth, and I'll skid-skin you for this!"

"If you ain't burgling, what have you come here for?"

"I came to give you a hiding, you little beast! I'll give it you yet! Let me get up!"

"Well, Robinson, I'm glad to learn that you haven't taken to evil ways, as I feared," said Redfern solemnly. "Your coming here in the middle of the night looks mighty suspicious, though. You're quite sure you're not a burglar?"

"Ye-es, you young brute! Lemme get up!"

"I don't know about that. Your voice sounds as if you are angry. Are you angry, Robinson?"

"I'll skin you!"

"There, you see, it wouldn't be safe to let you get up. Give me that cord, Inky, and I'll tie his hands together."

This was done. Then the spare length of the cord was fastened round Hake's wrists. Hake had been squashed speechlessly under a heap of Third-Formers, and he was gasping for breath. Helpless now, the unhappy intruders were allowed to rise.

"Take this off my wrists," said Robinson savagely.

"Can't, dear boy. I dare say somebody in the Fourth Form dormitory will."

"You're not going to send us away like this?"

"Wrong! I am!"

"We shall fall downstairs and break our necks."

"Shouldn't wonder. Off you go."

"It's—it's dangerous—we shall tumble over—"

"My dear Robinson, you repeat yourself. Kindly take your departure."

"I won't go," howled Robinson, in a rage.

"Inky, dip my sponge into the water jug, and chuck it over here."

The nabob obeyed with a chuckle.

"Now," said Redfern, "this is where I start squeezing the sponge down the back of your neck, Robby. How do you like it?"

Robinson gave a fearful howl as the cold water trickled down his spine.

"Where that came from there's plenty more," said Redfern cheerfully. "I'll keep it up till you shift. There's some for Hake. Queer thing, these chaps of the Fourth never can stand water touching them, or soap either. Get along!"

Under this persuasion, neither Robinson nor Hake could resist. They went out of the dormitory, stumbling along absurdly with their wrists tied together. Then they were heard stumbling down the stairs. They were in no danger of falling, but their progress was an extremely uncomfortable one. A howl of laughter from the Third Form followed them into the darkness.

There was the sound of a movement in the French master's room. M. Lavalley had been awakened. The Third-Formers bolted back into their dormitory and tumbled into bed. M. Lavalley came out of his room with a candle in his hand.

The Third Form were as still as mice when the door opened and the Frenchman looked in, holding up his candle so that the light fell on the row of beds.

"Boys!"

No reply but an unmelodious snore from Owen Redfern.

"Boys! Are you all asleep?"

Snore!

"Zat is strange," said M. Lavalley aloud. "I hear ze sound zat resemble ze laugh of ze garcons, but ze garcons sleep like ze top. Zat is strange."

And he withdrew and closed the door.

Had he reopened it, he would have heard a succession of giggles in the darkness.

"That was a narrow squeak," yawned Redfern. "Blessed old innocent Mossoo is, and no mistake. I hope those bounders of the Fourth will get home safe."

Robinson and Hake had seen the Frenchman's light, and they had stopped, as silent as mice, crouching in the shadows. Fortunately, M. Lavalley did not descend the stairs. He went

back to his room, and the unhappy heroes of the Fourth resumed their flight.

"I'll skin Redfern for this," growled Robinson.
"All your fault," snapped Hake. "It was your beastly idea to pay a visit to their rotten dormitory. Catch me following your lead again."

"Just like you to throw the bub-bub-blame on me. Come along, do, before some beastly prefect drops down on us."

They blundered along the passage, and reached the door of the Fourth Form dormitory. But with their wrists tied in a bunch it was impossible for them to turn the handle.

They tried again and again, but in vain.

"Kick!" growled Hake.

"We shall wake the house!"

"Can't be helped. We can't stay out here all night. Kick the beastly door!"

And Hake kicked, to wake his Form-fellows within.

But the Fourth Form seemed to be pretty sound asleep. Hake kicked half a dozen times, each kick louder than the last. A light gleamed in the passage, and then Hake wished he had not been quite so reckless. Devereux, the captain of Netherby, came along with a lamp in his hand.

He stared at the two Fourth Formers in blank amazement.

"What are you doing out of bed, after lights out?" he demanded.

"We—er—that is——" said Robinson lucidly.

"Ah—we—you see—er——" explained Hake, with equal clearness.

"What do you mean? What are you holding your hands together in that manner for? Why, your wrists are tied together. What does this mean?"

"We—you see—that is to say——"

"You know—we—and——"

"Yes, I think I know," said Devereux grimly. "You have been playing some trick on the Third, and have got the worst of it. Is that it?"

"Ye-es," mumbled Hake.

"I thought so. The best thing you can do is to get in bed as soon as you can. I've a great mind to give you fifty lines each, but I dare say Redfern has punished you."

Devereux opened the dormitory door, and kindly assisted the pair inside with an application of his boot. Then he closed it, and went away laughing.

Robinson had not dared to ask him to untie the cord, and apparently he had not thought of it himself, or he wished to let the pair take the consequences of their raid. The two Fourth-Formers blundered into the dormitory.

"Wake up, some of you," growled Hake. "Deaf as adders, I suppose."

"Hallo," said a sleepy voice. Vane sat up. "You fellows have been gone a long time. Have you given Redfern a jolly good hiding?"

"N-no," mumbled Robinson. "The—the little brutes were awake."

"Oh, so you had to give it up? Why don't you get into bed?"

"Er—our hands are tied up. Will you untie them, Vane?"

"You've let those kids tie you up?" said Vane. "Great Scot! You're something for the Form to be proud of, you are!"

"Oh, shut up," said Hake. "Untie us, and go to sleep."

"Pair of silly asses, I call you— Ooch!"

Vane broke off suddenly, as four hands, all tied together, came down upon him with a mighty smite. Robinson and Hake were out of patience.

"Now untie us," snarled Hake, "or we'll give you some more."

Vane sulkily obeyed, and the unfortunate chiefs of the Fourth Form were able to go to bed at last. They did so with many forebodings as to the morrow, which were realised, for the next day the story of their nocturnal adventure was all over Netherby, and they were "chipped" without mercy, both by the Third Form and their own.

CHAPTER 5.

Knowles Shows His Hand.

MONSIEUR LAVALLE was losing his temper. He was such a conscientious little man that his task with the Third Form at Netherby was never an easy one. He did not, as some masters do, devote himself to the clever boys of the Form, and leave the dull ones to get on as best they could. He expected his boys to work, and he worked hard himself.

Most of the Third, following the example of Owen Redfern, made things as easy as they could for the little Frenchman. He had not the authority of the English masters, and it was easy for his pupils to make him uncomfortable. But the fiat had gone forth from Redfern and Company that he was not to be tormented. It was probably because of Redfern's known wishes on the subject that Knowles found a keen pleasure in worrying the little man.

Knowles was about the best French scholar in the Third,

and he could easily have delighted Mossoo if he had chosen, but he did not choose. Of late, Knowles had developed a studied impertinence in his manner towards the French master, which Mossoo did not exactly know what to make of.

And on this particular morning, Knowles seemed bent on worrying M. Lavalle into a state of frenzy. He gave purposely stupid answers to every question, and smiled with enjoyment as he saw poor Mossoo growing more and more excited.

"I know not vezer you are such a stupid, or vezer you pretend," said M. Lavalle. "You seem not able to make za simplest sentence——"

"Yes, sir, I can make a sentence in French quite easily," said Knowles.

"Zen let me hear you do it."

"Can I make it on any subject, sir?"

"Oui, oui; zat is quite immaterial."

Knowles appeared to reflect.

"Mon habit est très vieux," he said demurely.

There was a giggle from some of the class.

Mossoo blushed to the roots of his hair. Although he did not dress so well as the other masters at Netherby, he was very sensitive about his personal appearance.

"Knowles! How dare you?"

"You said I might make a sentence on any subject I choose, sir," said Knowles, with an injured look. "I wasn't alluding to your coat, sir."

"Knowles!"

"I wasn't, sir. I respect you too highly to make any reference to your old coat, sir. If I had said that your coat was very old I should have been to blame. But I wasn't referring to the shabbiness of your attire, sir. I wouldn't do such a thing, because I know you can't afford to dress properly, and you would very likely be sensitive on the point."

This explanation sent some of the class into hysterics. Mossoo's face was a study.

"Knowles! I can only zink zat you mean to be impertinent."

"My dear master, I had no such intention. In fact, until you mentioned the matter yourself, I had really not noticed that your coat was very, very old."

Mossoo gasped for breath. It was natural that Knowles's coolness should take it away. A good many of the boys, thoughtless rather than ill-natured, were enjoying the joke. But they wondered where Knowles got the nerve from.

"Silence, Knowles!"

"Certainly, sir."

"I will not deal viz you now. I can only zink zat you mean to be insolent, but I not like to cane ze boys in my class. I will pass on."

"Yes, sir. Would you like me to make another sentence?"

"Non," thundered Mossoo. "You can go to ze bottom of ze class."

Knowles did not stir.

"Do you hear me, Knowles?"

"Yes, sir, I heard you quite distinctly. I am not deaf, and in fact I have never suffered from hardness of hearing."

"Go to ze bottom of ze class!"

"I do not think it is just to send me down, sir. I have not failed to do what was asked of me. It is not my fault if you saw in a perfectly innocent sentence an allusion to your old coat," said Knowles.

"Zat is ze last time I am patient viz you, Knowles," cried M. Lavalle. "Ze patience is vusted! you grow more insolent. You will go to ze bottom of ze class, and you will write out ze whole of ze first book of ze Henriade for ze punishment. Now, obey me at vunce, or I take you direct to ze Doctor!"

Knowles hesitated.

He thought he had strong cards in his hand, so to speak, and could afford to treat the French master as he would not have ventured to treat any other master at Netherby. But the little Frenchman had evidently lost his temper now, and at a word more would have marched Knowles off to the Head. And Knowles twisted uncomfortably in his seat at the thought of what would inevitably follow. He rose reluctantly, and went to the bottom of the class. M. Lavalle took no further notice of him, and he sat for the rest of the lesson with a sullen brow.

"You got what you were asking for that time, Knowles," said Redfern, when the class was dismissed, "and serve you jolly well right! I always knew you were a cad, but to chip a poor man about his old clothes seemed a bit steep, even for you. If Mossoo hadn't given you an impot, I should be inclined to start on you myself."

Knowles scowled savagely.

"I'm not going to do that impot," he said.

ANSWERS
ONE PENNY.
Every Tuesday.

"Aren't you? I fancy you will, though. You weren't going to the bottom of the class, but you did after all."

"Well, I sha'n't do the impost! You'll see!"

And Knowles walked away. Redfern looked after him with a rather puzzled expression. Knowles looked as if he meant what he said.

"He seems to have something up his sleeve," remarked Lawrence. "Blessed if I can see what! He'll have to do the impost."

"I can't quite make him out lately," said Redfern.

Redfern looked at Knowles curiously a good many times that day. Knowles seemed to be quite easy in his mind, and he made no attempt to write out the long imposition the French master had given him. When the time came for taking the lines into M. Lavalle, not one of them had been written.

"Aren't you going in to see Mossoo?" asked Reggie Lawrence, whose curiosity was excited by Knowles's peculiar line of conduct.

"Yes, I shall go in and see him, I think," said Knowles carelessly.

"What will you say about the lines?"

"Oh, I shall tell him I haven't had time to do them!"

"You wouldn't have the beastly check, I should think?"

"Shouldn't I? Well, you'll see."

Knowles strolled away to the French master's study, knocked, and entered. The door closed behind him. The little Frenchman looked up inquiringly.

"Ah, it is you, Knowles! You have come to bring me ze imposition. I am ver' sorry, mon garcon, zat it vas necessary to inflict ze punishment, and I hope zat upon reflection you vill realise zat it is not cleavre nor manly to be impertinent to ze master. Vere are ze lines?"

"Er—I haven't done any, sir," said Knowles.

M. Lavalle stared at him.

"You haven't done any, Knowles? Vat doz zat mean?"

"I haven't had time."

M. Lavalle's face set grimly.

"Zen zere is only vun vay of dealing viz you, Knowles." He rose to his feet. "You will come viz me to ze Head."

"Wait a minute, sir," said Knowles easily. "If I go to the Head perhaps you won't like it."

"I not understand you."

"I might mention to him some things I know."

Lavalle started, as if he thought Knowles had taken leave of his senses.

"I happened to be in the old chapel the other night," said Knowles deliberately, and watching the effect of his words on the Frenchman. "I happened to hear two men talking there, sir."

M. Lavalle started as if he had been shot.

He gave Knowles a wild glance, and then sank back into his chair, pale and trembling.

"You! Vat did you hear?"

He spoke in a faint, gasping voice. Knowles smiled with satisfaction. He had felt certain that he had the whip-hand of the Frenchman, but he had not expected so complete a surrender.

"We needn't go into that, sir, need we?" he said loftily. As a matter of fact he was lying; he had heard only one word that was said at the meeting. But he did not intend to let the Frenchman know that. "There's no need to go into details. You know what I know, and I think that's enough."

"You—you heard vat zat man—zat Lundy—say to me?"

Knowles smiled at the Frenchman's simplicity. For the first time he heard the name of the man who had met M. Lavalle in the disused chapel.

"Yes," he said calmly, "I heard what Lundy said. How would you like to be kicked out of Netherby College, M. Lavalle?"

The Frenchman gave a groan.

Knowles pursued his advantage. Mercy to a vanquished enemy was not in his cold, cruel nature.

"Nice sort of chap you are to be master of a school," he said.

To his surprise the Frenchman started up with flashing eyes. "Knowles, I believe you are lying! If you had heard all zat vas said you would know zat I am not to blame; zat it is all my misfortune."

Knowles shifted uneasily. He saw that he had made a false move, though he did not exactly know how. He tried to carry it off with a high hand.

"You can put it like that if you like," he said coolly, though his heart was beating. "But would you like the doctor to know all about the matter?"

M. Lavalle sat down again.

Knowles saw that he had won, and his confidence returned.

"That's the point," he said. "Would you like the Doctor to know? Would you like all Netherby to know? You can decide for yourself."

"If it were not zat in France zere are zose who depend upon me," said M. Lavalle, "if it were not zat for zis reason I dare not lose my post, Knowles, I would not speak vun vord more to you. I would take you straight to ze Head and tell him all."

Knowles shrugged his shoulders. He did not believe this.

He thought it was simply an excuse the Frenchman had invented to cover his surrender. Consideration for others was not a strong point with Knowles, and he did not believe in it in others.

"And now," said M. Lavalle, his eyes gleaming, "vat is it zat you vant, Knowles? I suppose you have not take ze trouble to spy on me for noting?"

"Well, I think that if I keep your secret you ought to be willing to do me a good turn," said Knowles. "I don't want to do that imposition for one thing."

"You are excused," said M. Lavalle, with a gulp.

"Thank you, sir," said Knowles, with an inflection of mockery in his voice. "By the way, I want to go down to the village this evening, sir. Could you give me a pass?"

The French master hesitated.

"It's all right, sir," said Knowles suavely. "I don't want to go to the Green Man, or any place of that kind."

M. Lavalle started, and dropped his eyes. He wrote out the pass without another word and handed it to Knowles. The junior put it in his pocket and left the study.

When he was gone, M. Lavalle jumped up and began to pace the room, his hands clutching at his scanty locks. The excitable little man was in a state bordering on desperation.

"Well, and what did Mossoo say?" demanded Lawrence, when Knowles appeared in the Third Form room, with a satisfied grin on his face.

"Oh, nothing!" said Knowles airily. "He's let me off the impost."

And he walked away, leaving Reggie very much mystified.

CHAPTER 6.

Robinson Makes Discoveries.

"HALLO, k-k-kid! Where are you off to?"

It was Robinson of the Fourth who asked the question. He was lounging by the gates of Netherby when Knowles came along, with the evident intention of going out. Robinson was alone. Since the adventure in the Third Form dormitory he had been on cold terms with Haake, and the two were not seen about together so much.

Knowles looked rather nervous. He saw that the captain of the Fourth was in a mood for mischief.

"I'm going out," he said.

"Like your cheek! It's only a quarter of an hour to locking-up time."

"I've got a pass."

"I'll believe that when I see it. My belief is that you're going to break bounds, and I can't allow that," said Robinson, with a shake of the head.

"No business of yours!" snapped Knowles. "I tell you I've got a pass signed by M. Lavalle. Get out of the way, can't you?"

Robinson grinned.

"Let me see the pass first. You are a most untruthful person, Knowles."

"It's not your affair! You're not a prefect!"

"Never mind that. Show me the pass or I'll pull your ears."

"Hang you! Look at it, then!"

Knowles produced the pass signed by the French master. Robinson looked at it, and suddenly jerked it from his hand.

"Thanks," he said. "You don't mind lending this to me, do you, Knowles?"

"Give it to me!" howled Knowles furiously. "It's no good to you, you brute! It's filled in with my name!"

"Oh, that's all right! Mossoo writes such a scrawl that there ain't much difference," said the captain of the Fourth.

"It'll do, I dare say, if you'll lend it to me. I want to go out. You're such an obliging fellow, I know you won't mind. Can I have it?"

"No, you can't! Give it me back!"

Robinson caught hold of Knowles's ear between his finger and thumb.

"Can I have it?" he asked pleasantly.

"No—yes! Leggo!"

"You are sure you don't mind my having it?"

"No. You can have it. Leggo, you brute!"

"Thanks awfully. That's really kind of you, Knowles."

Robinson strolled out of the gate with the pass in his pocket. He was safe now if any prefect found him out of bounds, unless the said prefect should make a close examination of the pass. Mossoo's writing was nearly illegible. Knowles did not dare to go out without the pass, and he had to give up his expedition. It served him right, as a matter of fact, but that did not make it any the more pleasant to him.

Robinson strolled away towards the village. He met Devereux in the lane, and the captain of Netherby stopped him. Robinson showed the pass, and Devereux glanced at it and went on. The captain of the Fourth chuckled gleefully.

To be able to break bounds by means of a pass despoiled from the rival Form was very pleasant. Robinson treated himself to some ginger-pop in the village to drink his own health on the strength of it. But a change came o'er the spirit

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

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of his dream when he came back to Netherby. The gates, of course, were closed, as it was after dark, and he had to ring up Jobling the porter.

Jobling came, but he did not open the gates. He simply looked at Robinson through the upright iron bars. There was an expression upon his face that made Robinson vaguely uneasy.

"Hallo, Jobling!" he said affably. "Open the gate, old fellow!"

"The horders is," said Jobling, "to close the gates, and to keep 'em shut. You knows well enough that I ain't allowed to let in a boy after locking up, Master Robinson, without reporting the same to the 'Ead.'"

"But I've got a pass, Jobling."

"Oh, 'ave you?" The porter grinned. "Kindly 'and it to me."

Robinson took the pass out of his pocket, and passed it between the bars to the porter. Jobling examined it attentively in the light of his lamp. Robinson ground his teeth. He saw that the game was up. Knowles had evidently been talking to Jobling, and had put him on his guard.

"Which this ain't your name, Master Robinson," grinned Jobling, passing it back. "You've made a little mistake. This is for Master Knowles."

"I'll b-b-break his neck!" hissed Robinson. "He's given me away!"

Jobling chuckled. Knowles had not only given Robinson away, but he had tipped the porter a shilling to make things as warm as possible for the captain of the Fourth.

"I say, Jobling," said Robinson persuasively, "your sight isn't very good, you know. You haven't read the name properly."

"You can come in if you like," said Jobling; "but I'll have to take you straight to the 'Ead.'" He jingled his keys.

"Then I'll stay out," said Robinson. "You're a bib-bib-beast, Jobling. Look here, will a tanner make it square?"

"No, nor twice that!"

"I'll give you half-a-crown," said Robinson desperately.

"When?" asked Jobling, winking one eye solemnly.

"When—when my next allowance comes."

"You're joking, Master Robinson! Besides, do you think a honest servant is to be bribed? Not half! Are you coming in?"

"No, hang you, I'm not!"

And Robinson drew back from the gate. To be taken before the Head was serious, for it would not only mean a punishment for breaking bounds and staying out after locking-up, but it would be bound to come out that he had despoiled a Lower-Form boy of his permit. The porter grinned as he disappeared with his lamp. Robinson could stay out as long as he chose for aught Jobling cared.

But the captain of the Fourth had an idea in his head. He knew that some of the Netherby lads had sometimes broken bounds by climbing over the wall of the ruined chapel, which lay close by the inhabited portion of the college buildings. He had never done it himself, but if others could get out that way, there seemed no reason why he couldn't get in. At all events, it was worth trying.

The task was not very difficult when Robinson came to try it. The darkness was thick in the shade of the trees that grew on the inner side of the crumbling wall. Robinson found a spot where he could climb up, and reached the top of the wall. There he paused for a minute, with a thrill in his heart.

Before him lay the ruined chapel, and beyond that the school. He had only to pick his way through the ruins and cross the low wall into the quad. But as he sat astride of the wall he thought he heard a sound in the gloom. It was like someone moving about cautiously among the masses of masonry.

Whom on earth could it be in the ruins at that hour in the darkness? He strained his ears to listen, but the sound was not repeated. But he was only half satisfied. He dropped silently down inside the wall, and moved with great caution. As he passed a great mass of brickwork he caught a red gleam, and a scent of tobacco was wafted to his nostrils. He gave a jump at the discovery. A man was standing within six paces of him, smoking a cigar.

Robinson, with beating heart, crouched down in the gloomy shadow. The man's back was turned towards him; he was looking towards the school. He seemed to be waiting for someone. Whom could it be? In the dimness Robinson could only faintly make out the figure, but there was nothing in the least familiar about it. He did not believe that it was anybody belonging to Netherby.

While Robinson, half terrified and half amazed, crouched as silent as a mouse, there was a footstep in the ruins, and a second dim figure appeared and joined the first. Then the amazed Fourth-Former heard a well-known voice.

"Ah, you are here, Lundy!"

It was the voice of M. Lavalle, the French master at Netherby.

"I have been waiting for you five minutes," replied a cool, drawing voice. "However, that is of no consequence if you have brought the cash."

"Mon Dieu! Do you zink I am made of ze money?"

"Well, I think you have enough to spare a little for an old friend, Lavalls, who is hard up."

"Have I not said to you more zan vunce—"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted the other rudely. "I know all about the family and the old mother in France. You need not tell me all about that again."

M. Lavalle made a passionate gesture.

"Ah, scoundrel!" he hissed between his teeth. "You are ze blackguard! You have ze feelings of ze volf; but I have nozing to give you!"

"Don't be a fool, Lavalls! If you are reasonable this time you will never see me again. I must leave the country. The police are already on the track, and I believe they know I am hiding in the neighbourhood of Netherby."

"Zen you may be arrested?"

"Certainly, at any moment, if I do not clear out."

"Vy you not go, zen?"

"I can't go without money."

"You have had nearly ten sufrin from me, and I cannot give you more. Zat was more zan enoff if you really intended to go away. You vas gamble at ze Green Man, and lose ze money. Zat is ze truth."

"Well, I admit I have had some bad luck. Still, you can't desert an old friend in distress," said Lundy easily. "I am frightfully hard up, and you have money. Yes, yes, I know you send most of your screw to your relations in France, but that's not my business. You wouldn't if you had my sense."

"Mon Dieu! Scoundrel!"

"Oh, shut up that! You get a jolly good screw here for French master, and I don't see why you can't part a little to pal."

"You vas no friend of mine. And I have not draw ze salary yet. Vat I give you I saved. I am mock by ze boys because I wear such old clothes!" hissed M. Lavalle.

"Well, if you give so much away you can't expect to have left. Let the old folks shift for themselves," said Lundy coolly. "Anyway, I must have the tin. You say I'm not pal of yours. I shall tell a tale very different if I am arrested. You couldn't deny that you were in partnership with me—"

"You know zat I knew nozing of your character," wailed Mosscoo. "You deceive me, and ven I know you vas a big rogue I vash my hands of you."

"Oh, I don't mean to say I could get you lagged along with me!" said Lundy. "That isn't the point. But I could name your name up with mine and throw suspicion upon you. I'm master at a school like this has to be like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. Get your name talked over in a criminal court as the probable associate of a criminal, and you'd get the order of the push, jolly sharp. And you wouldn't get into another berth easily, either."

"Do you zink I know zat not? But for zat I would never have given you ze penny, but I would have chastise you!"

Lundy laughed.

"Come, don't lose your temper, Lavalle. No sense in the I give you my word that if you hand over the twenty quid I'm in want of I will clear out, and you'll never see me again."

M. Lavalle gave a scream.

"Twenty pound! Twenty pound!"

"That's the figure."

"I have ze money not."

"Borrow it, then, on the strength of your salary. You could do that easily enough. Or pitch the doctor a tale and get an advance."

"And rob my family? Nevaire!"

"Then you'll take the consequences!" said Lundy savagely. "Until I have the money, here I stick at the Green Man at Netherby, risk or no risk! You know, there's a couple of years for me, at least, if I'm arrested. Then I'll make things just as hot as I can for you. You know you'll be ruined."

"Hélas!"

"Find the money and get rid of me. Look here, I'll give you till Monday night. Meet me here, same time and place on Monday, and bring the money, and you shall never see me again."

"It is impossible!"

Lundy made a movement, as if to stride away.

"Very well, you know what to expect!"

"Stay!" cried Mosscoo. "I will try. Anyvay, I will meet you here at ze time you say, on Monday, and ve will see."

"That's better. I won't fail."

And Lundy, throwing away the stump of his cigar, strode away. M. Lavalle stood wringing his hands for a few moments, and muttering to himself, and then he moved off in the direction of the school buildings.

The hidden Fourth-Former had heard every word. He hadn't wanted to listen, but circumstances had compelled him to do so. Robinson waited, trembling a little. He heard the blackmailer drop from the outer wall. M. Lavalle disappeared. Five minutes elapsed before the Fourth-Former ventured to move.

"My hat!" muttered Robinson, as he rose. "Here's a gal"

Poor little Mossoo! I've noticed that he looks awfully worried sometimes. Fancy being in the clutches of that rotten rascal, and having to dub up money like that! Poor little chap!"

Robinson stumbled through the ruins and clambered over the low wall. He dropped into the quadrangle under the shadow of the elms, and started towards the schoolhouse. Then he recoiled with a cry as he ran into somebody in the dense gloom, and a hand clutched him.

"Lemme go, sir! I didn't mean to listen, Mossoo! I really did—did—did—"

"Hallo, Robinson! What are you jabbering about?"

It was Redfern's voice, and the Fourth-Former heaved a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER 7:

Redfern has a Good Idea—An Alliance.

REDFERN did not loose his grip on Robinson. He had heard the words the startled Fourth-Former had uttered, under the belief that he had run into M. Lavallo. And Redfern intended to know what they meant.

"That you, Redfern?" said Robinson. "You startled me out of my wits! What are you doing out here, Reddy?"

His tone was unusually friendly. His relief at finding that it was Redfern, and not Mossoo, who had seized him was great, and his hostility was forgotten for the moment.

"I'm taking a sprint round the quad," replied the cock of the Third. "I heard somebody drop from the wall, and came round to see what it was, and ran into you. But the question is, not what I'm doing, but what you've been doing? You've been spying on Mossoo."

"I haven't!"

Redfern's grip tightened.

"Look here, Robinson, it's no good beating about the bush! I passed Mossoo just now, and he was coming from the old chapel. Now you've just got over the wall. When I laid hold of you thought it was Mossoo, and you said something about not meaning to listen. I want to know what you've been up to."

"What's it got to do with you?"

"I stick up for Mossoo, that's all. Don't start any tricks. Hurree Singh and Lawrence are within call, and I've only to raise my voice. Have you been spying?"

"No, I haven't. I couldn't help hearing what they sis-sis-said. Look here, Reddy, I don't mind telling you about it; but it oughtn't to go any further. Poor old Mossoo's in trouble! It's up against him, and no mistake."

"I know there's something wrong somewhere, and I fancy he's in the power of some beastly rascal, somehow," said Redfern. "I don't believe he's done anything wrong."

"You've got it down fine, Reddy. That's just how the matter stands."

"How do you know?"

"Because I heard them talking. I couldn't help it, Reddy, honour bright. You know I wouldn't have listened only by accident. Mossoo was talking to a chap he called Lundy, and he's going to meet him there again on Monday night. The chap's hiding from the police, and he threatens to mix Mossoo's name up in the case if he's arrested, and get him the sack at Netherby. And Mossoo hasn't done anything."

"He's a timid little fellow," said Redfern. "He's got a heart of gold, but he hasn't the pluck of a sick chicken. He's just the sort of chap a man could frighten by threatening. My hat, I'd like anybody to try the game on me!"

Robinson chuckled.

"Nobody would try it on a man who was able to take care of himself, I fancy, Reddy. I don't believe for a moment that this man Lundy is really in danger of arrest, or he'd scoot fast enough without waiting for Mossoo's money. I think it's correct about the police being in search of him, as Mossoo appeared to know it. But they're not on his track, or he wouldn't be hanging about, smoking a cigar, as cool as you please. Poor old Mossoo is gulled as easily as a baby!"

"I'd like to get hold of the fellow," said Redfern, between his teeth. "He wants a Form licking. I wonder if it could be managed."

"Wh-what are you th-th-thinking about now, Reddy?"

"I'm thinking if something couldn't be done to get Mossoo out of that hound's clutches," said Redfern, with wrinkled brows.

"Well, we could get him arrested; but then he would disgrace Mossoo, as he threatened. That wouldn't do old Lavallo any good."

"No, I wasn't thinking of that. I've got the germ of an idea in my head, but it will want some thinking out. I say, Robby, will you go into this with me? Mossoo's a decent son, and any decent chap ought to be down on a blackmailer."

"Jolly willing to!" said Robinson quickly. "I'd like to get my hands on that beast, and no mistake. I'll help you in any way I can, if you are going for that brute Lundy."

"It's a go. I'll talk it over with Hurree Singh and Reggie,

and the four of us ought to be able to manage it. Then we'll talk it over in the common-room to-night."

"Right you are!"

They walked back to the house together. En route Robinson gave Redfern a full account of what he had discovered. Redfern questioned him on some points, and was soon in possession of the whole story. The cock of the Third was naturally glad to be confirmed in his loyal belief that Mossoo had been innocent in the matter, and was the victim of an unscrupulous rascal. And he was more than ever determined to find a way of helping the timid little man out of his scrape.

He parted with Robinson in a very friendly way, and lost no time in seeking his chums to consult them about the matter. Hurree Singh and Lawrence listened with the keenest interest as Redfern retailed what he had learned from Robinson.

"My hat!" exclaimed Reggie. "I'm sorry for Mossoo. I dare say, if he explained everything to the Head, it would be all right for him, if he only knew it."

"He's got too much at stake," said Redfern. "He dare not risk it. But we are going to get him out of this fix, my infants."

"How?"

"I've got an idea. This chap Lundy is in mortal fear of the police; but they're not on his track, or he'd have skeddaddled before this. We can't put them on to him without risking doing Mossoo more harm than good."

"I don't see how we're to get out of that difficulty, Reddy."

"This is the thussness of it, my child. We can't set the police on that blackguard, but we can make him believe they are on his track. He's coming to worry Mossoo again on Monday night. Now, when he starts to climb over the wall into the ruined chapel from the lane, my idea is that he should be pounced upon by a couple of policemen."

"But you said—"

"Patience, kid, patience! Not real policemen, you understand, but first-class imitations. You know old Shandy in Netherby town, who lets out fancy costumes on hire? You remember when the Sixth gave a dramatic performance last term they had the things from Shandy's, and there were two policemen's uniforms among them?"

Reggie and the nabob saw the drift of Redfern's idea, and they began to giggle.

"But we ain't big enough for policemen, Reddy."

"Old Robinson is in it. He's lanky enough for a Life Guard. I shall be the other bobby, as I'm a bit taller than you, Reggie. Inky's barred, because of his beautiful complexion. There wouldn't be any use in trying to palm off a brown policeman on that chap."

The Nabob of Bhanipur smiled.

"These words savour of the great wisdom," he remarked. "Truly an Oriental would be somewhat susceptible upon a police person."

"Truly it would," grinned Lawrence. "So it's settled, Reddy, you and Robinson are to be the stalwart constables. You can get down to Shandy's to-morrow afternoon, as it's a half-holiday, and get the costumes. You'll have to leave a deposit on them."

"Half-a-sovereign will do, and we can raise that between us. You think it's a good idea?"

"Ripping!"

"It ought to work. If we collar the cad before he gets into the chapel, he won't meet Mossoo at all. Then Lavallo will simply think he has failed to keep his appointment, and no harm will be done. Of course, Mossoo mustn't know anything about this. The whole thing will have to be kept awfully dark."

"What shall we do with the man when we've got hold of him?"

"Frighten him out of his wits with fear of prison, and give him a jolly good hiding," said Redfern promptly. "But he mustn't get on to the wheeze, so we shall have to give him a chance to escape. I fancy he'll be glad enough to cut and run."

"It ought to work," Reggie said thoughtfully. "We shall have to keep it dark. Don't let that inquisitive brute Knowles find out anything. Speaking of Knowles, you know how he has been cheeking Mossoo lately? Do you think he has been working on this?"

Redfern's brow darkened. He pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"It never occurred to me," he confessed. "But now you speak of it it's very likely. He wouldn't have dared to cheek Mossoo so if he hadn't had something up his sleeve. If it's so, he's as big a blackguard as that fellow Lundy."

"And he ought to receive the severity of the heavy punishment," said the nabob.

"Well, I don't know. It's no good trying to get the truth out of him. And, of course, we can't ask Mossoo anything; But if we give him rope enough he'll hang himself. When we've frightened Lundy away, he won't have any more hold over Mossoo. He won't know it, and he'll go on with his mean tricks. Then he'll get it in the neck, I should think."

Reggie Lawrence chuckled.

"Serve the boulder right! Hallo, here's old Robinson! Let's put our heads together now, and settle details."

A good many curious glances were cast towards the shams of the Third, when they were seen in amicable conversation with the captain of the Fourth.

The hatchet was buried deep for the time being. Robinson was delighted with Redfern's plan, especially as he was to play a leading role. It was agreed that Lawrence and Hurree Singh should be on hand, to appear on the scene if their presence should be required. It would be necessary to break bounds after calling-over to carry out the plot; but, as Redfern said, it was in a good cause.

"It's a jolly good idea!" said Robinson heartily. "If that chap doesn't jump when he sees a uniform and a helmet, and feels a grip on his shoulder, I'm a Dutchman. Don't forget the grease-paint to put on our faces, Reddy. You'd better lay in some whiskers, too. If he sees a couple of boys' chivvies under the helmets it will give the game away. Of course, in the dark it will be impossible for him to see us clearly. But some whiskers will make it safer, don't you think?"

"Rightho!" said Redfern. "We won't spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar. Whiskers it shall be, and you shall have a giddy beard into the bargain. And a nice red face—say, the colour of a brick—suitable for a policeman. But, look here, Robinson, old chap, you mustn't do any of the talking. You might get tangled up, and give the whole show away."

"Look here——" began Robinson wrathfully. "Don't get ratty," said Redfern pacifically. "You can see for yourself that it wouldn't do for you to take a speaking part in this act. But I'll tell you what you can do. You can give him a clump over the napper with your truncheon if you like."

With this concession Robinson was content. Having discussed the details of the scheme thoroughly, the juniors parted, well pleased with themselves.

The following day—Saturday—Redfern made the necessary expedition to the village, and easily obtained the uniforms, together with grease-paint and some hirsute adornments for the face. Mr. Shandy imagined that the things were required for some amateur theatricals; but he asked no questions, and Redfern volunteered no information. Hake was taken into the secret, promising secrecy on being admitted to the plot and a rehearsal was carried out in the study shared by the two Fourth-Formers.

With considerable padding Robinson, who was tall and lanky, filled out the uniform and made a very respectable policeman, especially when his face was reddened and the false board and whiskers were affixed. Redfern was certainly a small size for a constable; but the helmet helped him to look bigger, and the whiskers and paint made him look old enough for the part. There was not doubt that they would pass very well in the dark. Redfern began to practise speaking in deep-gruff tones.

"You'll do," said Hake. "It's the best wheeze I've seen for a long time. But you couldn't get out of the school in that rig, you know. You'd better dress up on Monday-night in the woodshed, while we keep watch."

"That's a good idea," agreed Redfern.

And now the conspirators anxiously waited for the hour of the appointment.

CHAPTER 8.

In the Grip of the Law.

A DARK night! Eight strokes boomed from the clock-tower of Netherby, and echoed away into silence over the ruined chapel.

Five minutes later a man came sauntering up the lane from the village, the red glimmer of his lighted cigar visible at a distance in the gloom. He stopped at the wall of the chapel enclosure. It was not a high wall, and there were hollows in the ancient bricks in one place that made it easy to climb. In this place the shadow of a big, overhanging tree within the wall made the darkness intense.

Without removing the cigar from his mouth, the man stepped close to the wall, and put up his hands to pull himself up. As he did so there was a sudden gleam of light. A dark lantern had been turned on.

"Hallo! What's this?" said a preternaturally gruff voice. The stranger dropped from the wall in a twinkling. But as he did so two pairs of hands were laid upon him, he was tripped up, and he went to the earth in a flash, with a thump that shook all the breath out of his body.

"Old 'im, Bill!" said the gruff voice.

Lundy—for, of course, it was he—made a desperate effort to escape. He caught an indistinct glimpse of bearded faces and policemen's helmets in the glimmer of the lantern, and he was palpitating with terror.

"Now, then, are you coming quietly?" demanded the gruff-voiced constable.

"Yes, yes!" gasped Lundy. "Don't—don't hit me again. I

was doing no harm; I—I was only going to the school to see a friend, I assure you!"

The constable laughed derisively.

"A likely story. Then why did you struggle when we got 'old of yer?"

"I—I was startled."

"Yes, I'll bet you was—caught in the very act of committing a burglary."

"I—I wasn't. I will prove it!"

"I'd like to 'ear you prove it."

"I—I will prove it. The gentleman is M. Lavallo, the French master at this school, and he will prove what I say to be true."

"Hem! What do you think of that yarn, Bill?"

"It's a r-r-rotten lie!" said the taller constable. "I do—do—don't be—be——"

"Of course not," interrupted the other hastily. "It's all moonshine. As for Mounseer Lavallo, I don't believe there ain't no such person at the school at all."

"There is!" gasped Lundy. "He's a friend of mine. He will tell you so if you ask him. You have only to ring the school bell."

"Nice silly idiot I should look doing it!" growled the constable. "You can't get off on any yarn like that. I hain't properly seen your face yet, my bird. Show a glim on his dial, Bill, and let's see what he's like."

Lundy shivered. This was what he had feared. He twisted his features as the glare of the lantern shone full in his face, hoping thereby to escape recognition, in case his face should be known. But the device was quite useless.

"Thunder!" exclaimed the gruff-voiced constable. "I know that phiz! It's Lundy, who we've been told to look out for. You remember the superintendent said he was supposed to be a-hiding hisself in this neighbourhood."

"That's 'im!" said the other policeman. "That's the bib-bib-bound——"

"Right enough, Bill. We've got him. I shouldn't wonder if this means a reward. Fancy his trying to take us in with such a yarn!"

"He cue-cue——"

"Course he can't. We're up to blessed snuff, we are. He's Lundy right enough, and he's badly wanted. Stick them handcuffs on!"

"Don't!" gurgled Lundy, in abject fear. "I—I will come quietly. Don't handcuff me! I assure you it is all a mistake. I have two sovereigns on me. I will give you one each if you will take me to the station without handcuffing me!"

"What do you say, Bill?"

"We'll d-d-do it, Reddy, and——"

"We'll do it, Mr. Lundy. Mind, if you get up to any tricks you'll get it where the chicken got the axe—I mean we shall hurt you if you try to get away."

"I shall not try to escape," panted the miserable wretch.

"Mind you don't. Where are those two quid?"

"In my vest pocket, on the left side."

The policeman felt in the pocket, and found the two coins named. He promptly transferred them to his own pocket.

The taller constable viewed this proceeding with amazement.

"I say, Reddy, you're not go-go-going really to——"

"Oh, dry up!" said the other. "Don't talk so much, Bill!"

"I'll talk as much as I like, you young——"

"Shut up! Bring the prisoner along!"

They dragged Lundy to his feet. The rascal made a great pretence of submission, but in reality he was watching like a cat for a chance to escape. He knew that if he were taken to the station, and detained until he could be positively identified, it would be all up with him for some years to come. He could, it is true, do M. Lavallo considerable injury, but that would be a small consolation for the loss of his liberty.

The policemen took him each by an arm and marched him of down the lane. The smaller of the two now carried the lantern, while the other held his truncheon in readiness for use if the prisoner should make an attempt to bolt.

With his heart thumping against his ribs, and every sense on the alert, Lundy marched along between the two constables. He did not guess that behind him three juniors of Netherby were rolling on the grass in convulsions of mirth. Lawrence, Hako, and Hurree Singh had heard all that had passed, in the deep shadow of the wall, without the captured rascal suspecting that they were there. They had been ready and eager to lend a hand if required; but, as we have seen, their aid was not needed.

"Ere, my blessed bootlace 'as come undone!" growled the gruff constable suddenly, when the three were a hundred yards from Netherby School. "Old 'im, Bill, while I tie it up, Clump 'im over the 'ead if 'e tries to bolt!"

"Tr-tr-trust me, Reddy," said Bill. And he tightened his grip on Lundy's arm.

The latter drew a deep, quivering breath. Now was his chance!

Police-constable Reddy knelt down, placing the lantern on the road, and pretended to tie up his shoelace. Lundy set his

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teeth. With a sudden terrific wrench he tore himself away from the one that was holding him and bolted up the lane.

"Hallo, he's gone!"

Reddy jumped up.

"After him!" he roared.

The rapid tramp of footsteps behind warned Lundy that the policemen were in close pursuit. Fear lent him wings, and he tore on like a madman, and bolted through a gap in the hedge. He heard a police whistle shrilling out behind him, and ran his hardest.

Stumbling and falling, and picking himself up again, muddy and bruised, breathless with exertion and terror, the rascal fled through the dark fields. The two constables did not pursue him far. They stopped, and fell into each other's arms, shaking with mirth.

"Oh, gorgeous!" exclaimed Redfern. "Gone from our gaze like a beautiful dream; and if he's seen in these parts again, I'll eat my helmet!"

"He, ha, ha!"

"But what about that two quid," said Robinson. "What are you g-g-going to d-d-do with that, Reddy?"

"Send it back to the proper owner," said Redfern. "It belongs to Mossoo, and the poor little chap can't spare it. I'll get a couple of postal-orders, and send them to him, and he won't guess where they come from. What do you think of the idea?"

"Jolly good! The money belongs to him, and he ought to have it. I'm sorry we can't punish that scoundrel any more. Still, I gave him a jolly good clump with this truncheon, and he'll have a lump like a cricket-ball on his cocoanut, that's one comfort."

The juniors re-entered the precincts of Netherby, and the disguises were removed in the wood-shed without discovery. The next day they were returned to Mr. Shandy in Netherby town, and neither he nor anybody else but the five juniors concerned knew for what purpose they had been used that night.

CHAPTER 9.

Hard Luck for Knowles.

MONSIEUR LAVALLE was puzzled, and he was also considerably relieved in his mind. In the first place, Lundy had not kept the appointment in the old chapel, nor had he heard from the rascal during the three days that had elapsed since Monday.

In the second place, he had received two postal-orders for a sovereign each, by post, with a half-sheet of paper upon which was scrawled "An old debt."

The good-natured little Frenchman had lent various sums in the course of his career to various persons, and had not always seen them again; but which of his debtors had chosen this peculiar method of payment he could not guess.

However, the money was useful, as it enabled him to send a larger remittance than would otherwise have been possible to his old "mozzar" in France. The silence of Lundy was what astonished him most.

It was possible that, fearing for his safety, the rascal had left the neighbourhood, but that seemed too good to be true.

M. Lavallo finally paid a visit to the Green Man in Netherby to ascertain whether "Mr. William Smith" was still there, and he learned that the man had left the inn on Monday, and had not returned, and had left his personal belongings there unclaimed.

Mossoo was puzzled but comforted. It was clear now that the rascal was gone, and the incubus which had weighed him down so heavily was removed.

M. Lavallo returned to Netherby School in higher spirits than he had enjoyed for some time past. He found Knowles waiting for him at the door of his study. The little man looked at him sharply.

"You vant to speak viz me, Knowles?"

"Yes, sir," said Knowles, with a grin, "with your permission."

Knowles's insolence had been growing of late. He felt that he had the French master under his thumb, and he liked to give the screw a turn. His impertinence to M. Lavallo in class amazed the other boys, and they were still more amazed by Mossoo's studied disregard of it. That the Frenchman noticed it was certain; and why he did not punish it was a mystery.

"Come into my study," said the French master shortly.

Knowles followed M. Lavallo into the room, and monsieur shut the door.

"Now, Knowles, I am villing to listen to you."

"If you please, sir, I should like you to write me a pass for this evening."

"For vat?"

"I want to go down to Netherby."

"If you ask your Form-master he may give you ze pass. I cannot give you vun. Is zere anything else you vant to say viz me?"

Knowles's eyes glittered.

"It's no good my asking Mr. Lumsden, sir. He wouldn't give me one."

"Zen how dare you ask me for a pass ven your own Form-master would not vish you to have vun?" said M. Lavallo.

"Leave ze room."

"Won't you give me the pass, sir?"

"Non! Go!"

Knowles did not stir. "I said to you before, sir, that one good turn deserved another. If you don't want me to tell about your meeting that chap in the—"

Knowles broke off. M. Lavallo's proceeding as he was speaking rather alarmed him. The Frenchman had taken down a cane, and was testing it in his hand. Knowles watched him nervously.

"Vat do you say, Knowles?" asked Mossoo blandly.

"I—I say—that—"

"You say zat, as you have spy on me, you vill tell tales if I not yield to your demands," said the French master sternly. "I have been veak, ver' veak. It was wrong of me to give in ze least bit. It was zinking of my old mozzar zat made me veak. All zat is past. I do not believe you know so much as you pretend. In any case, it is all ovaire now. Zat man is gong and vill never return. You have gone a step too far, mon garcon."

Knowles bit his lip. There was a desperate light in his eyes. It was clear that the Frenchman's position had changed, and that he was no longer under the necessity of surrender. Knowles kept a wary eye on the cane.

"I don't care," he muttered. "You wouldn't like the Head to know all about it, anyway, and if I tell him—"

"You sall have ze chance. You vas vun evil boy, or you not believe so easy zat I vas a bad man. Now all ze danger is over, I not care if I tell ze doctair I have been ze most unfortunate man. You vill come viz me."

M. Lavallo gripped Knowles by the shoulder.

"I—I—where are you going?"

"I am going to ze Head," said the French master grimly, "and you are coming viz me, Knowles. Vatever he zink of me, zere is only vun punishment for a boy who threatens his master—zat he be expelled from ze school. You deserve it, and ze school vill be all ze better vizout such a big rascal. Come along."

Knowles was by this time wriggling with fear. He might or might not be able to injure the French master now with the Head, but there was no doubt that he would himself be expelled if his precious conduct became known to Dr. Lisle. Quite unexpectedly the Frenchman seemed to hold the whip hand.

"Oh, sir, don't take me to the Head," whimpered Knowles.

"I—I didn't mean—"

"Come viz me."

"Think of my people," gasped Knowles. "My mother, sir—"

The little Frenchman softened.

"Ah, if you zink of your mozzar, you may not be all bad," he said. "Very well, Knowles. I vill give you ze severe caning, and ze long inposition, if you prefer, and you shall have another chance."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" whined Knowles. "Thank you!"

"Hold out ze hand."

Knowles obeyed. The little Frenchman, gentle as he was by nature, laid it well on that time. Knowles had six on each hand, regular stingers. Then, with the parting injunction to write out a whole book of the Henriade on the next half-holiday, he was dismissed. He went down the corridor with his hands folded under his arms, twisting himself into remarkable attitudes. He met the chums of the Third a dozen paces from M. Lavallo's door, and they stopped to look at him.

"Hallo," said Redfern cheerfully. "Is that a new system of gymnastics, Knowles, old man, or have you got what you've been asking for a long time?"

Knowles scowled and passed on.

"He's got it at last," grinned Redfern. "Didn't I tell you that he'd hang himself if he was only given rope enough. He's been cheeking Mossoo again and caught it hot. Which proves, my infants, that our little game was a howling success, and that rascal isn't bothering Mossoo now. It's all right, and everything in the garden is ripping."

And Redfern was right; for after that time there was no more cheerful a person in all Netherby than the once-mysterious Mossoo!

THE END.

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