

42 Queen's

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 of
FIGHTING PLANES
 of the **WORLD**

"CANOPUS"—THE "QUEEN MARY" OF THE SKIES!

The SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE

Three masters of Oakshott School are under suspicion of being the wanted "Sussex Man." On whose shoulder is the hand of Detective-Inspector Nixon to drop? It is Len Lex's job to find out—to unravel the twisted skein of conflicting clues!

By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON**

Pie's Latest!

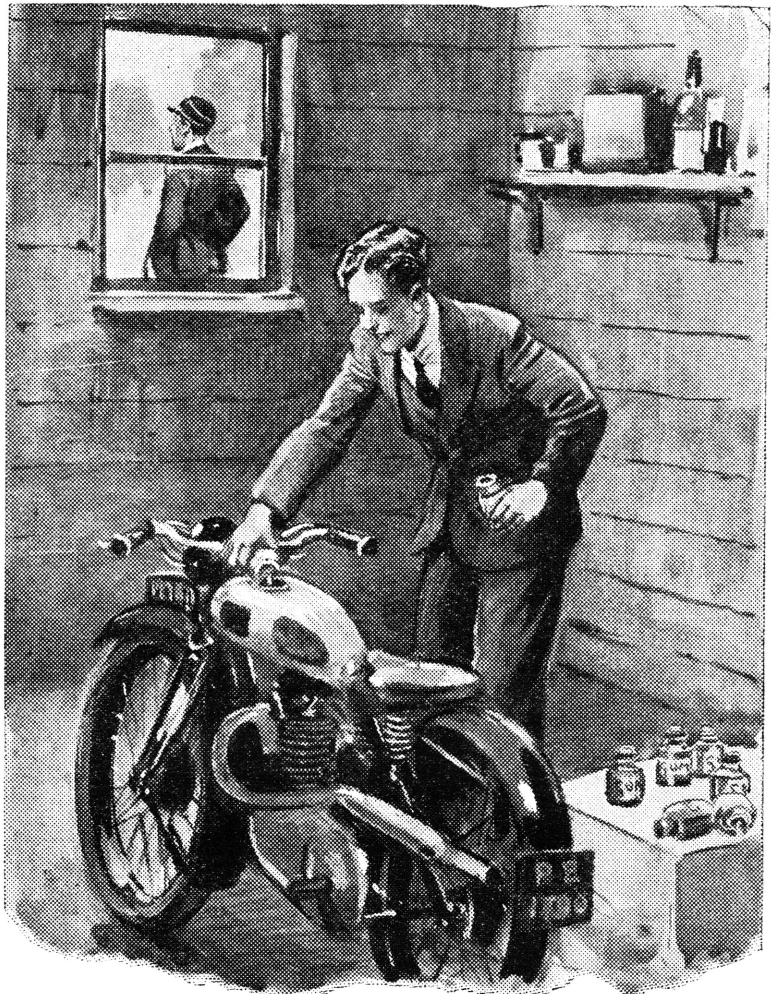
LEN LEX was talking Soccer with Harvey and Banks of the Fifth, when Poringe came out of the House. There was to be a pick-up game that afternoon on Big Side, and Len was keen on it. Oliphant, the captain of Oakshott, had told him that he would be wanted, which was Oliphant's polite way of intimating that he would give the new man in the Fifth a chance of showing what he could do.

Len—who had been sent there by his uncle, Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon, of Scotland Yard, to try to catch the elusive burglar known as the "Sussex Man," who was thought to operate from the school—was keen enough on the game; and he had, for the time, dismissed to the back of his mind the fact that he was at Oakshott more as a detective than as a schoolboy, and he was talking and thinking Soccer when Pie Poringe barged in.

Pie, after a glance round, came directly towards the group by the old oaks. He carefully ignored Len. Harvey and Banks were his chums. But Len, though in the same study, was the object of Pie's concentrated hostility. At the moment, however, Pie was not on the warpath. He still had a "game" fist, due to his little error a few days ago, when a tremendous punch, intended for the new fellow's head, had landed on the door of Study No. 8.

"I want one of you chaps to keep cave!" said Pie, addressing his pals.

As loyal chums, eager to back up a comrade, no doubt Harvey and Banks ought both to have spoken at



Len kept watch outside the shed while Pie emptied bottle after bottle of gum into the motor-bike's tank!

once, offering eager services. But they didn't! They did not speak at all. They exchanged a look expressive of a sort of comic dismay; then both looked at Len, who grinned.

Then all three looked at Poringe. They could not help noticing that Pie did not present quite his normal aspect. He looked bulgy and bumpy. All his pockets were full of something or other. His jacket sagged with hidden burdens. His trouser pockets bulged out from his rather lean, long legs. The goat of the Fifth was loaded with unseen cargoes.

As they looked at him, something slipped from an over-stocked pocket, and dropped to the ground with a light thud. It was a bottle of gum. Poringe hastily stooped to retrieve it. In doing so, he exuded two more similar bottles, which thudded down to the quadrangle, but did not break.

"Blow!" said Pie.

Hurriedly he gathered up the fallen articles, and crammed them

back into his pockets. Three pairs of eyes gazed at him in wonder. The nature of Pie's mysterious cargo was revealed. It looked as if Pie had been raiding all the studies at Oakshott, snaffling all the gum he could lay hands on. Why, was a very deep mystery. Nobody at Oakshott expected Pie to have any sense; they knew him too well. But this seemed rather the limit, even for the goat of the Fifth. Even Pie was not expected to be suddenly afflicted by an insatiable desire for gum!

Having crammed the bottles out of sight hurriedly, Pie looked round with a watchful and stealthy eye, uneasy that other eyes might have seen the incident. Mr. Silverson, his Form-master, was walking at a little distance in conversation with Mr. Surtees, the master of the Fourth. In another direction, Bullivant, the games master, stood talking to Oliphant. Dr. Osborne, the majestic Head himself, was crossing with stately pace towards his house.

The Schoolboy Detective

"Oh crumbs!" said Pie breathlessly. "Think they noticed?"

"Nobody was looking this way!" said Len comfortingly, while Harvey and Banks simply stared.

Clearly Pie did not want to be spotted in possession of all that gum. It was like him, of course, to display it under the eyes he least desired to see it. That was Pie all over!

"It would be a bit of a swizz if they did!" breathed Pie. "Silverson would guess at once. He's as sharp as a razor."

"What the dickens are you up to, you ass?" asked Harvey. "Have you been round all the studios burgling the gum bottles?"

"All I could find," assented Pie. "That's why I want one of you men to keep cave. If they spotted me shoving it into Silverson's stink-bike, I should be up before the Head! I don't want that."

"Fan me!" murmured Banks.

They began to understand. Two members of the Oakshott staff possessed motor-bikes—Silverson and Bullivant. These were garaged in the bicycle-house in a separate apartment from that which housed the bikes, but accessible from it. A fellow going into the bike-shed for his jigger could, if he liked, pass into the adjoining apartment where the motor-bikes were garaged. Such a fellow would not, of course, desire anyone to enter by the outer door of the motor-bike shed at the same moment! It was necessary for a pal to keep "cave" on that outer door.

This clearly was a new move in Pie's feud with his Form-master. That feud had raged all the term. It had led Pie to play the goat in all sorts of ways. The more the Fifth Form beak whopped Pie for his goat-like proceedings, the more resolutely Pie played the goat—that being the sort of goat Pie was. Now he was at it again.

"Catch on?" smiled Pie. "Silverson's going out on his stink-bike this afternoon—he often does on half-holidays. At least, he thinks he is! I think he isn't! If he can get that jigger to go with about a gallon of gum in the tank, he's welcome. My idea is that he will be flummoxed."

"Phew!" murmured Harvey.

"You goat!" hissed Banks. "You priceless goat! Silverson will raise war all over Oakshott—"

"I want him to!" chuckled Pie. "Jolly amusin' to see him goin' off at the deep end, what?"

"Frightfully amusing, when he marches you off to the Big Beak for a flogging in Hall!"

"How's he going to spot me?" grinned Pie. "I've thought this all out! I go into the bike-shed for my jigger. I step through into the next room. Who's going to know? Only if Silverson happened to come in for his jigger at that very time! Well, one of you men will keep cave outside and whistle if he blows along. I cut back into the bike-shed. Safe as houses. If either Silverson or Bullivant comes along—and nobody else

ever goes to that shed—I bunk! If not, I get on with the good work! And when Silverson goes to start up his stink-bike for his trip—ha, ha, ha!" Pie roared.

Harvey and Banks did not roar. They felt more disposed to groan. Pie had it all cut and dried—his schemes were always cut and dried, polished to the last button. Nevertheless, something always went wrong with them. Many and various were the schemes of the goat of the Fifth, but not one of them had ever been known to come off successfully. And Harvey and Banks had not the slightest doubt that his present masterly scheme would end, as usual, in disaster. It made them quite faint to think of what Vernon Silverson would say and do when he found his motor-bike filled up with gum.

"How's that, what?" asked the cheery Pie.

"You mad ass!" said Harvey, in measured tones. "Take all that gum back to the House, and get shut of it. Forget all about it."

"Are you going to keep cave for me, Harvey?"

"As soon as I feel frightfully keen on a Head's flogging, old chap, I'll go to Osborne and ask for one. Until then, leave me out."

"Are you going to keep cave for me, Banker?"

"I'll watch it!" said Banks.

"Don't be cads!" urged Pie. "I can't carry on without a man to keep cave, you know that!"

"Quite!" agreed Harvey and Banks. "We know that!" And happy in that knowledge, Harvey and Banks turned and walked away and joined Cayley and Hobbs and other Fifth Form men, who were punting a footer.

Pie gazed after them rather blankly. This lack of enthusiasm on the part of his pals rather let the stuffing out of his scheme. Len, about to walk after Pie's departed chums, paused, and turned back to Pie. There was a curious glimmer in the eyes of the new fellow in the Fifth. A few minutes ago he had almost forgotten that he was a detective. Now he forgot that he was a schoolboy and a footballer, and remembered that he was a detective.

"Will I do, Porrhinge?" he asked politely.

"Eh!" Pie stared at him. "You! You're no friend of mine." He frowned darkly.

"Letting a man down," he said. "Well, let 'em! I'll jolly well carry on, all the same, and chance it! They'll be sorry then, if I'm copped!"

"I wouldn't do that," said Len.

"You," said Porrhinge, "can shut up! Who cares what you would or wouldn't do? When a man that's been at Oakshott three years wants advice, he isn't likely to ask a new tick who's not been here two or three weeks."

"My dear chap," said Len, "I wouldn't presume to offer advice to a three-yearer. But why not let me keep cave for you?"

"Oh, rot! You don't mean it?"

"Honest Injun!" said Len.

PIE looked at him. This new fellow was altogether too cool for a man who hardly knew his way about the school, and he needed whopping for his cheek—and Pie was going to give him the whopping when his game fist was quite mended. Still, it was jolly useful to have a man keeping cave while he doctored Silverson's motor-bike. Pie was reckless, but he felt uneasy at the idea of being suddenly caught while he was doctoring that jigger. He decided to make use of the offer.

"Come on!" he said.

They walked away together. Mr. Silverson, still walking and talking in the quad, did not even glance at them. There was nothing whatever suspicious in two fellows going round to the bike shed. They reached the building, and Len took up his stand near the door of the motor-bike shed, while Pie went in at the other door.

In a few minutes he heard a sound from within. Pie had passed from the region of bikes to the region of motor-bikes by the communicating doorway. Already, he was busy with gum. Bottle after bottle was being emptied into a tank intended for a much less viscous fluid. Len smiled faintly as he kept watch and ward, prepared to whistle instantly if a beak appeared in the offing.

Pie might have wondered why the new fellow was so obliging. Len Lex certainly did not intend to tell him.

There were three names on the schoolboy detective's list of suspects—Silverson, Surtees, Bullivant. One of them, according to what he had been able to learn so far, was the Sussex Man—the mysterious burglar whose name, appearance, and hiding-place were unknown to the police.

Inside Oakshott the schoolboy detective was able to give those members of a numerous staff his very special attention. Outside Oakshott it was not so easy. Several times when Len had seen Vernon Silverson clear off on his motor-bike, he had wondered what his destination might be, and wished that he could shadow him there. A man on a motor-bike could not be shadowed by a schoolboy with only a push-bike available.

But if Silverson found his motor-bike in the state to which Pie plotted to reduce it, he would have to go by some less rapid means of transport, if he went at all. In which case the schoolboy detective was not likely to figure in the pick-up game on Big Side, reluctant as he would be to cut footer.

Len was as keen as Pie that the reckless japer should not be interrupted. And it really seemed that, for once, Pies luck was in. Two or three fellows came along to the bike shed and wheeled out their jiggers. But neither Silverson nor Bullivant showed up. It looked as if Pie was, for once, backing a winner.

He was twenty minutes in the shed. Then he emerged, grinning and sticky.

"All serene?" he said, as he joined Len.

"Quite!" said Len. "You've done it?"

"Jolly near a gallon of gum," chuckled Pie. "If Silverson gets that

bike going this afternoon, he's a miracle-worker! I don't know where he goes on these trips of his, but wherever it is he won't get there in a hurry this afternoon. I think I'll go and get a wash—I'm a bit sticky!"

"More than a bit," said Len, surveying him. "If Silverson saw you now he wouldn't need telling much."

Pie, chuckling explosively, cut off. Len sauntered away, his hands in his pockets. Cayley and the rest were still punting the ball, and Len joined in. He missed a kick, stumbled, and came down with a crash. He rose from that crash limping, and pressed a hand to his knee.

"Hurt?" asked Harvey.

"Ow!" was Len's reply. "Wow!"

"Well, dash it all, you're an ass, Lex!" said Banks. "If you've crooked your knee you'll have to stand out of the pick-up! Oliphant won't let you play dot-and-carry-one!"

"Rotten!" said Len. "Can't be helped, though. I hope Oliphant will give me another chance."

He limped away. He did hope, fervently, that Oliphant would give him another chance another time. But he was not thinking of that. He was thinking that a man deprived of his motor-bike could be shadowed that afternoon, and that there was work other than Soccer for the nephew of Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon of Scotland Yard!

Porrige All Over :

BULLIVANT, the Oakshott games master, had a deep, powerful, rolling voice. Even in ordinary conversation it had great carrying powers. Now Bullivant was not talking, he was roaring—and the roar was terrific.

He stood in the doorway of the motor-shed, his face, always red, absolutely scarlet with rage as he inquired of the heavens and the earth who had done this?

Oakshott men came from far and wide, gathering round. Oliphant and his merry men, going down to footer, were deflected from their course, and came crowding to see what the rumpus was about. Fags of the Shell, the Fourth, the Third came in their myriads. Beaks came—Silverson, Surtees, Chowne, Rodd—even

A slight rustle was enough to alarm the man whom Bullivant had called a bundle of nerves. Turning his back on the games master he made a sudden dive into the trees—and Len hastily dodged to cover.

Wegg, the porter, came over from his lodge.

Harvey and Banks, among the footballers, fancied they knew what the row was, when they found it came from the motor-shed. Pie Porringe fancied he knew, and chuckled as he went to see. But all three had a surprise when they found that it was not Silverson, but Bullivant, who was waking the echoes.

Len Lex, probably, was the only Oakshott man out of the range of Bullivant's roar. Len had wheeled out his bike some little time ago—his damaged knee, which kept him out of the pick-up, not apparently debarring him from going for a spin. That spin, however, did not take the school-boy detective out of sight of masters' gate.

"Who has done this?" roared Bullivant. "It is scandalous—outrageous! I will take the matter before the Head! I will not tolerate this! What rascal, what—what ruffian—"

"What has happened, sir?" asked Oliphant.

Everybody wanted to know what had happened. Some of the fags were grinning; Bullivant, in one of his tantrums, amused those thoughtless young sweeps. And they were happily conscious of not having done it, whatever "it" was.

"Senseless, unscrupulous, rascally, outrageous!" roared Bullivant. "My motor-cycle! I was about to go out with it! I cannot use it! Some rascal, scoundrel, has filled the tank with gum!"

Porrige almost fell down.

"Gum!" said Mr. Silverson. "Did you say gum?"

"Gum!" roared Bullivant. "I said gum, and I mean gum! I have an appointment this afternoon, and this trick has been played—this outrage has been perpetrated! I will not tolerate it! I will place the matter before Dr. Osborne! I will demand—"

Harvey and Banks looked at Porringe. The goat of the Fifth looked quite sick. They knew what had happened. Motor-bikes, no doubt, are much alike. But nobody but Pie would have mistaken one for another, of course. If there was room for a mistake, the remotest chance to blunder, Pie was not the fellow to miss it.

"Oh scissors!" muttered the unhappy Pie.

He had a fierce feud on with Silverson. But he had no grouch against Bullivant. Bully, with all his tantrums, was not a bad old bean. He had helped Pie a good deal with his Soccer—and Pie needed help in that line. And Pie, planning to jape Silverson, for whom he had a loathing, had japed old Bully, whom he liked and admired!

Porrige would have given a term's pocket money for the earth to open and swallow him up just then. He dared not meet the eyes of Harvey and Banks, gazing at him in eloquent silence.

There was a buzz all round him—a buzz of surprise, wrath, disgust. On all sides the jape was condemned. Such a jape on some of the masters would have been laughed at. But old Bully! What unspeakable tick had dished old Bully? From Sixth Form prefects down to small fags, that outrage on Bullivant's stink-bike was condemned.

Others of the Fifth, as well as Harvey and Banks, looked at Pie. Half the Form knew that Porringe had been gathering bottles of gum that day after dinner. It was gum that had been used. Nobody, of course, was going to mention it in the hearing of beaks. Later, they were going to mention it. Cayley, who was nearest Pie, kicked him to go on with. Pie hardly noticed it. He was too overwhelmed with dismay and remorse.

How long Bullivant would have roared on remained unknown. His



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lung power was practically inexhaustible. But three o'clock chimed out from the clock tower. Thus reminded that time was passing, Bullivant checked his explosive wrath. He had said that he had an appointment that afternoon. As he had relied on his motor-bike to take him there, he was likely to be late anyhow.

"Silverson! If you are not using your machine this afternoon—"

"Unfortunately," said the Fifth Form master, "I am using it, Bullivant, and have, in fact, come to take it out now."

Mr. Silverson passed Bullivant, going into the motor-shed. A smile came over his dark, handsome face as he glanced at Bullivant's machine—not only filled up with gum, but overflowing with the same. He was glad that his own jigger had not been selected by the unknown japer. His face was quite grave again when he reappeared in the public eye with his jigger.

Sympathy, indignation, general condemnation of the outrage, perhaps, afforded Mr. Bullivant some consolation. More, no doubt, would have been afforded him by the loan of the Fifth Form master's motor-bike. A good many fellows thought that Silverson might have let old Bully have that jigger. He had said nothing about any appointment—and if he was only going for a spin, really he might have stood down. Evidently, that did not occur to Silverson himself. He gave Bullivant a sympathetic murmur as he passed him again, then his machine was heard chug-chugging on the road. Silverson was gone. Bullivant remained.

Olipphant came to the rescue.

"If my push-bike would be any use, sir," said the Oakshott captain.

He hoped that it would; like everybody else, he liked old Bully.

"Your push-bike, Olipphant!" said the games master. "My dear fellow, that's very good of you. Yes, certainly, I shall be very late if I walk—I am much obliged to you, Olipphant."

"Not at all, sir! I'll get it out."

Olipphant got it out. Bullivant thanked the captain of Oakshott again, took the jigger, and wheeled it down to the gate. The crowd broke up—excitedly discussing the amazing, unprecedented happening.

"If I knew who'd japed old Bully," said Olipphant, "I'd scrag him! I'd strew him all over Oakshott. But we're going to play footer, you men—come on."

Sixth Form men who were named for the pick-up followed Olipphant at once. Fifth Form men who were in the game, did not follow immediately. They gathered round Porrhinge with grim and significant looks.

"You unspeakable scug!" said Cayley. "What did you do with all that gum you were grabbing after dinner?"

Pie groaned. Remorse was heavy on his heart.

"I never meant—"

"We've got to play footer now," said Hobbs. "We'll see you afterwards, Porrhinge. Take that to go on with."

"And that!" said Worrall.

"And that," said Cayley. "And that."

Pie might have fancied for the moment that he was the football. Harvey and Banks did not kick him. They were his chums, accustomed to bear with him. Every other boot lunged at Pie, some of the fellows hacking one another in their eagerness to land one on Porrhinge. But for the fact that Soccer called, there really might not have been much left of Pie. In the few minutes they gave him his indignant Form fellows made Porrhinge realise to the full what the life of a Soccer ball was like! They left him sitting in the quad, gasping for breath, wondering dizzily whether he was still in one piece.

The Man in Trant Wood!

ANYONE coming out of Oakshott by masters' gate or the great gates would not have seen Len. Anyone who had seen him would not have known, without a second glance, that he was an Oakshott man. Len's bicycle was parked out of sight behind a hedge. Len himself was ensconced in the branches of a tall elm, fifty yards from masters' gate. Foliage was thinning in autumn winds, but the thick branches gave good cover, and no passer-by would have been likely to spot him.

His Oakshott cap was in his pocket, and a cheap dark blue cloth cap was pulled down over his forehead. On one of his cheeks was a criss-cross of sticking-plaster, as if to cover cuts. It was sufficient disguise to delude a casual eye, especially from a distance.

Lying along a stout branch, Len watched the road where it ran past masters' gate. The distance was considerable, but his eyesight was good. If Vernon Silverson came out on foot, or if he came out on a borrowed push-bike, Len was going to spot him with ease. And Pie's jape, seemingly successful, left him in no doubt that Mr. Silverson would do one or the other. And he was keen—very keen—to shadow Silverson.

Vernon Silverson had the distinction of being first and foremost on the schoolboy detective's suspected list of three. Surtees, he knew, prowled at night. Bullivant, he knew, had secrets to keep. But Silverson, to his certain knowledge, had recently lost a large sum in backing a horse for a certain race—and Len had seen him white, and almost stunned, by his disaster. Had Len Lex felt disposed to lay a bet with himself on the subject he would have laid two to one that Vernon Silverson, of the suspected three, was the Sussex Man.

And if the man, who was a secret and most unlucky gambler, met his losses by helping himself at night, it was time for the Sussex Man to be heard of again. Every time the Sussex Man struck it was in secret, unseen; he knew his ground like a book, which implied careful scouting, patient watching, before the time came to crack the crib. Was that the reason of Silverson's trips on his motor-bike on half-holidays? Len was inclined to think that it was—and

if, on this occasion, Silverson went less rapidly, the schoolboy detective was going to know where he went, and what he did when he got there. He could have blessed Pie for that remarkable jape.

But as he heard the chugging of a motor-bike, and stared down from the elm, he ceased to give Porrhinge his mental blessing. For the man on the chugging stink-bike was Silverson, and he shot away at his usual speed—a speed which made it useless for Len to think of dropping from the elm and getting to his hidden jigger.

Len stared after him from the branches blankly. That ass, Pie! What had he done? Not, evidently, what he had set out to do—for there was Silverson, scudding away, vanishing in the dim distance—far beyond the hope of shadowing.

Len's lips set hard. He had laid all his plans, only to discover at the finish that Porrhinge had, after all, fooled it—as he always did! He could have found distinct pleasure at that moment in punching the goat of the Fifth right and left. It had been such a chance to spot the Sussex Man, if Silverson was the Sussex Man—scouting round the locality of the next crib—and it was gone phut!

So there was nothing doing that afternoon in the shadowing line. Surtees was referee in the pick-up on Big Side. And it was no use thinking of Bullivant, because he, like Silverson, had a motor-bike on which he would go, if he went at all. Len could no more shadow Bullivant than Silverson.

But could he not? Looking down from his high branch, Len started at the sight of the games master wheeling out a push-bike. Even at the distance he could read the red wrath in Bullivant's face. A grin dawned on Len's own. He was intensely exasperated—but he could not help grinning, as he realised what must have happened in the motor-shed. Silverson on his motor-bike—Bullivant on a schoolboy's jigger. It spoke for itself, and he knew now that that unbelievable goat, Porrhinge, must have doctored the wrong machine.

"Oh!" breathed Len. "The goat—the priceless goat!"

He was keenly disappointed, for it was Silverson that he wanted to shadow. But he wasted no time, nevertheless. He slithered down from the elm, and hooked his bike out of the hedge. Bullivant, also, was his game, though lesser game than Silverson. The fact that he himself, like nearly everybody at Oakshott, found that he liked old Bully personally made no difference. Personal likes and dislikes counted for nothing when it was his business to spot the man on whose shoulder the hand of Detective-Inspector Nixon was to drop.

Bullivant rode at a good speed. He was a powerful man on a good jigger, and he was in a hurry. But Len kept him in sight. He did not want to do more than keep him in sight—so long as he did not lose him, the farther off he was the safer. At a backward glance, Bullivant would never have

recognised the cyclist behind him in the shabby cap with the sticking-plaster on his face as an Oakshott Fifth Former. But a fellow could not be too careful. As it turned out, the games master did not cast a single backward glance. Obviously, it never crossed his mind for a moment that he might be followed. If he was—as Len doubted, now that he had learned so much about Vernon Silverson—the Sussex Man, he was feeling quite secure. His destination, and what he did there, would probably reveal what he was and what he was not. Len found himself hoping that, whatever might transpire, it would enable him to take the name of James Bullivant off his list of suspects.

Ten or eleven miles ran under the wheels. They were getting to Trant, about eleven miles to the east of Oakshott—the scene, as Len well remembered, of one of the Sussex Man's "jobs"—all of them within a certain radius of Oakshott at the centre.

Was the Sussex Man going to give the locality of a former exploit the once-over, with the idea of another raid in the same place? Len hoped not—but it would be easy to see what Bullivant did when he got to Trant.

But Bullivant did not reach Trant. The old red roofs of that little sleepy Sussex town were in sight when the games master turned off the road into a bridle-path through a thick, leafy wood. He disappeared from Len's sight, and Len, turning the corner a minute or two later, spotted a notice posted on a tree-trunk: "NO CYCLING." Bullivant, evidently, had not heeded that prohibition—neither did Len. But he was doubly cautious now. Old Bully was not likely to be recklessly disregarding of local bylaws. He was more likely to walk where the law required walking, and Len did not want to overtake him. He slowed down.

He was glad of his caution a few minutes later. At a turn of the bridle-path about a hundred yards from the road he saw Bullivant wheeling his bike. Len dropped from his machine on the instant and walked and wheeled. Another instant and he backed, pushed his bike behind a mass of hawthorns, and followed it out of sight. For Bullivant, thirty feet ahead of him, had stopped, and a man leaning on one of the trees had stepped towards him.

Behind the hawthorns, Len Lex breathed hard. Bullivant, he knew, had not seen him—not once had the games master looked back since leaving the school. But the other man, whoever he was, evidently a man whom Bullivant had come there to meet, might have glimpsed him. With his heart beating a little faster, Len listened intently. The deep, rolling voice of the games master came to his ears:

"Let us step into the wood, then, Roger."

It was an answer to something Len had not heard—the other man spoke low. Perhaps he had said that there was someone on the path. Len heard a rustling sound; they were going into the wood.

"Roger!" breathed Len.

It was the name Bullivant had spoken a few days ago on the telephone in Common-room! Roger was the man who wanted money, the man whose voice on the phone at Oakshott had startled and alarmed the games master. Len Lex was extremely keen to have a look at Roger. A needy relative—a black-mailer—a confederate in the burgling line? Any of these things Roger might be, and the schoolboy detective was going to know.

Leaving his bike hidden in the hawthorns, Len threaded his way through the wood along the path without emerging into it. He came abreast of the spot where the games master had stopped and peered out from brambly thickets. The first object that met his view was a bicycle leaning against a tree. Bullivant had left it standing there while he went into the wood with Roger on the other side of the bridle-path.

Len pushed on a dozen yards farther, and cut across the path into the opposite trees. He was now on the same side of the path as Bullivant and his unknown acquaintance. A rolling voice that he knew well boomed in the trees close at hand. From a thick mass of willows and tall ferns, Len peered at two figures standing under the trees—and hardy breathed, so near was he to them.

Bullivant had his back to Len. The other man, younger, slimmer, leaned on an ash trunk with a cigarette in his mouth. Len saw his face very clearly—a rather handsome face, with a weak chin and dark shadows under the eyes that told of late hours. He was well dressed, in dark clothes, with a touch of dandyism. There was a fleeting resemblance in his face to the features of the games master—they might have been relatives. Bullivant was speaking:

"Nonsense! Rubbish! There was no one on the path! If there had been, what of it? You are a bundle of nerves, Roger! Pah!"

"Someone was on the path—a boy, I think—and I have not heard him pass, Jim." The voice was sulky, with a querulous note in it. "Don't you care if a constable's hand drops on my shoulder?"

Len drew a deep breath. So Roger went in dread of an officer of the law tapping him on the shoulder! A friend, probably a relative of the games master of Oakshott went in fear of the police! Mentally, the schoolboy detective relegated Vernon Silverson to a back seat! That goat, Poringe, had served him well, after all!

"Don't be a fool!" came Bullivant's deep growl. "You're in no danger of that, as you know, or ought to know!"

"How do I know! I know I'm sick of this! Are you going to see me through?"

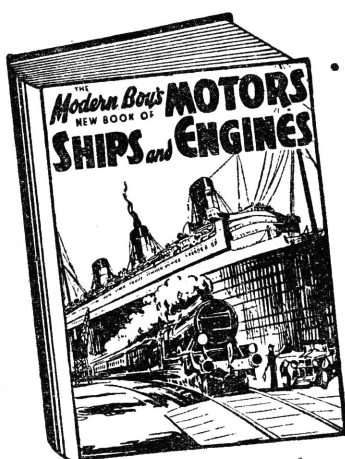
"I'm going to see you through. Keep off the telephone, and don't expect to see me. It won't be long now."

"How shall I know?"

"Keep your eyes on the newspapers!" There was a strange, almost terrible note in the games master's deep voice. "When you see in the papers that the Sussex Man has cracked the crib at Oakshott, then you will know that I have the money."

The Hidden Jigger!

MASTER of himself as the schoolboy detective was, he could not restrain a start as those words reached him in the deep voice of the Oakshott games master. Silverson? Surtees? They were blotted out now. This was a



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The Schoolboy Detective

confession. It was what he wanted to learn; yet, somehow, it came like a blow to him. It made him realise how much he had wished that "old Bully" would not turn out to be the wanted man. He started—and the next moment there was a sharp exclamation from Roger.

A slight—ever so slight—rustle in the willows was enough to alarm the weak-chinned man, whom Bullivant had called a bundle of nerves. He made a spring from the tree he was leaning upon, passed the games master, and plunged into the willows—guessing, or at least fearing, that someone was there—and at the same instant Len backed away, and dodged round the trunk of a massive beech, vanishing.

"Roger!" Bullivant's voice came deep and angry. "What—"

"There was someone—"

"Nervous fool! There was nobody."

"I tell you, Jim, I heard—a rabbit, perhaps—but I heard. Let us look round, at least! I tell you there was someone—something."

The voice was shrill with alarm.

Len Lex, flitting from tree to tree, was beating a rapid retreat. He had not been seen; and if he was not seen, it would pass as a false alarm—as, indeed, Bullivant at least believed that it was. Behind him, the schoolboy detective heard a trampling and a rustling. One, if not both, of them was searching—and the sooner he was far from the spot, the better.

There was no more shadowing to be done now. To get back to his bicycle and disappear from Trant Wood as fast as he could drive the pedals was his cue. But he did not head direct for the bridle-path. He had to make sure of throwing the searchers off his track first. He plunged deeper and deeper into the wood, following a roundabout route, taking advantage of all the cover that the thick woodland afforded.

When at last he stopped to listen, there was no sound. If Roger, and perhaps Bullivant, still searched, they had failed to find a trace of him; they were nowhere near at hand. More slowly, but still cautiously, Len threaded his way among the trees and brambles, circling round towards the bridle-path.

When, through the trees, he glimpsed the open path a little distance in front of him, he did not step into it. There was danger of Bullivant coming back along the path. He had to be sure the coast was clear. He threaded a way through a thicket of willows on the edge of the path, to wait and watch before he emerged. His hand struck something as he parted the drooping branches. He stopped, and stood as if petrified. Standing hidden in that clump on the edge of the path was a motor-cycle. The ghost of a motor-bike could not have startled him more.

He stood perfectly still, forgetting, for the moment, what he had just seen and heard. For he knew that motor-bike. It was Vernon Silverson's. There was no sign of Silverson

—he had concealed his machine there, and gone—probably long ago. Len Lex gazed at it with almost bulging eyes.

Mr. Silverson had ridden away from Oakshott to the west, on the road to Baye or Shooters Fell. Trant was direct to the east of the school. Silverson must have covered a wide circle of country—a small matter on so speedy a machine. But why? Why was the motor-bike hidden in a thicket in Trant Wood? Where had Silverson gone, on foot, after parking it there? And why?

The schoolboy detective felt his brain in a whirl. He had wondered where Silverson had gone that afternoon. He knew now. But why—why? But for what he had heard, only a quarter of an hour ago, with his own ears, he would have said that the Sussex Man was scouting in Trant, the destined scene of his next exploit.

A man with no secrets to keep did not park his motor-cycle in the depths of a thicket. It was parked there because it was urgent that no one should see it. But why? It was not, it could not be, because he was the Sussex Man—after what Len had heard Bullivant utter. Len was not often at a loss; but he was absolutely perplexed as he stood staring at Silverson's motor-bike.

He stirred. Whatever this might mean, Bullivant was his man, and he had to get clear without risking being spotted. He pushed through and scanned the bridle-path. It was clear—there was no sign of Bullivant or his companion. Len ran across, reached his bicycle where he had left it hidden in the hawthorns; and, after another careful survey of the path, mounted and rode swiftly away to the Trant Road. It was a relief to spin out on to the open road and head for Oakshott, as fast as he could go.

Not till he had covered a good six miles did Len stop. Behind a way-side hedge he removed the sticking-plaster from his cheek, and changed his cap. He was now within school bounds again, and an Oakshott man once more. Remounting, he rode on more slowly. Bullivant might see him now, and it did not matter.

When he was still a mile from Oakshott, he heard a bicycle on the road behind him, and Bullivant rode by. The games master glanced at him, and slowed down, riding by his side.

"Weren't you in the pick-up this afternoon, Lex?" he asked.

Whatever he was—and how could Len doubt what he was, after what he had heard in Trant Wood?—he was the games master of Oakshott now. A man with a sense of duty, so far as the school games were concerned, at least.

"No, sir. I had to stand out. I knocked my knee in a punt-about!" answered Len innocently.

"It has not prevented you from cycling, Lex, I see! I hope you are not a slacker! I thought you were keen. I like to see a boy keen. You have a chance for the first eleven, Lex. I advise you not to lose it."

"Thank you, sir!" said Len. "I'm going to try hard."

The games master nodded and shot on. Len followed, more slowly. Bullivant had not the remotest idea that he had been to Trant that afternoon. Len could almost have found it in his heart to wish that he had not been. He was conscious that, in spite of what he now knew, he still liked old Bully—the man who, whatever he was, worked hard at his duty, and took a keen interest in every footballing fellow at Oakshott. Len felt that it was unjust and unreasonable, but all the same he could not help wishing that the words he had heard from Bullivant in Trant Wood had been uttered by Vernon Silverson!

W! Oh crumbs! Ow!"

Such was the sound that greeted Len as he came into Study No. 8. He stared. Harvey and Banks were sitting on the study table, grinning. Porrhage was sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall. Apparently he had been extended on the floor, and had dragged himself into a sitting position, and could get no farther. He looked a wreck. His face was inky. His hair was a dusty mop. His jacket was split up the back. His trousers were dusty and crumpled. Several detached buttons lay on the floor round him. He gasped for breath. It looked as if Pie had been through a rather exciting time.

"Just too late to see the fun, Len," said Harvey. "Nearly all the Fifth have been here! That goat started out to gum Silverson's stink-bike, and gummed old Bully's."

"And the Fifth have jolly well let him know what they think of it," said Banks.

"Ow!" moaned Pie. "It was a mistake—I keep on telling you it was a mistake—I meant it for Silverson—ow! I wouldn't hurt old Bully for worlds! Wow! You men ought to have stood by a pal! Wow!"

"Stood by you!" growled Harvey. "Why, we're always standing by you, trying to keep you out of trouble. But you're such a silly ass that it is impossible. You make a mess of the simplest thing, and then growl at us because you get it in the neck. For two pins I'd give you another whopping for your cheek. You jolly well deserve it!"

"Rather!" agreed Banks. "But I think that you've had enough. If I didn't jolly well think so, I'd jolly well kick you now."

"And so would I!" said Len. Which was, perhaps, a little ungrateful, considering the discovery the schoolboy detective had made, owing to Pie's little error with the gum. But, oddly enough, that was how he felt!

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