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SKIMPOLE, DETECTIVE.

DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.



NO. 7.

SKIMPOLE

VOL. 1.

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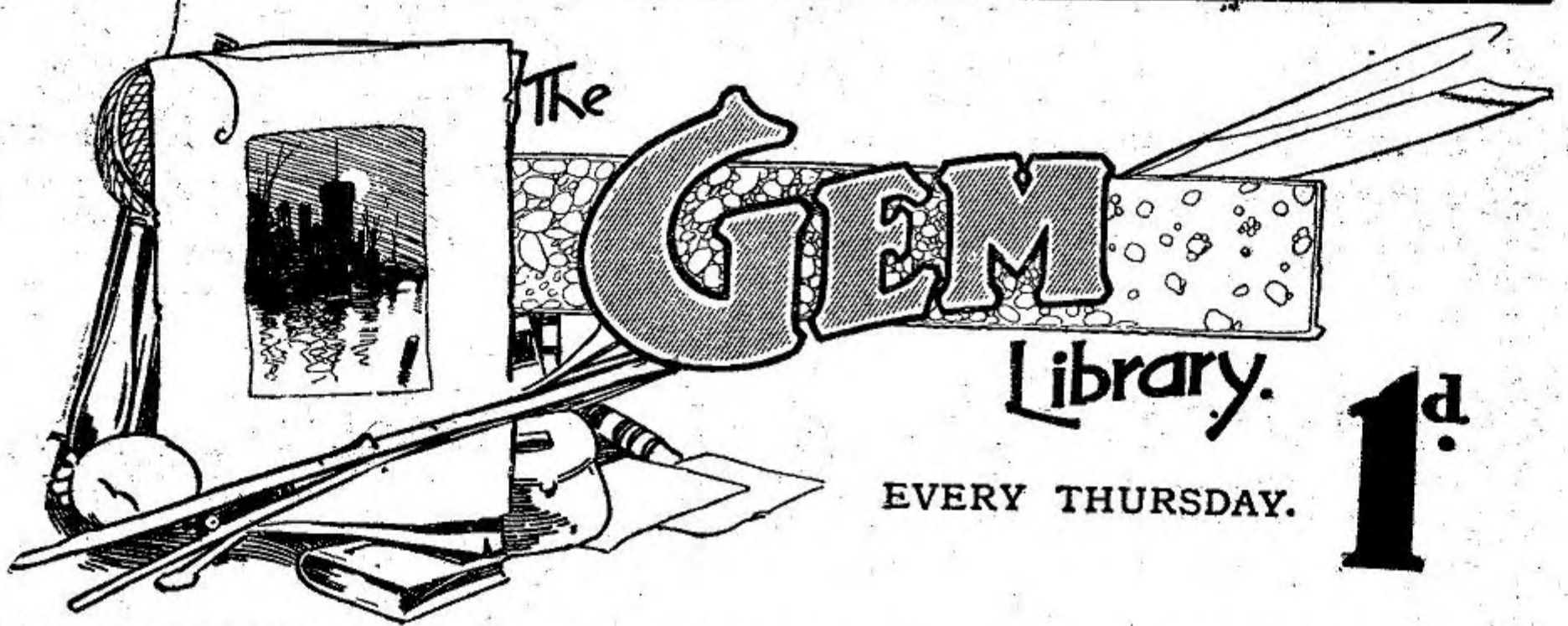
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CHAPTER 1.

Gore Gets into Trouble.

"TOM MERRY!"

Scratch—scratch!

"Tom Merry!"

Scratch, scratch, went the pen. Tom Merry did not lift his head. For the past quarter of an hour the only sound heard in the study had been the steady scratching of the pen, and Tom Merry did not seem to hear his name called. He was writing away at express speed, and the pen fairly flew over the paper.

"Tom Merry!" roared Gore angrily. "Tom Merry, are you deaf?"

"No," jerked out Tom, still without looking up, and without allowing the pen to stop in its race for a second. "I'm busy! Get out!"

"I want to speak to you."

"Get out!"

"Stop that scribbling for a minute!"

"Can't!"

And the pen went on—scratch, scratch, scratch—as if the hero of the Shell at St. Jim's were writing against time; as, indeed, he was.

Gore scowled, and advanced into the study.

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom Merry did not look, or answer. His pen scratched

ANOTHER DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 7 (New Series).

away furiously. Gore clenched his fist, and gave the table a sounding thump.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. He jumped violently at the shock, and the ink flew off his pen in a variety of blots over the paper.

"You ass!" he shouted, looking up at last. "Look at that!"

George Gore grinned.

"It was your own giddy fault!"

"You—you utter beast!" growled Tom Merry, looking at his watch. "It's too late now!"

"What's too late?"

"I shall have to write that sheet over again, so I can't show this up to Mr. Linton before six."

"Well, what do you want to show it to him before six for? Why won't you after six?"

"Because I've got to do it before. Express orders!" grunted Tom Merry. "Confound you! I shall get fifty extra for this!"

"Well, why couldn't you say so—"

"Ass! I hadn't a second to spare to get the thing finished—" Tom Merry threw down his pen in disgust. He had almost reached the end of the imposition, which he had strict orders from the master of the Shell to take in before six o'clock. It wanted one minute to six now, and with a whole page to write out again the task was evidently hopeless.

Gore did not seem much concerned. It was not his habit to worry about anybody's troubles but his own.

"Confound you!" growled Tom Merry. "Never mind, I want a rest. That ought to have been written out before, but I've been playing fives with Lowther. What do you want, Gore? If you've got anything to say, say it."

"It's about the next number of the 'Weekly.'"

"Do you want to put in a contribution?"

"I've got one written out. It's an article slating Linton, and it will make him wriggle when he sees it, as he's bound to do," explained Gore. "Of course, no names are used, as that would make a row; but there can't be any mistake about whom it's meant for."

The editor of "Tom Merry's Weekly" shook his head in a very decided way.

"Won't do, Gore."

Gore scowled darkly.

"You haven't seen it yet, Tom Merry."

"I don't need to see it, if that's the kind of article it is. Slating the masters is bad form, and it's barred in the 'Weekly.' Besides, you know very well that they wouldn't stand it, even if we were asses enough to start it. Once before we had the magazine stopped, because Linton fancied there was something about himself in it."

"That's all very well—"

"So you can put your slating article behind the fire, Gore. If you want to slate anybody, slate the New House bounders."

"Well, everybody in the magazine is doing that."

"Slate D'Arcy, then, or Skimpole the Socialist."

"D'Arcy is getting used up as a subject for jokes, and Skimpole seems to be giving up Socialism."

"Well, you can slate me, if you like," said Tom Merry generously, "or, better still, slate yourself."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I don't mean to be ass enough to print that article, and get the paper suspended," said Tom Merry. "Sorry, but it can't be did. You've spoiled my impot for nothing. I think you ought to write out this page for me."

"Catch me!"

"Well, clear out, while I do it, then!"

"Look here, I want to have this article put in the 'Weekly.'"

"You can't, and that settles it!"

"It doesn't settle it. You're not the whole giddy staff rolled into one, I suppose!" sneered Gore. "Blake and Figgins have something to say in the matter."

"They'll say the same as I do."

"Oh, I don't know! We're not all afraid of old Linton."

"You wouldn't call him old Linton if he were anywhere near to hear you," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Rot! What do you think I care for him? A Form master isn't a Tsar, I suppose; and if you think I'm afraid of that old duffer, Linton—"

"Gore!"

George Gore gave a jump, and turned quite white as he whirled round and saw Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, standing in the doorway, looking at him with a freezing glare.

The master of the Shell at St. Jim's was not a particularly good-tempered man, and the words he had overheard would have made most good-tempered men angry.

Mr. Linton was certainly angry.

His eyes were gleaming like steel as he fixed them upon

the unhappy Gore, and his lips were set in a tight line, which meant trouble. Gore wished the floor would open and let him drop through into Knox's study below. He stood, pale with terror, his jaw dropped, his eyes staring, as he met the steely glance of the Form master.

For some seconds there was silence—a silence that might have been felt.

"I came here," said Mr. Linton, at last, "to inquire, Merry, why you had not brought your imposition to me at six o'clock, as I especially commanded you—"

"I am sorry, sir, but—"

"But that is quite a secondary matter now," said Mr. Linton, with a wave of the hand, dismissing the subject. "Quite accidentally, as I came to this door, I heard Gore's reference to myself."

Gore's knees were giving way under him. Visions of the Head's study and a severe flogging unnerved him. He could only stare at the incensed Form master like an animal fascinated by a serpent.

"I could hardly believe my ears," said Mr. Linton, in his cold, measured tones. "Will you have the kindness, Gore, to repeat the expression you used?"

"I—I—I—"

"Repeat the expression you used instantly."

"I am sorry—"

"Did you hear me, Gore? What did you call me?"

"A-a-a-a-a-a duffer, sir!" stammered Gore, his pale face flooded with crimson.

"Ah, then I was not mistaken! You alluded to your Form master as a duffer—an old duffer, if I remember correctly, Gore?"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir!"

"I have no choice," said the master of the Shell, "but to administer a severe punishment. As I overheard the words accidentally, however, I will not take you before the Head, but will inflict the punishment myself."

Gore breathed a little more freely. The terrible vision of a flogging faded from his mind. At the worst the Form master could only cane him; but his spirits were depressed again as he remembered how Mr. Linton could lay it on when he chose.

"You will come with me to my study, Gore," said Mr. Linton. "After I have finished, I think you will be careful not to make such a disrespectful allusion to your Form master again; at least, when there is a chance of being heard by him."

"If you please, sir—"

"Follow me."

And Gore followed the angry Form master from the study. Tom Merry was looking rather concerned. He did not like Gore, and he did not like a disrespectful allusion to a master behind his back. But Gore was evidently "in for it" now, and Tom Merry felt sorry for him.

"Hallo, kid, what's the trouble here?" asked Monty Lowther, coming into the study with Manners. "I've just passed Gore and Linton. Linton looked as if he meant business—"

"And Gore looked as if he knew it," said Manners.

Tom Merry explained.

"Phew!" said Lowther, with a whistle. "Gore will get something warm this time! But I say, haven't you finished that rotten impot yet?"

"No; Gore interrupted me."

"Then finish it, and come down to the gym; we'll wait."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry tore through the last page of the imposition, and, with the impot under his arm, left the study with his chums. As they approached Mr. Linton's room, sounds of anguish were heard proceeding from behind the closed door.

The door suddenly opened, and George Gore came out. His face was twisted with pain, and he was hugging his hands in his arm-pits, and apparently trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

"I say, I'm sorry, Gore!" muttered Tom Merry, as he passed them.

Gore's reply was a sullen scowl, and he went wriggling down the passage. Tom Merry went into the study, and laid his lines upon the table, and Mr. Linton gave him a short nod. Perhaps the punishment of Gore had satisfied the Form master, for he said nothing about the impot being late, and Tom Merry left the study, relieved in his mind.

The chums of the Shell passed Gore again as they went out of the School House. He scowled at them as he rubbed his tingling hands. But he did not speak, and the Terrible Three passed into the gym, and soon forgot about Gore and his scowling.



Tom Merry and Co
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and Co to a feed in
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the occasion of Kerr's
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CHAPTER 2.

The Amateur Detective.

"I WANT—"

"Don't come in."

"I want to—"

"Get out!"

"I want to speak—"

"Shut up!"

"I want to speak to you chaps—"

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wats, Skimpole, and many of 'em! Twavel along, deah boy, and don't bothah!"

"I want to speak to you chaps about—"

"Ring off!"

"But I want—"

Four juniors jumped to their feet in Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, with determined, or, rather, ferocious, looks.

Skimpole stood in the doorway, evidently determined to speak. And Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, the chums of Study No. 6, didn't intend to listen. It was a case, as Blake put it, of too much Skimpole. They had had enough of the eloquence of the reformer of the Shell, and they didn't want any more.

Skimpole was a slim, not to say skinny, youth, with a large head, a larger imagination, and a great capacity for argument. He took an interest in the most abstruse subjects, and would argue about them by the hour. He had taken up Socialism, and had argued and disputed about it till his Form-fellows had in some cases been driven to personal violence in self-defence. Skimpole was an earnest youth, and whenever he took up a subject, he took it up earnestly. But his enthusiasms were as a rule short-lived.

"Now, look here," said Blake aggressively, "we don't want any Socialism at present. When we want any conversation like yours, we'll ring up Colney Hatch—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Shut up, Gussy, while I—"

"Wats, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway don't be so beastly bumptious, you know. I nevah knew such a boundah for talkin'."

"Dry up, ass! Now, Skimpole, off you go! You're a

harmless ass when you can keep your mouth shut, so I don't want to hurt you; but a word about Socialism, and—"

"And we bump you in the cinders," said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You're quite mistaken," said Skimpole. "I haven't come here to talk Socialism—"

"Oh, well," said Blake, more cordially, "that alters the case! What's the trouble, then?"

"I am giving up Socialism for the present," said Skimpole. "Mind, I don't give up my faith in it. Socialism means the amelioration of the conditions of life for all the workers, and the lightening of the heavy lot of the toiling millions—"

"Why, you're starting off already!" exclaimed Blake wrathfully.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm sorry," said Skimpole. "As I said, I'm rather giving up Socialism for the present, as other matters are claiming my attention."

Blake grinned.

"What is it now—some new crack-brained wheeze?"

"Nothing of the kind. But I have often thought, from knowledge of my powers of observation and judgment, what a splendid detective I should make—"

"My hat!"

"And I am devoting my attention to that department now," said Skimpole modestly. "I have studied the works dealing with Sexton Blake, Sherlock Holmes, and Lecoc, and I am convinced that they are really nothing compared with what I might be—"

"Modesty, thy name is Skimpole!"

"Oh, of course, there's no false modesty about me!" said Skimpole. "I know my own abilities too well for that, Blake!"

"Ha, ha! But what do you want to tell us about it for? Is there anything in the wind?"

"No," said Skimpole, rather dejectedly. "So far as I can discover, there is not a single mystery of any kind about the school at present."

"Wathah wotten for you, deah boy."

"Yes, rather. I am keen to begin work on some case, you know, and the deeper the mystery the better I should like it; but—"

"But there's nothing going on?" said Blake thoughtfully. "It's hard cheese! If only Tom Merry would commit a murder in his study——"

"Bai Jove! That would be wippin'!"

"Or if Figgins would burgle the School House——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But they won't," said Digby, shaking his head. "The school has fallen upon degenerate days, and there's no chance for Skimpole in the detective line."

"I can make a suggestion, though," said Blake, with an air of reflection. "There's a mystery about Taggles, our school porter, that has always puzzled me."

"What is it?" exclaimed Skimpole eagerly, producing a huge notebook and a pencil from his pocket. "Give me the details, please."

"Why, you know that Taggles is a strict teetotaler—he says so himself."

"Yes?"

"And yet his nose goes on getting more and more like a beetroot every day," said Blake seriously. "Can you account for that?"

The chums of Study No. 6 laughed, and Skimpole frowned, and thrust his notebook back into his pocket without taking any notes.

"If you're going to make fun of me, Blake——"

"My dear chap, I wouldn't think of it; you're funny enough already," assured Blake. "You wanted a mystery, and I've given you one, and I can't do more than that to help an amateur detective."

"Certainly not," said D'Arcy. "But I'll tell you what, Skimpole. I want to know where Mannahs keeps his camera, as I want to bowwow it. Can you find out for me?"

"Why don't you ask him for it?" said Blake.

"I have asked him, and he has wefused," said D'Arcy. "He wefused, as a mattah of fact, in a very wude mannah. He actually had the feahful impertinence to say that he couldn't twust his camewa into the hands of a silly ass, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I cannot see that it is a laughin' mattah, Blake. I wegard the wemark as impertinent. But I must have the camewa, you know. I am goin' to learn photogwaphy, and I want to pwactise before I buy a camewa myself. I might damage it in learnin'."

"Ha, ha! If Manners knew that, I am sure he would lend you his camera with pleasure."

"No. I explained that to him, and he called me by an oppwobwious expwession."

"You don't know where he keeps it," said Skimpole thoughtfully. "Well, I'll find out for you, certainly. A little thing like that won't trouble a fellow of my ability long. I'll bring the camera to you."

"Thanks, awfully, deah boy. Don't forget to bwing some films, too," said D'Arcy.

And the amateur detective departed on his quest.

"Well, my word!" said Blake, sitting down again. "That ass always has some new wheeze on the brain; but upon the whole, I think he'll be a little less of a bore as a detective than as a Socialist. If he discovers Manners's camera, and Manners discovers him discovering it, I am afraid Skimpole will discover also that it isn't all lavender to be an amateur detective."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo, here are those kids from the Shell! You needn't come in," said Blake, looking towards the doorway, where Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had appeared. "No dogs admitted."

But the Terrible Three came in all the same.

"We've got a wheeze on," said Tom Merry cordially. "It's up against the New House bounders. Are you coming into it?"

Blake looked reflective.

"Well, that's according to the wheeze," he replied. "We've had some experience of your wheezes, Tom Merry, and before we go into a thing, we'd like to have some information. What's the little game?"

"Well, can I trust your discretion?" said Tom Merry, in a hesitating manner. "It's a rule of mine not to trust secrets to kids."

Blake's hand slid towards a ruler on the table.

"It would be better to tell them nothing about it till the time comes," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "They would be bound to get chattering, and then Figgins & Co. would be put on their guard."

And Manners nodded sagely.

"There are two modes of exit from this study," said

Blake, with ominous calmness—"the door and the window. Which do you prefer?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Neither at present. Upon the whole, I think I will trust you with the wheeze. It's a raid in Figgins's study in the New House."

"Do you call that a new idea?" said Blake disparagingly.

"Bai Jove! I wegard it as a vewy mouldy and moth-eaten old ideah," said Arthur Augustus. "If you cannot think of a bettah wheeze than that, Tom Mewwy——"

"Dry up a minute, Gussy, and let me finish."

"I wefuse to dwy up. If you cannot think of a bettah wheeze than that, you had bettah go out of the business, and——"

"But I haven't come to the point yet."

"Well, why don't you, then? What are you so extremely long-winded for?"

"You don't give a chap a chance to speak. Figgins & Co. have been laying in a big supply of tommy because it's Kerr's birthday to-morrow, and they're going to have a feed to celebrate it."

The chums of Study No. 6 looked more interested.

"Oh, I see! There's something to collar," said Digby.

"Of course! My idea is to visit the New House after lights out to-night——"

"Then how on earth will you get in?"

"By the window of Figgy's study."

"Going to climb up a sheer wall?" asked Blake sarcastically.

"No; I'm going to tip Taggles a bob to leave his ladder out."

"That's not a bad idea."

"We can carry off the tommy, and leave our compliments in its place," said Tom Merry, with a grin. "And to-morrow, after Figgins & Co. have had time to realise that they have been done, we'll invite them to a feed in the School House, with their own tommy on the festive board. Of course, I don't want to do Kerr out of his birthday feed. What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Ripping," said Blake heartily.

"Yaas, wathah. All I wondah at is, how Tom Mewwy came to think of such a weally wippin' wheeze."

"Thank you," said Tom Merry. "Then you kids are in it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly," said Blake instantly. "We're in it, tooth and toenail. It will be a big joke on Figgins & Co., to collar their tommy, and then invite them to a feed on their own grub. They'll have to come. Fatty Wynn will make them, even if they don't want to. I say, you fellows, I always said that Tom Merry wasn't nearly such an ass as he looked."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I wish I could say the same of you, Blake," said Tom Merry. "But I was brought up to adhere strictly to the truth, so——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Herries.

Blake looked at his chum frigidly.

"Are you often taken like that, Herries?" he asked.

"Blessed if I see what you always want to be going off like a blessed alarm clock for. Now, then, Tom Merry, we're on to this wheeze, and we're ready for business after lights out. Now carry your faces away, you three; they worry me."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the Terrible Three, laughing, walked out of the study, and banged the door.

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CHAPTER 3.

Skimpole Investigates.

"It's a good wheeze," Monty Lowther remarked, as the chums of the Shell walked away towards their own quarters. "It will pull Figgins & Co. down off their perch a little, I think. Hallo, there's somebody in the study!"

The door of Tom Merry's study was half open, and the sound of somebody moving within could be plainly heard.

"Some New House bouncer on the prowl, very likely," muttered Manners.

Tom Merry laughed silently.

"If it is, we'll catch him in the act, and give him a lesson on the subject of nosing into our study," he murmured. "Come on quietly!"

The Terrible Three stole on tiptoe to the study door, and looked in.

Tom Merry gave a slight start of surpris. It was not a junior from the rival House of St. Jim's who was in the study. It was Skimpole, of the School House, and he was far too busily occupied to notice the three juniors looking in at the door. He had his face turned from them, and was now standing still in the middle of the room, tapping his big forehead with his forefinger, as if endeavouring to set his brain working more actively.

"Skimpole!" murmured Tom Merry. "What can he want here?"

"He's been looking for something," muttered Lowther, noticing the disturbed and disordered state of the study.

"You know his latest wheeze," whispered Manners. "He's dropped Socialism, and taken on detective work, and is setting up as an amateur Sexton Blake. I wonder——"

"If he starts any detective work in our study, he will get it where the chicken got the chopper!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yes, rather!"

"Shut up, and see what he's at!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Hush! He's talking!"

Skimpole was thinking aloud, and the chums of the Shell listened curiously to the audible mental efforts of the amateur detective of St. Jim's.

"The camera seems to be carefully hidden. No doubt Manners knows that D'Arcy might look for it. The question is, where has Manners hidden it? What would Sherlock Holmes do under the circumstances?"

Manners's face became like a thundercloud.

"My camera!" he murmured. "That ass D'Arcy wanted to borrow it, and I've shoved it out of sight, in case he should look for it. Now he's got this ass Skimpole——"

"Dry up!"

"Yes, but——"

"Don't alarm him."

Manners relapsed into wrathful silence. By the look on his face, one might have judged that the amateur detective of St. Jim's would have a rough time before he got clear of that study, whether he concluded his investigations there or not.

Skimpole rubbed his high, bony forehead in a very thoughtful way.

"There is not a single clue to the mystery of the camera," he murmured aloud. "The only receptacle in the room that is fastened is this desk. Perhaps the camera is in the desk. Should I be justified in breaking the lock? Under the circumstances, as my reputation as a detective is at stake, I cannot hesitate at such a trifle."

And Skimpole stepped towards the grate, and picked up the poker, with the evident intention of smashing the lock of the desk.

The Terrible Three dashed into the study.

Skimpole started back at the sight of them, and the poker dropped from his hand with a crash to the floor. He smiled a feeble smile.

"Hallo, Tom Merry! I—I—I——"

"You didn't expect us?" said Tom Merry blandly.

"Well, no, not exactly!"

"I should have thought not. May I inquire what you happen to be doing in our study?" asked Tom Merry, in the same bland tone. "Keep back, Manners!"

"I'm going to punch your head——"

"Keep back!"

"I tell you I'm going to punch his head!" howled Manners. "Do you think I'm going to have every lunatic in the school collaring my camera?"

"You'll only hurt your knuckles," said Lowther. "Besides, he hasn't found the camera. Besides, too, give him a chance to explain."

"I'm going to punch——"

"Please do not be violent!" said Skimpole, retreating a step or two, and holding up his hand. "It is impossible, as I have often told you, for a sincere Socialist to return violence for violence, but since I have taken up my detective

work, I have rather dropped Socialism, and so if you start punching my head, I shall start punching yours, and so——"

"I'll wipe up the floor with the image!"

"Oh, keep your wool on, kid!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing. "He hasn't done any damage, so far. Now explain yourself, Skimpole!"

"I was simply pursuing my investigations, Merry. I should have been sorry to break the desk, but I could not let a trifle like that stand in the way of success as a detective. D'Arcy has called me in in my professional capacity to discover Manners's camera——"

"Ha, ha! So Gussy is at the bottom of it?"

"Certainly! He is my client in this case," said Skimpole modestly. "I should be glad if you would retire from the study, and allow me to pursue my investigations undisturbed!"

"I dare say you would!" howled Manners. "But, as a matter of fact, you're the johnny who is going to retire from the study, and you're going to do it on your neck!"

And, breaking away from Tom Merry and Lowther, Manners hurled himself upon the amateur detective of St. Jim's, and caught him by the collar, and whirled him headlong out of the study.

The unfortunate camera-hunter went spinning along the passage, to collide heavily with George Gore, who was coming along to his study.

Gore staggered back with a yell, and Skimpole reeled against the wall, dazed and giddy with the shock.

"What do you mean by that?" yelled Gore. "What do you mean by bashing into me like a wild bull, you howling ass?"

"I—I am really sorry!"

"Then there's something to make you sorrier!" growled Gore, and he gave Skimpole a drive on the chest which made him sit down on the hard linoleum with a bump.

Then he went on his way, grinning in a satisfied manner.

"My—my word!" muttered Skimpole. "It is not an easy life to start as an amateur detective, I think, especially among such unsympathetic people."

Tom Merry laughed, and closed the study door.

"Young ass!" growled Manners, who was still looking wrathful, though the violent ejection of the amateur detective had relieved his feelings a little. "I'll teach him to begin his giddy investigations in our study, with my camera as his object. I wonder what would happen to that camera if Gussy once got hold of it? I know what would happen to him afterwards."

"Where is the camera, after all?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, it's in the grub cupboard!" said Manners, opening the door of the latter. "I put it out of sight behind these things, in case Gussy should look for it. You know what an obstinate mule that fellow is when he gets an idea into his head. That giddy detective never thought of looking behind these things, or he'd have found it." Manners took out the camera. "And I want to use it to-night."

"Eh—what are you going to do with a camera, to-night?"

"Take a photo by moonlight."

"By moonlight?"

"Yes. You know, there's a full moon to-night, and the quadrangle will be pretty nearly as light as day. I want a picture of the School House by moonlight. See?"

"But you'll have to get a long exposure, and——"

"I can take the camera out with me when we go to raid Figgins's quarters," said Manners. "I'll expose the film then, and get the camera again when we come back. Half an hour or so will be enough, and I dare say we shall be that time."

"Well, I hope it will be a success. Hallo! There's that fathead again!"

The door of the study opened, and Skimpole's head was seen. He kept his hand on the door, ready to shut it and bolt at a hostile movement on the part of the chums of the Shell.

"I say, Manners— Oh, I see, that's your camera?"

"Yes," said Manners; "this is my camera. If I ever find you looking for it again, my pippin, there will be a dead Socialist knocking around St. Jim's!"

"But I have undertaken to take it to D'Arcy——"

"You'll want an undertaker yourself if you don't clear," roared Manners, making a step towards the door.

"But really, Manners——"

Manners rushed at him. Skimpole banged the door and fled. His footsteps died away down the passage, and the amateur detective of St. Jim's was gone.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins and Co's Invitation.

"THAT'S the last lot!" exclaimed Figgins. Figgins & Co., the chums of the New House, had just come into their study, and deposited a variety of parcels on the table. Figgins looked them over with a satisfied eye, and the Co. grinned anticipatively. On the morrow there was to be a feed such as would break the record in the New House.

It was Kerr's birthday, and Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co., naturally wanted to celebrate it. So did his chums. And that birthday feed was a subject of much thought and consideration to the Co. Kerr had received a liberal remittance from home. He had pooled it with all that his chums could raise. The total sum had been a large one, and Fatty Wynn had laid it out to the best advantage.

The result would be seen on the morrow—at least, so Figgins & Co. expected. Fatty Wynn and Marmaduke Smythe began packing away the parcels in the cupboard, which was already half full of similar packages. Some of the articles had been purchased at the school shop, kept by Dame Taggles. Others had been brought in from the village of Rylcombe. All of them were of the best quality that money could buy, and in large quantities. Given the money to expend, Fatty Wynn could be trusted to do the shopping in the best style possible.

The fat boy of the New House smiled contentedly as he packed away the purchases. His eye lingered lovingly on each parcel.

"My word!" said Marmaduke. "I really believe Fatty Wynn would like to start now, without waiting for the birthday."

"Oh, no; not exactly that!" said Fatty Wynn deprecatingly. "But I have been thinking that it would be a good wheeze to have a taster to-night—a sort of preliminary canter, you know—just to satisfy ourselves that the grub was really all right!"

Figgins laughed.

"As a matter of fact, I'm fearfully hungry," Fatty Wynn continued pathetically. "I always get hungry in March more than any other month in the year, I think. I've only had a few pork-pies and jam-tarts and some sausages since tea, and I'm as empty as a drum!"

"You must be!" said Figgins.

"Then what do you think of my idea?"

"Rotten!" said Figgins emphatically.

"Oh, really, Figgins—"

"We're not going to have you scoffing Kerr's birthday feed in advance," said Figgins severely. "If you're hungry, there's some sardines left and some bread."

"There's nothing of the sort!"

"I tell you I put them in the cupboard just after tea."

"And I tell you that I have eaten them since then!"

"Oh, that alters the case, of course. If you've eaten them you can't be hungry."

"I'm famished!"

"Oh, I say, let him have one of the steak-pies!" said Kerr generously. "He's done a lot of shopping, and you know how it pains him to look at anything he mustn't eat."

"Well, yes, make it a steak-pie," said Figgins, relenting. "Only one, mind; and make the best of it!"

Fatty Wynn beamed again.

"That's all right," he said; "I only want just a snack, and a steak-pie will do me down all right, Figgy. It's a good suggestion of yours, Kerr."

And Fatty Wynn, selecting the largest of the steak-pies, set to work upon it there and then, with a beaming countenance and extremely active jaws.

"He's got it and he's happy now!" remarked Figgins. "Some of the School House bounders would be happy, too, if they knew what we'd got in this study."

"I shouldn't wonder if Tom Merry has tumbled to it," Kerr remarked thoughtfully. "He knows it's my birthday to-morrow, and he saw us in the school shop."

"Possibly; but he can't get a chance at the tommy," said Figgins.

"You remember how they sneaked the fig-pudding that time—"

"Ha, ha, ha! We'll take care they don't get a chance like that again. We'll lock the study door to-night, when we go out of it."

"Good! But, I say, what about inviting guests to the feed? It would be a rather good idea to have some of the School House bounders over."

Figgins nodded.

"Yes. We don't want any House rows on such an auspicious occasion," he remarked. "Kerr doesn't have a birthday every day, and we ought to celebrate it in the olive-branch, peace-on-earth style. What do you say to

inviting both those lots of rotters—Blake and his crowd and the Terrible Three?"

"Think the grub will go round?" asked Fatty Wynn, looking up for the first time from his steak-pie.

"Yes, of course it will, you horrid porker!" said Figgins. "We have got enough tommy for fifteen or sixteen fellows to gorge themselves into dyspepsia with."

"That's about right," Marmaduke remarked. "We shall be eleven with the School House fellows, and Fatty counts as four extra—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you want to be always joking about my appetite for," complained Fatty Wynn. "I know I get hungry sometimes—"

"Yes, I know you do," said Figgins. "We've noticed it. But if we're going to invite the School House rotters we'd better go and do it. Fatty can stay here and scoff his steak-pie while we trot over to the School House."

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn, quite satisfied with this arrangement.

"But mind, Fatty, you're to stop at that one. Don't you make a raid on the cupboard while we're gone—"

"Oh, Figgins!"

"Well, you know what an unearthly gourmand you are," said Figgins distrustfully. "One never knows what to expect when you're left alone with any grub—or, rather, one does know what to expect."

"If you can't trust me with the grub, Figgy—"

"Oh, that's all right! Keep your wool on! Come along, kids!"

And Figgins & Co. quitted the New House. The dusk of evening was thickening over the quadrangle at St. Jim's, and lights were glimmering from the windows of the School House opposite. The moon was peeping up from behind the elm-trees, and a dim glimmer of silver came through the dusk of night.

Figgins & Co. entered the School House with a careless air, but with their eyes well about them. The rivalry between the Houses at St. Jim's was keen, and a boy entered the rival House at the imminent risk of assault and battery at any moment. The chums of Study No. 6 were standing in the passage, chatting, when the New House fellows entered. They turned round at once and fixed an aggressive look upon the intruders.

"Hullo, Figgins!" said Blake. "We were just talking about you."

"Glad you had something nice to talk about," said Figgins cheerfully.

"Bai Jove, that is wathah smart of Figgins, deah boys! I weally considah—"

"We were talking about the cricket—"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake—"

"Yes, I know that, Gussy. We were talking about the cricket, Figgins, and wondering whether your lot would be licked as often now cricket's coming on as you were at footer during the winter."

Figgins's eyes gleamed.

"If you like to count up the number of goals kicked on either side during the football season," he exclaimed, "I think you'll find that—"

Blake waved his hand patronisingly.

"My dear chap, I'm not a counting machine; and, besides, what's the good of taking account of a few flukes you made—"

"Flukes! I'll fluke you—"

"What are you chaps doing in a respectable place, anyway?" demanded Blake, changing the subject. "You know we bar hooligans and dogs and New House bounders here, and—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We've come to—"

"Rats! Get out! We're not particular, but we don't want to mix with bounders of your sort!" said Blake loftily.

"Just so," said Digby. "We have to draw a line somewhere, and we draw it at New House rotters!"

"Yaas, wathah! My fwriends, as a wule, are quite select, not to say swaggah, and, weally, I object to the pwesence of these feahful wottahs!"

"Look here—"

Blake waved his hand again in an extremely irritating way.

"Now, you're asking too much, Figgy. How can you expect anybody to look at a chivvy like that? It's unreasonable."

"Yaas, wathah, weally extwemely unweasonable. I weally think that Figgins ought to get a new set of featchahs befoah he wequests anybody to look at him," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Figgins & Co. controlled their wrath with difficulty. The School House chums were trying to rag them into a row, as



"As a matter of fact, I'm fearfully hungry," said Fatty Wynn, pathetically. "I always get hungry in March more than any month in the year, I think. I've only had a few pork-pies and jam tarts and some sausages since tea, and I'm as empty as a drum!"

they knew perfectly well; but Figgins was not to be drawn this time.

"I want to tell you, Blake—"

Blake shook his head.

"Don't bother, Figgins. Your features worry me. Take them away. Bury them. Get a new set. If you can't do that, borrow a Guy Fawkes' mask, and wear it on all occasions. It would be an improvement!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You rotten School House wasters!" roared Figgins, making a stride towards the cool and irritating chums.

But Kerr caught him by the arm and pulled him back.

"Oh, don't stop him!" implored Blake. "We've got a few minutes to spare, and there's a floor here wants wiping up, and we should be very happy to use Figgins to wipe it up with—"

"Look here," howled Figgins, "we don't want a row with

you rotters! We've come over on purpose to invite you to a feed—"

"Oh, that alters the case!" said Blake at once. "I take back what I said. You needn't get that Guy Fawkes mask."

"Yaas, wathah; and you can keep on with the same set of featchahs, fearful as they are to look at—"

"We want you to come to a special feed," went on Figgins, unheeding.

"Now, you're talking!" said Blake emphatically.

"It's Kerr's birthday to-morrow—"

"Oh!" ejaculated the chums of No. 6 simultaneously.

Figgins broke off and stared at them inquiringly.

"What the dickens are you saying 'Oh!' in that tone for?" he demanded testily. "Is there anything remarkable in Kerr having a birthday?"

"Oh, no! I suppose he really has 'em like anybody else."

**NEXT
THURSDAY:**

"THE TELL-TALE!"

**A TALE OF
TOM MERRY & CO.**

said Blake. "Lemme see, are you ten or eleven to-morrow, Kerr?"

Kerr replied to this disparaging question with a withering stare. Words were unequal to the occasion.

"Well, we're giving a feed, something a bit out of the common, to celebrate Kerr's birthday," said Figgins, "and we're here to ask you to come."

"That's jolly kind of you, Figgy—"

"Yes; one would think so, by the way you've been talking—"

"Well, we didn't know what you had come for," said Blake apologetically. "When we saw you marching into our House, as bold as brass, of course, we thought you had come to look for trouble."

Figgins grinned.

"Oh, that's all right! Well, will you come? It's a ripping feed—unlimited tommy, specially selected by Fatty Wynn; a regular rip of a spread. We'll be glad to have your company."

"I'm awfully sorry—"

"You don't mean to say that you're not coming—"

"Can't be did! We've promised Tom Merry."

"Is Tom Merry giving a feed?"

"Yes; and we've promised to feed with him."

"Well, that's annoying," said Figgins. "As a matter of fact, we've come to ask Tom Merry as well as you, Blake. Suppose he puts off his feed till another occasion, and you all feed with us in the New House?"

Blake could not help grinning.

As it was the New House birthday feed which was to form the School House repast, if all went well, the situation was rather a curious one, and he could hardly explain the exact facts to Figgins.

"Well, you'd better ask Tom Merry," he said. "I'll leave it to him. Of course, we're awfully grateful for this invitation."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "It's very decent of you, Figgins, and I wish Kerr had a birthday every day in the week."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Figgins. "We'll go up and speak to Tom Merry. Come on, kids!"

And Figgins & Co. went upstairs. Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy stared at one another with silent grins till Figgins & Co. were out of sight.

"Well, if this doesn't beat cock-fighting!" ejaculated Blake at last. "It seems almost too rough to scoff Figgy's feed, after a generous invite like that."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we're going to ask him to it," said Digby, grinning. "It will be all the same in effect, only the feed will be ours, and he'll be a guest instead of host."

"Ha, ha! Of course. I hope Tom Merry will have sense enough not to give the game away when Figgins & Co. spring this on him," said Blake, rather anxiously. "I think—"

Arthur Augustus made a step towards the stairs.

"I had better go and see about it!" he exclaimed. "Tom Mewwy will vevy pwobably put his foot in it if I am not there to pwrompt him."

Blake caught the swell of the School House by the collar and yanked him back.

"You stay where you are, Gussy."

"But, weally, Blake—"

"You would only make matters worse, ass!"

"You are wumplin' my collah, Blake."

"Blow your collar!"

"I wewuse to do anythin' of the kind. I insist upon bein' immediately weweased," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity.

The sound of a closing door was heard above, and Jack Blake released the swell of the School House. But he kept a wary eye on D'Arcy, to see that he did not follow Figgins & Co. to Tom Merry's study, to carry out his idea of prompting Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry Declines.

THE Terrible Three were busy in their study in the School House. The gas was lighted, and a cheerful fire blazed in the grate, for the evening at the end of March was cold and chilly. Manners was examining his camera, and adjusting the film in it ready for the work he had in contemplation. Manners used the daylight-loading apparatus, as dark rooms were rather scarce at St. Jim's. Monty Lowther was doing some fretwork, having lately taken that up as a hobby, and Tom Merry, thinking of the summer days soon to come, was oiling his cricket bat. The mere sight of the yellow blade, and the feel of the cane handle in his grip, seemed like a promise of golden days in

store, hinting of green fields and blue skies and white-flannelled cricketers. The chums of the Shell were decidedly cheerful, each deeply interested in his occupation, and the thought of the intended raid upon the quarters of Figgins & Co. gave an added satisfaction to their cheery countenances.

There was a knock at the door which might have been heard—and, as a matter of fact, was heard—from one end of the School House to the other. Then the door was jerked open, and Figgins, Kerr, and Marmaduke walked in.

Manners laid down his camera. Monty Lowther put his tool upon the table. Tom Merry left off his careful inspection of the cricket-bat, and took a grip of the cane handle. The three chums were never caught napping. But Figgins & Co. had not come in hostile mood, as the expansive grin of the great Figgins proved.

"It's all right, kids," said Figgins, with a wave of the hand. "We've only come in for a little friendly chat. That cricket-bat won't be wanted, Tom Merry. You can keep it till we're bowling at your wicket—though it won't be of much use to you then, I expect."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, come in!" he said. "We're going to lick you at cricket, the same as we've licked you at footer; but it's rather previous to talk about cricket before the end of March. What have you come to see us about?"

"It's Kerr's birthday to-morrow."

"Is it?" said Tom Merry, with a look of surprise, as if he had never imagined that Kerr could have such a thing as a birthday at all.

"Yes," said Figgins. "Nothing remarkable in that, is there?"

"Oh, no! I won't forget to send Kerr a card, if that's what you've come to remind me of. A postcard will do, I suppose, so long as there's a loving message upon it?"

"Oh, don't rot!" said Kerr.

"We're giving a birthday feed in the New House," announced Figgins.

Manners and Lowther burst into a sudden cackle. It seemed funny to them for Figgins to tell them that, when they knew it already, and had already made arrangements for carrying off the provisions. Figgins stared at them.

"I don't see what there is to cackle at in that!" he exclaimed. "Haven't you ever heard of a birthday feed before?"

Tom Merry looked at his chums severely.

"I don't see, either!" he exclaimed. "Manners, stop that cackling instantly! Lowther, I'm surprised at you! What is there to laugh at in the idea of Figgy giving a birthday feed in honour of Kerr, whom we all know to be a worthy and respectable young man?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Kerr.

"Oh, if you're not respectable—"

"To come to business," interrupted Figgins. "We've asked Blake to come to the feed, and he says he's promised you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens are you cackling at now?"

"Nothing. Blake said he promised us, did he?"

"Yes; so he couldn't come."

"Well, as a matter of fact, that's just how the case stands."

"It's very unfortunate. We wanted the lot of you to come over," said Figgins. "It's to be a really ripping feed."

"First-rate," said Marmaduke.

"And it's my birthday," added Kerr. "Couldn't you manage to put off your feed to-morrow, Tom Merry, to another time—"

"And come along with Blake and feed with us instead?" said Figgins.

Tom Merry looked quite concerned.

"I'm awfully sorry!" he exclaimed. "I would if I could. But I've fixed the date now, and it's really impossible to get out of it. I suppose you couldn't manage to have your birthday another day, could you, Kerr?"

"How could I, ass?" said Kerr.

"Well, the birthday feed, then?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then I'm awfully sorry to miss a good thing," said Tom Merry, "to say nothing of the pleasure of your company, but I shall have to be excused."

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins, rather huffily. "We thought you might like to come, that's all. Never mind!"

"I'm really sorry!" said Tom Merry, looking concerned. "I can't very well explain now, Figgins; but it's quite impossible. I hope you'll have a good time—I mean, I wish Kerr many happy returns of the day."

"Thank you!" said Kerr.

"Oh, it's all right!" said Figgins. "If you can't come, you can't, and that's all there is about it. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Figgy, and many thanks!"

Figgins opened the door and went out with the Co. Tom Merry smiled as the door closed behind them.

"If Figgy only knew!" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The footsteps of Figgins & Co. died away down the passage. A minute later the door opened and Skimpole looked in.

"Can I come in, Tom Merry?"

"No!" roared Manners, dropping a protecting hand upon his camera. "Get out!"

"Really, Manners—"

"Oh, let him come in!" laughed Tom Merry. "There are enough of us to see that he doesn't do any damage, I think."

Manners looked at the amateur detective in a far from friendly way. He was nervous about his camera. Skimpole came in and closed the door.

"Well, been doing any more detective work?" asked Tom Merry.

Skimpole shook his head.

"No. There appears to be absolutely nothing wrong at St. Jim's, no mystery of any kind, you know; nothing to elucidate. Ah," ejaculated Skimpole abruptly, looking round the study, "I see that you fellows have been for a tramp in Rylcombe Lane."

"Do you?" grinned the Terrible Three.

"Yes; and you didn't get in much before locking-up, either," said the amateur detective, with a wise shake of his head.

"How do you make that out, Skimmy?"

"Look at the mud on the carpet," said Skimpole, pointing to the floor, where Figgins & Co. had been standing. "That kind of mud is the kind in Rylcombe Lane—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it was dry this afternoon," went on Skimpole sagely.

"Now, you see how damp the traces are, and that proves that you came in after it had begun to rain."

"But it isn't raining."

"There was a shower in Rylcombe Lane."

"My dear kid, you've deduced that wonderfully; only none of us have been out of the gates of St. Jim's since dinner."

Skimpole shook his head.

"It's useless to try to deceive an investigator like myself," he remarked. "That won't wash, you know, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry's glance grew ominous.

"Do you mean to say that you doubt my word, you skinny apology for a silly scarecrow?" he demanded warmly.

"Oh, no!" said Skimpole hastily. "But my deductions are absolutely infallible, you see—at least, in this case. The clues are obvious."

"Enough to hang a man on, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then it's a jolly good thing they don't hang anybody on the evidence of amateur detectives," said Tom Merry, "for we haven't been outside the gates of St. Jim's."

"I can't understand it, then. The clues are unmistakable."

"Figgins was standing there a few minutes ago."

"Oh, I see! It was Figgins who left these clues!"

"Certainly. You had better hang Figgins; or, better still, go and be hanged yourself," said Monty Lowther. "Any more discoveries, fathead?"

"I just dropped in to tell you that you needn't be alarmed about your camera," said Skimpole. "I reported to D'Arcy, and he called me an ass, and I refused to follow the case any further."

"It wouldn't be good for your personal comfort to follow it any further," said Manners, rather aggressively.

"But, I say, I suppose you don't know of any mysteries that require solving, do you?" asked Skimpole anxiously.

"I have studied the subject very deeply, and I am all ready to begin serious work now, and it seems a pity that I shouldn't find any case more important than hunting for a hidden camera."

"Well, if you like to search for a lost article, Skimmy," said Monty Lowther, with a thoughtful air.

"Certainly!" said Skimpole eagerly. "Have you lost anything?"

"No; but you have!"

"I?" said the amateur detective, looking puzzled. "I haven't lost anything, Lowther. At least, I don't remember."

"Yes, you have," said Monty Lowther blandly. "You've lost your brain, if you ever had one. Why not try for a clue and hunt for it?"

Skimpole looked disappointed.

"I really wish you would be serious, Lowther."

"Why not take up the case of the lost hedgehog?" suggested Tom Merry. "I hear that Blake has lost his hedgehog again, and—"

"If you are only going to joke on the subject—"

"Or, you could solve the mystery of the fire," said Manners reflectively. "You know—where does the fire go when it goes out? That's a great mystery—"

But Skimpole went out of the study and banged the door. He left the Terrible Three laughing heartily. Skimpole the detective seemed as rich as Skimpole the Socialist, if not a little more so. But the time was coming for Skimpole to distinguish himself, as we shall see.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Dead of Night.

"QUIET, there!"

"Right-ho!"

"Don't answer so loud, fathead!"

"Whom are you calling a fathead?"

"You, Manners, you ass! What's that you've got under your arm?"

"My camera."

"Oh, I had forgotten that!" muttered Tom Merry. "I really don't see what you want to bother with that for?"

"You're not the amateur photographer of the Junior Hobby Club," said Manners disdainfully. "I am going to take a photograph of the School House by moonlight."

"All right, come on!"

"And have it enlarged, and hang it on the wall of the club-room."

"Good! Ring off now!"

"You'll wake the whole giddy dormitory!" muttered Monty Lowther. "I believe I heard a fellow move then."

"I didn't hear anything."

"Shut up, and come along!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Lead the way, then!"

Tom Merry silently opened the door. Eleven had struck from the clock-tower of St. Jim's. The School House was dark and silent. In the Shell dormitory there were, however, at least three who were wakeful—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther. They had agreed to meet the chums of the Fourth Form a few minutes after eleven, and now they were up and dressed.

Tom Merry cast an anxious glance along the dark dormitory as he opened the door. He did not want any of the Form to awaken. Curious questions would have been awkward, and the possibility of being followed by some more than usually curious person might have spoiled everything. But the row of dim white beds was quite silent.

"I'm sure I heard somebody shift!" muttered Lowther again.

"Anybody awake?" called out Tom Merry, in a suppressed voice.

There was no reply.

"It's all right," said the hero of the Shell reassuringly.

"It was only some fellow turning in his sleep, Monty. Come on!"

The three chums quitted the dormitory, and silently closed the door behind them. And as the door closed, George Gore, the cad of the Shell, sat up in bed, and stared after them with wide, wakeful eyes, and a curious, sneering smile upon his face.

Quite unconscious of the fact that Gore had been awake, and had seen them leave the dormitory, the chums of the Shell went quietly along the passage.

All the Forms at St. Jim's were in bed by that hour, and only some of the masters were still up; but as the masters were more to be feared than the prefects, it was necessary to be very cautious.

The three chums reached the door of the Fourth Form dormitory, and found it half-open, and four dim forms waiting for them there.

"That you, Blake?" whispered Tom Merry.

"Yes. Where have you been? You're minutes late."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We were just coming to look for you," said Digby. "Thought perhaps you had lost your nerve, and were funk-ing it."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We can't be many minutes late. Manners had to stop and get his silly camera."

"What on earth does he want a camera for now?"

"I'm going to take a photograph of the School House by moonlight," said Manners, "to hang on the wall of the club-room."

"Scat! How long do you expect it's going to take you?"

"There's a full moon, and—"

"I suggest, deah boys, that we bweak Mannahs' camewah, so as to save time," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"And I suggest that I shall break your neck if you do," grunted Manners. Manners was an enthusiastic photographer, and, as a matter of fact, he thought far more of the photograph he was going to take by moonlight than of

the raid that was to be carried out upon Figgins & Co.'s quarters.

"Mannahs, I wegard that wemark as wude, not to say insultin'."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I wefuse to cheese it."

"Shut up," said Tom Merry, "and come along! There's no time to waste; and if you chatter here you'll have some beastly master poking his nose into the business."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm surprisid at you, Mannahs, weally! How you can stand there talkin' at such a time I weally don't compwehend."

"You ass! You're doing all the jabbering!" growled Lowther. "Why can't you ring off, and keep that chatter-box of yours quiet for a bit?"

"I distinctly wefuse to ring off. I wegard—"

Someone grasped D'Arcy by the back of the neck, and he was propelled forcibly along the passage. He was silent for a few moments, and then a muffled voice was heard:

"Leggo my beastly neck, you wuff wottah! You're cwumplin' my collah!"

"Will you shut up, then?"

"Ya-a-a-as, wathah!"

He was released. The juniors cautiously descended the stairs, and stopped at the hall window, and Tom Merry unfastened it. The window made a slight sound as it was opened, and the seven juniors stood quite still and listened anxiously. But no sound came from the great silent house.

"All serene!" whispered Manners.

Tom Merry climbed out upon the sill and stepped to the ground. Lowther followed, and then Blake. Manners came next, handing out his camera first to Tom Merry for safety. Then D'Arcy climbed out upon the sill.

"Buck up!" whispered Digby impatiently, as the swell of the School House slowly and laboriously made his way over the window-sill, in great uneasiness about his clothes, and the imminent peril of rumpling or soiling them.

D'Arcy, who never would be hurried, paused with one leg inside the window and the other across the sill outside, and turned his head towards Digby.

"I am sowwy, Dig—"

"Buck up!"

"I am extwemely sowwy," said the swell of the School House, with more emphasis, "but undah the circs. I must wefuse to buck up, if by that you mean that you wequire me to huwwy. The window-sill is extwemely dirty, and I am afwaid of soilin' my clothes."

"Get a move on you!"

"I weally do not perceive the weason for this excessive impatience, Digby. But if you are in a gweat huwwy, I will come in again, and let you get out first, deah boy."

"Get on, you ass!" whispered Dig fiercely.

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as an ass."

"Are you going to get off that window-sill?"

"I have alweady explained— Ow!"

D'Arcy's last exclamation was caused by a push from the exasperated Dig, which sent him rolling off the window-sill into the quad outside. He bumped down at the feet of Tom Merry with a loud gasp.

"My word!" gasped Tom Merry. "You made me jump! What did you want to plump down like that for, Gussy?"

Gussy scrambled to his feet.

"I didn't want to, Tom Mewwy. That wascal Digby pushed me in the wudest poss. mannah. I am goin' to thwash him."

"Keep your wool on."

"I wefuse to keep my wool on, whatevah that widiculous expwession may mean. I am goin' to give Digby a feahful thwashin'."

Digby dropped from the window-sill to the ground, and Henries followed him. D'Arcy rushed at Digby, who did not avoid him, but bent a little and caught him round the waist, and plucked him off the ground. The swell of St. Jim's was a light weight, and the sturdy, thick-set Digby swung him round easily.

"My—my—my beastly word!" gasped D'Arcy, as the grinning Dig swung him round and round. "Pway desist, deah boy! You are simply wuinin' my linen! My collah is wumpled up, and my shirt-fwont is— Oh, deah! Pway don't!"

"Are you going to be quiet, then?"

"Certainly not—I mean, yaas, wathah!"

Digby set him upon his feet again, breathless and very giddy. The swell of the School House frowned the frown of outraged dignity, but he was a fellow of his word, and made no further attempts at hostilities. He was saving up the fearful thrashing for a more suitable occasion, perhaps. Tom Merry led the way across the quadrangle towards the New House, and the rest of the juniors followed. Manners halted and looked round him in the brilliant moonlight, that made the quadrangle almost as light as by day.

Tom Merry looked back impatiently.

"Come on, Manners!"

"Wait a bit. I'm going to expose a film first, Tom, so that I can take my camera in as we come back."

"Oh, blow your camera! I'd forgotten it again."

Manners looked round for a suitable spot. The facade of the School House was bright in the moonlight, every window and door thrown into relief. Manners set his camera down in a favourable spot well back from the house, under an elm-tree. He glanced at the School House again. Most of the windows were dark, but here and there a light glimmered, and the nearest of the lighted windows was that of Mr. Linton's study. The master of the Shell could be seen, for his blind was not down, and the flimsy curtain offered little impediment to the view.

Tom Merry caught Manners by the shoulder, and pointed to the window of the Form master's study. Mr. Linton was at his table, writing, and every feature of his face could be clearly seen in the light of the reading-lamp. His eyes were on his work, but if he had glanced out of window he could hardly have failed to see the juniors in the bright, clear moonlight.

"Let's get out of this, Manners; it's not safe."

"You've got to get the ladder," said Manners. "Go on and get it, and put it up against the New House, while I see to this."

"Well, don't let Linton spot you, then. He's not in an amiable temper to-day; you remember how he licked Gore for calling him a duffer."

"I'll be jolly careful; I'll keep in the shadow of the elm. But I must be careful how I set this, or it may be spoiled. You cut along!"

"Very well, then."

Tom Merry & Co. went on, leaving Manners to dispose his camera as he thought fit. Taggles, the school porter, had been bribed and corrupted, as Tom Merry put it, to leave out his long ladder. Taggles knew perfectly well that it was wanted for some trick or other, but he did not care. He knew that the juniors would never give him away, if there should be an inquiry into the matter, and for the rest, a tip of a shilling was not despised by Taggles. All was grist that came to his mill. He left the ladder out, affecting to know nothing; and Tom Merry knew just where to find it.

The ladder was there, sure enough, and in a few minutes more it was in the hands of the adventurous juniors. They ran it swiftly along, keeping in the shadow of the elms as much as possible, to the wall of the New House under the window of Figgy's study. That window, as well as nearly every other in the New House, was dark. Figgins & Co. had long been in bed, and were far from dreaming that any enterprising burglars were at work.

"Quiet!" whispered Tom Merry, as the ladder was reared against the wall. "It's rather long for this; don't clump the end through the window."

"Ha, ha! That would be wathah funnay, Tom Mewwy."

"It wouldn't be funnay, as you call it, for old Ratty to come out and catch us burgling his old house," growled Tom Merry.

"That's right!" muttered Lowther, as the ladder dropped into place beside the window. "Better leave it there, instead of letting it rest on the sill, and I can step straight off it on to the sill, and—"

"You mean I can, Lowthah."

"You! You'd break your neck. Not that that would matter much, of course; only it would spoil the game."

"I weally think I had bettah go up the laddah first."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

A dark figure came running up in the moonlight. Manners rejoined his comrades.

"Have you fixed up that beastly camera?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes. I shall have the negative all right by the time we go back to the School House," said Manners. "I hope it will be a success. I see you're all ready. Hold the ladder, and I will go up first."

"You won't!" said Blake. "That's my business."

"Yours? Why, what rot!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it distinctly as wot, Blake. What Mannahs says is equally wot, howevah. I am goin' up first."

"Rats!" said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah— Why, there's that boundah Mewwy goin' up the laddah! Tom Mewwy, I insist upon you immediately weturnin' and lettin' me go up first."

But Tom Merry gave no ear to the indignant swell of the School House. He had settled the question of precedence by mounting the ladder, and was already almost at the window of Figgins's study.

CHAPTER 7.

A Raid, and an Alarm.

"TOM MEWWY—"

"Shut up, Gussy!"
 "Pway be careful, deah boy! I weally wish you had left it to me. Pway be careful! If you fell and bwoke your neck it would be such a beastly bothah, you know."

Blake pinched the swell of St. Jim's.

"Do you want to wake up the New House, ass?"

"Ow!"

"Will you shut up?"

"Leave off pinchin' my beastly arm!"

"I'll wring your neck instead if you don't shut up. Are you all right up there, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, all serene!"

Tom Merry had reached the window of Figgins's study. He placed a knee on the window-sill, and felt the sash. Blake watched him anxiously. The form of the junior was plainly to be seen against the window in the bright moonlight, silhouetted against the glimmering glass.

"Is it fastened?"

"Of course it is."

"Then you had better let me come up and unfasten it."

"You had bettah let me come up, deah boy."

"I can manage it. You asses keep quiet; you'll wake the place! Hold the ladder tight, and don't let it wobble, you cuckoos!"

"If you are chawactewisin' me as a cuckoo, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up! Somebody wring his neck! I'll have this thing open in a jiffy."

With a foot on the ladder, and a knee on the sill, the hero of the Shell set to work. He opened the strongest blade of his pocket-knife, and passed it up between the sashes, and easily forced back the old-fashioned catch. There was a click, which was heard below in the stillness of the night. Tom Merry shut his knife and returned it to his pocket.

"All serene?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Yes, right as rain!"

"You haven't got the window open yet," said Blake.

"That won't take long."

It took some minutes, however, to prise the lower sash up. But it was done at last, and the way into Figgins's study lay open. The blind was not down, and there was nothing to bar Tom Merry's entrance. He peered into the dark study. The moonlight lay like a bar of silver across the gloom within. He could see the door, and see that it was shut. His comrades below watched him anxiously as he crawled into the window and disappeared.

He looked out again the next minute and waved his hand.

"All serene!" he called out, in a suppressed voice.

"Good! Buck up with the business!"

"I'll come up the ladder and take the things as you hand them out," said Arthur Augustus, making a step at the ladder.

Unfortunately, Blake made a step at the same time, with the same object, and the two collided, and D'Arcy sat down in the quad, while Blake staggered against the ladder. Monty Lowther calmly pushed him aside and mounted the rungs, a big cricket-bag under his arm.

"Blake, I wegard you as—"

"You utter ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an uttah ass!"

"I'll—I'll—"

"Shut up!" said Manners. "Hold the ladder, you giddy cuckoos!"

Lowther was already at the top. He stood there, with the bag resting on the window-sill. Tom Merry had vanished, but in a few moments he reappeared with his hands full. He passed out the good things raided from the cupboard of Figgins & Co.—pies, puddings, cakes, jams, and marmalades, preserved fruits and jellies and biscuits and apples and oranges and bags of nuts. Again and again he came to the window, and still the supply was unexhausted. Lowther gave a low whistle.

"My hat! They're doing this in style, Tom! There's enough tommy here to feed a regiment of dragoons, I should think. Is there any more?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Yes, rather! That's about half."

"Scott! We shall want the other bag, then. Lucky I thought of bringing it. Wait a tick till I get this lot down."

Lowther descended the ladder with the crammed bag. He handed it to Manners, and received an empty one in exchange, with which he returned to the window. Then the filling recommenced. There was barely enough to fill the second bag. But the quantity of the good things made the School House juniors open their eyes.

They had had some big feasts in the School House, but seldom anything quite up to this in magnificence. Figgins &

Co. had undoubtedly intended to celebrate the birthday of a member of the Co. in first-class style.

"That's the lot," said Tom Merry at last.

"And a jolly good lot, too," said Lowther, with a chuckle.

"Don't forget the billet-doux!" called out Blake from below.

"What-ho!" grinned Tom Merry.

He felt in his pockets, and returned to the raided cupboard. In the place of the missing provisions he laid a card on the bare shelf. Then he closed the cupboard door, and climbed out of the window. He carefully closed the sash. It was impossible to fasten it again from the outside, but that was of little consequence. When Figgins & Co. found the cupboard empty, in the morning, they would know which way the raiders had come, but the knowledge would not benefit them much.

Tom Merry stepped upon the ladder and began to descend. Crash! Through the stillness of the moonlit quadrangle came a terrific crash of breaking glass, followed by a startled cry clearly heard in the still night.

Tom Merry gave a violent start. So did the juniors below who were holding the ladder. The sudden crash in the stillness was enough to startle anybody. The juniors simply jumped. The ladder swayed, and Tom Merry came down it with a rush. He landed among his comrades sprawling, and several of them were sent flying right and left.

"Ow!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh!" roared Manners.

Tom Merry sat on the ground, across Blake. Blake wriggled spasmodically.

"Gerrof me chest!" came a gurgling voice from beneath the hero of the Shell. "You maniac, gerrof me chest!"

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

"I couldn't help it!" he gasped. "What did you want to jerk the ladder for, you set of blithering idiots?"

"It made us jump," jerked out Manners. "What was that crash? It sounded like a window breaking."

"And that's what it was," said Blake, panting. "It was a stone crashing through a window, as sure as a gun."

"What does it mean?"

"What has happened then?"

"Hush!" whispered Tom Merry, holding up his hand.

"Look!"

He pointed across to the School House. The juniors followed the direction of his finger with their eyes, and there was a muttered exclamation of amazement. In the brilliant moonlight the opposite building could be clearly seen across the great quadrangle, excepting where the elms interposed. The window of Mr. Linton's study, with the light burning clearly there, was easily visible, though small in the distance.

In the middle pane was a rough, jagged gap, evidently smashed there by some missile hurled from the quadrangle. That was the cause of the sudden crash which had so startled the raiders. And as the juniors stared in amazement at the broken window, the lighted square was suddenly darkened by a shadow. The master of the Shell was looking out into the moonlit quadrangle!

CHAPTER 8.

Shut Out!

TOM MERRY caught his breath quickly.

"Get back to the wall!" he muttered.

The juniors understood, and obeyed at once.

If Mr. Linton, looking out across the moonlit quadrangle, turned his glance in their direction, there was nothing to screen them and the high ladder from view. The distance was considerable, but the moon made the quadrangle like daylight, and, though they were not likely to be recognised, they might easily be seen.

They crouched back against the wall, as the only chance of escaping detection; unless the master of the Shell scrutinised the spot carefully, they might be lost in the general mass of the New House.

The dark figure remained at the window of the School House study. The crash of the breaking glass must have given Mr. Linton one of the greatest shocks of his life, and the juniors could imagine what his feelings were like as he stood staring out into the moonlight through the jagged gap in the window-pane.

Tom Merry, watching him tensely, saw his hand go up to his head, and the hero of the Shell gave a start.

"I say, did you see that?" he muttered.

"Yaas, wathah! He was tappin' his cocoanut!"

"The stone must have hit him."

"Bai Jove!"

"My word!" muttered Digby. "Who can have thrown it? Surely the fool-idiot, whoever he was, can't have intended the stone to hit Mr. Linton!"

"I shouldn't think so."

"It will mean expulsion for the utter ass when he's caught."

"It may mean squalls for some of us, if we're caught," said Tom Merry seriously. "If Linton discovers that we were out to-night—"

"How beastly unlucky that we should be here now!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"I wish I knew who'd played that mad trick," he murmured. "By Jove! I'd make him sit up for it!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Who could it have been?" muttered Blake.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I can't guess."

"I wish he'd move or say something," growled Herries. "What's he standing there for like an Egyptian mummy, I'd like to know?"

The Form master was standing quite still, looking out into the quad. Perhaps he had not yet recovered from the shock. He seemed to be searching the quadrangle with his eyes, but apparently he had not caught sight of the group of juniors crouched against the wall of the New House, or of the high ladder reared up to the window-sill of Figgins's study.

Suddenly the dark figure at the broken window was seen to give a start. Tom Merry looked quickly at his comrades. He knew what that start meant—the Form master had seen something.

"Look out!" muttered Tom. "He's on the scent now. Great Scott! We shall have to do some dodging this time!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The form disappeared from the lighted window. The juniors did not need telling that the master of the Shell was about to leave the School House to look round the quad in search of the window-breaker.

"No time to lose," muttered Blake. "We must get this confounded ladder away, and bunk out of sight!"

Tom Merry rapped out his directions swiftly, like a good general accustomed to deal with emergencies.

"Manners, you and Lowther get those bags away. Don't try to get them into the house now; smuggle them into the wood-shed—we can get them in to-morrow. If we're spotted we don't want to have the grub confiscated."

"Right-ho!"

"Get off at once! We'll get rid of the ladder."

"We're off!"

And Manners and Lowther dashed off with the crammed bags, keeping in the shadows of the elms as much as possible. The crash of the breaking window had been heard by other ears. The juniors heard a window open, and Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked out into the quadrangle.

"That's Kildare," muttered Blake. He knew the window, though he could not recognise the captain of the school at that distance. "We shall have a regular hornets' nest about our giddy ears soon."

"I wish I knew who threw that stone!" muttered Tom Merry. "I wonder where he is now?"

"Safe, you can bet. I'd wager a lot that the rotter, whoever he is, knows that we're out here, and has counted on our getting the blame."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"What was that noise?"

It was Kildare's voice calling from his window. The captain of St. Jim's knew that something was going on, but he had not the least idea of what it was.

The juniors were not likely to answer. They dragged the ladder down silently, and, carrying it between them, rushed it away. Fortunately, an angle of the building covered their retreat a dozen paces or so from Figgins's window.

They ran the ladder quickly to the spot where they had found it. They plumped it down with great relief. Tom Merry held up his hand for silence.

"Hark! That's Linton's voice!"

A voice could be heard in the stillness of the quadrangle.

"Did you hear the breaking of my window, Kildare?"

The master of the Shell was evidently under Kildare's window, speaking to the captain.

"Good!" muttered Tom Merry. "We know where he is now, and can give him a wide berth. Come on, and keep quiet."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Don't speak a word!"

"Certainly not, deah boy. I regard it as most important to be extremely cautious at a moment like this."

"Shut up!" muttered Blake fiercely.

"Not a word, I tell you!" growled Tom Merry.

"Quite right, Tom Mewwy. Why can't you keep quiet, Blake? Tom Mewwy has warned you twice not to make a waw, and—"

Blake seized the swell of the School House by the back of the neck, and ran him along. The juniors followed swiftly.

D'Arcy's eyeglass fell off, and dangled at the end of its cord, and D'Arcy gasped in Blake's iron grip.

"Another word," muttered his chum, "and I'll sling you over for Linton to discover, and the busted window will be put down to you!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on, ass!"

The juniors were keeping carefully in the shade of the elms. Under the blackness of the trees they were invisible. They had lost the sound of voices, but when they paused as near the School House as the elms allowed them to go, and looked up at the moonlit facade, Kildare was no longer at his window. Mr. Linton was standing there, evidently waiting. Tom Merry gave a low whistle of dismay.

"Kildare's coming out to join him," he muttered.

"We can't get into the School House while he's standing there," murmured Blake, "and we can't stay here to be routed out."

"Bai, Jove, no! I— Ow! Who's that?"

"Shut up, you ass!" muttered the voice of Lowther fiercely. "It's only us."

"You made me jump, Lowthah, comin' up so beastly quietly!" said D'Arcy. "I weally wish—"

"Did you want us to hail you, you duffer?"

Manners and Lowther had silently joined the juniors under the trees. Their coming had been so silent that some of the others had been startled as well as D'Arcy.

"No, wathah not! That would have been hardly cautious, undah the circs, Lowthah. But weally, deah boy—"

"Have you put the bags in safety?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"Yes, they're in the wood-shed, hidden safe enough. Nobody will come upon them before we've had a chance of getting them into the School House in the morning."

"Good!"

"Hallo, there's Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's, in trousers and slippers, and an old Norfolk jacket, came out of the School House, and joined the master of the Shell. The juniors were near enough to hear Mr. Linton speak.

"There seems to have been no one else alarmed, Kildare. No need to wake anyone; we can search for the rascals ourselves."

"Certainly, sir. But I cannot make out exactly what has happened," said Kildare, with a puzzled look. "Someone has thrown a stone through your window!"

"Yes. I was busily writing, when I was startled almost out of my wits by a sudden terrific crash. A pane in my window was sm^{ashed} to fragments, and some of the pieces of broken glass struck me. I have a slight cut on my forehead, as you see. A huge stone dropped upon my floor inside the window."

"You amaze me, sir!"

"I looked out of the window as soon as I could collect myself, and after some minutes I saw that there was someone in the quadrangle—several persons, in fact. I could not make out whom they were, but I am certain they were juniors. They were close up to the wall of the New House, and the ladder was leaning against the wall."

"Then it was probably some New House juniors."

"That is what I think. Probably the ladder was used by them to descend from a window to reach the quadrangle."

"But how could they have got the ladder there, sir?"

"Oh, one of them may have come down upon a rope to place it there."

"Yes, that is possible."

"It certainly looks, at all events, as if this amazing outrage had been committed by New House boys."

"But the motive—"

"The motive, of course, was to give me a terrible shock; and, indeed, it was a terrible one," said the master of the Shell. "Such a shock might easily have proved serious to a man with a weak heart. Fortunately, I am not troubled in that way. But the unfeeling brutality of such an action, and the danger of it, have made me determined to punish the perpetrator with the utmost severity."

"He will deserve it."

"The ladder has disappeared now. It must have been removed during the minute or less I took in descending from my room," said Mr. Linton. "The young rascals cannot, of course, have re-entered the house without it in so short a time, for I have been watching the place since I came out, and have seen no one. They must be still in the quadrangle."

"Yes, if they were New House fellows."

"I have no doubt upon that point. In case of a mistake, however, it will be as well to close the door of the School House, so that if the boys should belong to this house they cannot re-enter without our knowledge."

Tom Merry suppressed a chuckle.

The closing of the door would not bar the re-entrance of

the raiders, as they had been careful to leave the hall window unfastened.

Kildare snapped the School House door shut, and came down the steps again and rejoined Mr. Linton. Then the two of them crossed the moonlit quad. towards the New House. They disappeared round an angle of the building, and Tom Merry whispered to his comrades:

"Come on; now's our chance!"

"Right-ho!"

The juniors dashed out of the shadows of the thick elms, and in a moment or two were across the open moonlight and into the shadow of the porch of the School House.

There they were again safe from a casual glance. Keeping in the cover of the gloomy porch, they had nothing to fear till the Form master and the captain of St. Jim's should seek to re-enter the School House.

"Safe at last!" muttered Tom Merry, feeling at the window to open it. "But it was a narrow shave."

"Beastly narrow," said Blake. "But, I say, he's got an idea into his noddle that the trick was played by a New House junior."

"It couldn't have been," said Manners. "We should have known if anybody had come out of the New House."

"That's what I was thinking. It was a School House fellow who broke the window, and I wish I knew the rotter's name."

"Yaas, wathah! We had bettah set Skimpole on the twack to-morrow to discover him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or send for Tom Mewwy's friend, Fewwahs Locke. The mystewy weally ought to be cleared up, you know."

"We'll clear it up," said Blake. "Linton's got the idea into his head that the chaps he saw against the New House wall broke his window. If he finds out about our raid, he's bound to think we did the window-breaking business. Then we shall have to nose out the real rotter to save our own skins, I suppose."

"Yaas, wathah! You're a beastly long time with that window, Tom Mewwy! Do you want us to remain here to give Mr. Linton a reception when he comes back?"

"I can't get it open."

"Wats! Twy again!"

Tom Merry tried again, but without avail. The hall window remained fast. Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"It's jammed," he muttered. "Yet I don't see how that can have happened. Either it's jammed, or else—"

"Else what, deah boy?"

"It's fastened inside."

"Phew!" whistled Blake. "Let me have a try."

Blake tried, and then Digby tried, and then Lowther. But it was useless. The window refused to budge. It was fastened inside!

"My hat!" muttered Blake. "The rotter who threw that stone at Linton's window got in this way, and fastened the window behind him!"

There was no doubt about it. The juniors were shut out. They stood still in the shadow of the porch, and looked at each other in the silence of dismay.

CHAPTER 9.

Caught.

TOM MERRY was the first to break the silence.

"The beastly thing's fastened! We can't get in here. We shall have to try somewhere else, that's all."

Blake gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders.

"Where else, kid? You know all the windows are fastened up as safe as anything now, since that burglary here a while back."

"Yaas, wathah! We couldn't possibly get a window open unless we could get a laddah and climb up to one of the bedroom windows, deah boy."

"I suppose so," said Tom. "We can't get a ladder, of course. If we tried that game they would spot us at once."

"That's a dead cert."

"I might manage to climb up the water-pipe near our study window, and get in there," Tom Merry remarked thoughtfully. "You know we always leave our study window open at the top for fresh air, and so it would be easy to get in."

"It would be feahfully dangewous!"

"Well, I have been down the pipe, so I don't see why I shouldn't go up."

"You have been down the pipe, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You must be dweamin', deah boy! That watah-pipe is much too nawwow to admit you; and besides—"

"Ass! I mean, I have climbed down it."

"I see, deah boy! Why can't you say what you mean, then? Well, weally, if you have climbed down you ought to be able to climb up, so—"

"Hist!" whispered Digby, who was looking out of the porch into the moonlight.

"What's the beastly mattah, deah boy?"

"They're coming!"

"Linton and Kildare?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"My only Panama hat! We're in for it now!"

"Yaas, wathah! Keep cool, deah boys!"

"Will you shut up? They may not be coming into the porch yet, and if we lie low they may not see us," whispered Blake fiercely.

"Quite a mistake, Blake; they are comin' stwaight towards us," said D'Arcy, looking out into the quadrangle.

"Silence! Dry up!"

"I wefuse to dwy up, undah the circs. As I was saying, deah boys, keep cool, and leave the talkin' to me!"

"Yes, we're likely to do that."

"I shall be able to explain to Mr. Linton—"

A hand was pressed over Gussy's mouth, and he was forcibly silenced. He sputtered under Tom Merry's pressing palm, while Mr. Linton and Kildare came slowly towards the steps of the School House.

They were talking as they came, and their voices, though low, were quite audible in the stillness. The half-hour had just chimed out from the clock tower.

"It is very strange, Kildare; not a trace of them!"

"No, sir. Are you quite sure that you were not mistaken?"

"Quite sure upon that point, Kildare," said the master of the Shell, with a very decided nod of the head.

"It is easy to mistake a shadow in the moonlight."

"There were several boys—at least three or four—as well as a ladder, reared against the wall of the New House!" said Mr. Linton positively.

"Then I cannot imagine where the boys are, sir."

"No, that is a puzzle. We have looked about. They have certainly not re-entered the New House," said Mr. Linton, pausing on the steps of the School House as he spoke, to take a last survey of the quadrangle. "But there are, of course, plenty of obscure corners where they may be hiding."

"That is possible, of course."

"I could knock up the New House and search for any boys missing from their beds," Mr. Linton remarked thoughtfully; "but there are objections to that plan. Mr. Ratcliff would not be pleased at being disturbed."

Kildare smiled.

"No, I don't think he would, sir."

"And, besides, if it should happen that the delinquents were not New House boys after all, I am afraid that Mr. Ratcliff would never let us hear the end of it," Mr. Linton went on. "I do not care to take that course."

"Then what—"

"I shall remain here, in this porch," said Mr. Linton, his face setting in a determined expression. "From here I can see anyone who should attempt to re-enter the New House at the spot where I saw the ladder placed."

"That is true, but—"

"I do not wish you to remain up with me, Kildare; you can go back to bed; I shall remain here on the watch till I have caught the rascals. It is a serious matter, and I am determined that it shall be sifted to the bottom."

"I will remain with you willingly if you wish, sir."

"Not at all; it is not worth while."

"Then if you will unlock the door—"

"Certainly."

Mr. Linton produced his key and stepped into the shadowy stone porch. Seven juniors were crouching back, as far from the door as possible, in the shade of the stone pillars. Even at that crucial moment they hoped against hope that Mr. Linton would not see them, and Tom Merry's pressure upon D'Arcy's incautious mouth grew harder.

That was rather unfortunate, as it turned out. D'Arcy gasped for breath, and his gasp made Mr. Linton turn round as suddenly as if he were moved by a spring. He glared straight at the shadowy corner where Tom Merry, Manners, and D'Arcy were huddled. He took his hand from the key in the door.

"So I have found you!"

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "I weally am wathah glad, as a mattah of fact! You have vewy neahly suffocated me, Tom Mewwy!"

"I wish I had quite!" growled Tom Merry.

"That is a bwutal wemark!"

"Stand out here, where I can see you!" said the master of the Shell, in his cold, sharp voice.

The juniors stepped out into the moonlight. Mr. Linton looked them over with an eye like a gimlet.

"Are there any more of you?"

The rest of the juniors came out of the shadows. Seven

dismayed culprits stood before the stern-faced Form-master.

Kildare looked on in amazement. The discovery of the juniors in the porch had taken him quite aback.

"And now," said Mr. Linton, in measured tones, "which of you was it that threw the stone through my window?"

"Weally, my dear sir—"

"Answer my question, Tom Merry!"

"It was none of us, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Merry!"

"I have told you the truth, sir."

The master of the Shell looked exasperated.

"Do you mean to say, Merry, that it was not one of you who hurled a stone through my window a short time ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you were out of your House at the time?"

"Yes, sir, that is true."

"Where were you, Merry?"

"Over by the New House, sir," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Ah! Then the boys I saw in the moonlight there—"

"We were there, sir; we thought you saw us."

"Yaas, wathah; and it was beastly wotten—"

"Silence, D'Arcy! So you were the boys I saw by the New House? The outrage, then, was not committed by New House boys?"

"I think not, sir. So far as we know, none of the New House boys came out of the house at all," said Tom Merry.

"And you deny that it was one of you who threw the stone at my window, and caused me a severe shock to the nerves?"

"It was not one of us, sir."

"Then some other School House boy must have been out?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Do you know whom it was?"

"I don't, sir; I wish I did."

"You heard the crash, I suppose, when the stone broke my window?" said the master of the Shell, looking keenly at Tom Merry.

"Yes, sir. The thing startled me, and made me fall off the ladder."

"What were you doing with the ladder at the New House?"

"It was a joke on Figgins, sir."

"Ah, I see; some more of the absurd rivalry between the two houses! You have been to play some absurd joke on Figgins?"

"That's the case, sir; we—"

"Yaas, wathah, sir! We've collahed—ow!"

D'Arcy broke off his ill-timed explanation with a yelp of pain. The Form master gave him an angry look.

"What do you mean by making that absurd noise, D'Arcy?"

"Somebody twod on my toe, sir!" gasped D'Arcy. "I was just about to tell you that we had waided the—ow—ow—ow!"

"D'Arcy! How dare you?"

"Somebody twod on my beastly toe again, sir!"

"If you make another sound, D'Arcy, or say another word, I shall cane you severely! Now, Merry, you know perfectly well that you have broken an important rule of the college by being out of your house after bedtime, but if you are really not guilty of the outrage that has occurred, I should be inclined to look upon that with a lenient eye; in fact, I should simply report the matter to your housemaster, and leave Mr. Railton to deal with it as he thought fit. But—"

"I assure you, sir, that I have not the slightest idea of who threw the stone," said Tom Merry earnestly.

"I should like to believe you, Merry; I have always known you to be a truthful boy; but it is singular that the thing should happen at the very time that you are in the quadrangle without leave!"

"Yaas, that is weally wathah stwange; but, as one gentleman to another, sir, I assuah you that we know nothin' of the outrage!" said Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Linton coughed.

"How did you get out of the house, Merry?"

"By the hall window, sir."

"Then how is it I find you still here?"

"Someone has fastened the window on the inside."

"Ah, indeed! Then you are shut out!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry ruefully; "but for that we should not have been here still."

"I have no doubt of it."

Mr. Linton glanced at the window and tested it. Then he nodded, satisfied that Tom Merry's explanation was correct, so far.

"The window is certainly fastened, and I suppose it must

have been fastened from within. Doubtless there was someone else in the quadrangle to-night."

"It's pretty certain, sir," said Kildare. "These youngsters would have gone in the way they came out if it hadn't been closed against them; that stands to reason!"

"I suppose so." The Form master unlocked the door. "Go in at once, and return to your beds, and this matter will be seen into to-morrow!"

"Yes, sir. Good-night!"

The juniors entered the hall of the School House; Mr. Linton and Kildare followed them in; and the door was quietly closed again. The juniors went upstairs and separated in the passage, the chums of Study No. 6 going to the Fourth Form dormitory and the Terrible Three keeping on to the quarters of the Shell.

Tom Merry had just opened the dormitory door, when Manners gave a sudden start, and stopped.

"My hat; I'd forgotten!"

"Forgotten what?" asked Tom Merry.

"My camera!"

"Eh; your camera?"

"You know I left it out there to take a moonlight photo of the School House—"

"My word; so you did! Well, it will have a jolly long exposure by the time you close the lens," grinned Tom Merry; "that won't be till the morning!"

"Won't it?" said Manners determinedly, turning back into the passage. "I'm not going to have my photograph spoiled, I assure you!"

"Come in, you ass; you can take another some other time! Linton's only just gone into his room, and he's bound to spot you if you go downstairs now!"

"I can't help that; I'm not going to leave my camera out in the quad. all night!"

"Come back, ass!"

"Rats!"

And Manners went quietly down the stairs.

"The ass!" grunted Lowther. "He'll be caught, sure as a gun!"

"Sure to be!"

The chums listened anxiously on the landing. Kildare and Mr. Linton had gone into their rooms again, and Kildare's light was already out. Tom Merry heard a faint sound below as the door opened under Manners' hand.

"If he shuts it—" muttered Lowther.

But Manners did not shut the door. He left it open while he scuttled across to the elms and recovered his camera. A minute more and he was in the School House again, and had silently closed the door, and was stealing upstairs to rejoin his chums. The three entered the dormitory.

"Got it?" asked Lowther.

"Yes; it is all right! I don't know if it has been exposed too long, though; the moon is very bright! I'm afraid the photograph—"

"Oh, blow the photograph!"

And the chums of the Shell tumbled into bed in the silent dormitory. The thought of the trouble that was pretty certain to come with the morrow did not disturb the healthy sleep of youth. They were in the land of dreams in a very few minutes.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry's Invitation.

"MANY happy returns of the day!"

Kerr was awakened in the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House by a hearty thump on the shoulder, and the words of greeting.

"Ger-rooh! Gro— What's the matter?"

Figgins laughed.

"Oh, don't be alarmed; it's only Figgy! Many happy returns of the day. Have you forgotten that it's your birthday?"

"You needn't bash me through the bottom of the bed if it is," grumbled Kerr, as he sat up in bed. "Jolly cold this morning!"

"Never mind; it's a fine day, and think—"

"Think of the feed we're going to celebrate it with," said Fatty Wynn, rolling his round eyes in ecstatic anticipation. Fatty was usually the last up in the dormitory, but the thought of the gorgeous feed awaiting him that day had been in his mind, and he simply could not lie in bed now. He had dreamed of it, and now he awoke with the thought of it in his brain, and he was restless with happy anticipation.

Kerr tumbled out of bed.

"Thanks, Figgy, only don't bash so hard next time. By the way, you haven't invited the fellows who are to come in the place of those School House wasters."

"Plenty of time for that to-day," said Figgins

"May as well have a look in and make cure the grub's



Tom Merry passed out the good things raided from the cupboard of Figgins & Co.

all right as we go down," Fatty Wynn remarked, when the chums of the Fourth left the dormitory.

Figgins grinned.
"Oh, that's all right!" he said. "I locked the study door last night, and took the key out, and carried it up to bed with me."

"Good. But do you know," said Kerr meditatively, "that a curious thought struck me about Tom Merry—"

He paused, and his chums looked at him inquiringly.
"It's curious that he should be giving a feed to-day," said Kerr, "and that Blake and his lot should be already engaged for it when we asked them. It struck me that perhaps Tom Merry had some idea of commandeering our feed—"

"That's why I locked the door last night, because I thought of that," said Figgins. "I've no doubt the thought crossed his mind."

"What I mean is, he may have had some plan—"
"I don't see what plan he could have for getting into a bolted-up house and through a locked door."

"Better go and have a look at the grub, anyway," said Fatty Wynn. "Kerr makes me feel quite anxious. What should we do if we lost the feed?"

"Do without it," said Figgins.
"It's no joking matter, Figgy; I really believe it would break my heart," Fatty Wynn exclaimed pathetically.

"We'd jolly well snatch Tom Merry baldheaded if he had collared the grub," said Marmaduke. "But it can't have happened."

"We'll have a look, anyway."
The four juniors went down to Figgins's study. Figgins found the door still locked when he reached it, and produced a key from his pocket to open it. The chums of the New House went in, and Fatty Wynn crossed at once to the cupboard.

He opened the door, and the next moment there was a terrible whoop.

"Done!"
"What's the matter?" exclaimed Figgins, springing after him to look into the cupboard.

"My hat!" yelled Kerr. "It's gone!"
"Your hat's gone?" exclaimed Marmaduke, in amazement.

"No, ass; the grub!"
"The grub's gone?"
"Yes."

"And here's this in the place of it," said Figgins, in a shaking voice, lifting a card from the cupboard, and reading out what was written upon it. Listen. 'Tom Merry & Co. have great pleasure in inviting Figgins & Co. to a feed in the School House on the occasion of Kerr's birthday, the feed to commence at seven sharp. A real treat promised. R.S.V.P.'"

The chums of the New House stared at one another.
In a sense, it was kind of Tom Merry to ask them to the purloined feed, but just then it seemed to Figgins & Co. like adding insult to injury.

"Tom Merry!" ejaculated Fatty Wynn faintly
"Inviting us to a feed!" murmured Marmaduke.

"On the occasion of my birthday!" snorted Kerr.
"R.S.V.P.," said Figgins crumpling the card in his hand.
"I'll R.S.V.P. them, the horrid, rotten bounders!"

"Repondez s'il vous plait," said Kerr, who was rather proud of his French. "Let's go and repondez, Figgy."

"How did the beasts get in?" said the bewildered Figgins.
"The door was locked, and School House keys don't fit New House locks."

"Can't imagine, unless they came down the chimney."
"They came in at the window," said Marmaduke.

"How the dickens did they get up a sheer brick wall," said Figgins, "that's what I want to know?"

"They had a ladder of course."
"Then it was a jolly deep-laid plan, and they must have been getting ready for it yesterday," said Figgins. "Had it all cut and dried, I suppose, by the time I went over to ask them here to a feed."

"My hat! How they must have grinned up their sleeve!"
"Now I come to think of it, some of them did cackle, but I didn't catch on then to what they were cackling about."

A grin broke over Kerr's face. The Scottish partner in the Co. had a keen sense of humour, and the ridiculousness of the situation struck him at once.

"It's nothing to laugh at, Kerr," said Fatty Wyan almost tearfully. "There's our great feed gone—"

"Well, we'd better accept Tom Merry's invitation," said Kerr.

"Rats!" said Figgins. "Accept Tom Merry's invitation to our own feed! More likely go and snatch him baldheaded for his cheek in asking us!"

"That's a better idea," exclaimed Marmaduke. "Come on; the School House rotters will be out now, and we shall find Tom Merry in the quad., I expect."

And the New House quartette hurried out of the House. It was a bright, cold morning, and the quadrangle was already lively. The first School House boy the Co. met was Skimpole, who was wandering along with his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed on the ground, and a thoughtful frown upon his face. Tom Merry was not to be seen yet, nor were any of his chums. As a matter of fact they were not rising that morning earlier than they could help, after losing so much of their sleep over-night.

Figgins gave Skimpole a slap on the back that startled him out of his reverie. The amateur detective of St. Jim's jumped, and looked up.

"Hallo, Figgins!" he exclaimed. "I've been thinking—"

"I thought you had a pain somewhere, by your look," said Figgins.

"No, I've only been thinking," said Skimpole innocently. "You know I've taken up detective work lately—"

"Vice Socialism, deposed," said Figgins.

"Eh? I say I have taken up detective work lately," said Skimpole, who usually followed out a train of thought while others were speaking, and then went on unheeding when his turn came again. "But there's simply no scope for a detective at St. Jim's. I was thinking of writing to Ferrers Locke—"

"Tom Merry's friend, the detective?"

"Yes. I was thinking of writing to him and asking him if he would care to take me as his assistant in London."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a joke, Figgins; I'm perfectly serious. There's no scope for me at St. Jim's, you see," explained Skimpole.

"I have been looking for a mystery to unravel for a long time—"

"And you can't find any?"

"No. Nothing against the law ever seems to happen here. It's rather rotten. If one of the fellows would rob another fellow's desk, it would give me a chance. I've heard of that happening at schools. But I don't expect anything of the sort to happen here," said Skimpole, in a disparaging way.

"I should think you don't," said Figgins warmly. "Of all the champion asses— But it's no good talking to you. If you want to discover something, discover Tom Merry, and bring him out here to be slain."

"What's the matter?"

"Our study was raided last night, that's all, and a feed collared," said Figgins darkly.

The amateur detective looked eager.

"Did the rascals leave any clue?" he exclaimed. "I will undertake to track them down, if you like. Lead me to the scene of the crime—"

"Ass! It was Tom Merry and his gang did it, and they left us a note to tell us so."

"Oh!" said Skimpole, disappointed. "How rotten! I could have tracked them down for you, Figgins. It's a pity—"

"A pity you're off your rocker," said Figgins, nodding.

"I agree with you there, Skimmy."

"I wasn't going to say that—"

"Weren't you? Never mind— Hallo, there's the rotter, kids! Go for him!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had appeared on the steps of the School House. And Figgins & Co., with vengeful faces and clenched fists, rushed towards them to settle prompt accounts with the Terrible Three.

CHAPTER 11.
Facing the Music.

"LOOK out!" muttered Tom Merry. The chums of the Shell were on their guard at once. Figgins & Co. dashed up the steps of the School House, and found three stalwart youths with their guard up, ready for the fray. At the same moment Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy came out of the house together, and they immediately lined up with the Terrible Three. And Figgins & Co. paused in time.

"Good-morning, Figgins," said Tom Merry affably. "This is a very early call. To what unexpected stroke of good fortune do we owe the unexpected honour—"

"Ha, ha! I wegard that as funnay! To what unexpected stwoke of fortune do we owe the beastly honah of this early visit, deah boys?"

Figgins glowered at the School House chums.

"You—you unspeakable rotters—"

"Hallo! What are you grumbling at now?"

"Give us back our grub!"

"What grub?"

"The grub you boned out of our study last night," howled Figgins excitedly.

"My dear Figgins—"

"I'll give you dear Figgins—"

"Don't; I wouldn't take such a thing at a gift—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I wegard that as funnay!"

"Is that what you call gratitude, Figgins?" went on Tom Merry, with a look of severe reproach at the chief of the New House juniors.

"Gratitude?" yelped Figgins.

"Yes, I should think you might feel decently grateful to us for taking the trouble to get up a birthday feed for one of you—"

"Why, you—you—it's our feed!"

"Quite a mistake; it's ours," said Tom Merry blandly.

"We've invited you four fellows to it, though. Are you coming?"

"Coming! Coming to our feed that you've boned?"

"My dear chap, if you don't want to accept the invitation, say so!"

"I'll—I'll—"

Words failed the enraged Figgins, and he stood staring at Tom Merry, his mouth open, and his eyes agleam.

"Go on, Figgins," said the hero of the Shell politely.

"Any remarks you've got to make will be listened to with patience."

"Yaas, wathah! Go on, Figgy, deah boy!"

"You—you rotters!"

"Now, weally, Figgins—"

"You outsiders!"

"Pway, Figgins—"

"We'll—we'll wipe up the quadrangle with you!"

"I should like to see you twy to wipe up any beastly quadwangle with me, Figgins!"

"Here goes, then!" roared Figgins.

And he rushed to the attack. But the more prudent Co. seized him by the arms, and dragged him back.

"Let me get at him!" howled Figgins.

"No go!" said the practical Kerr. "The odds are against us. We'll make them sit up another time! Come away!"

"Rats! I'm going to—"

"Oh, let him come on!" said Blake. "These steps want dusting, and Figgins's carcass would do as well as anything else!"

"Come away, Figgy."

Figgins glowered at the School House chums, but he realised the sense in Kerr's remonstrance, and allowed himself to be quieted.

"All right, Kerr," he said. "I'll let them alone now."

"Thanks, awfully, deah boy!"

"But wait a bit till I—"

Figgins paused. Mr. Railton looked out of the School



POLLIE GREEN

IS IN

This Week's

"Girls' Friend."

PRICE ONE PENNY.

House, and his eye glanced over the juniors, then fixed on Tom Merry.

"Merry!"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, turning round.

"You are to go into the headmaster's study directly after prayers, instead of going to your class-room."

"Certainly, sir."

"And us, too, sir?" asked Monty Lowther quickly.

"No, only Merry."

"But we were all in it, sir—" began Manners.

"Only Merry is wanted. You will go to the class-room, as usual."

And Mr. Railton turned away and re-entered the house.

There was a serious look on Tom Merry's face. Figgins, his excitement all gone, looked at the hero of the Shell curiously.

"I say, anything the matter?" he exclaimed. "What's the trouble, Merry? Your housemaster was looking terrifically solemn."

"It means a row, I expect," said Tom.

"He doesn't know you raided us last night, does he?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Phew!" said Figgins. "How—"

Tom Merry explained the happening of the night. Figgins & Co. listened with great interest. Skimpole, who had drawn near to hear what was going on, drank in every word like a fish. Skimpole's round eyes were gleaming now, and he began to take rapid notes in his huge notebook.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "This looks bad! You say that all seven of you were out, and you don't know who chucked the stone into Linton's window?"

"That's how the case stands."

"It must have been a School House boy, as the window was fastened against you from the inside."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, he was a rotten cad, whoever he was," said Figgins. "Nobody of that sort in the New House, thank goodness!"

"Oh, don't rub it in!" said Blake.

"Sorry," said Figgins, at once, colouring a little. "I oughtn't to have said that. Excuse me! But haven't you any idea whom it might be?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I might make a guess," he replied. "But without any evidence to go upon, it wouldn't be quite the fair thing. I know only two juniors in this House who would be mean enough to do a thing like that, and it might be either of them, or neither."

"I say, Merry!"

It was Skimpole who spoke eagerly.

Tom Merry glanced at him with a smile. He had seen the pencil working away at the big notebook, and knew that the amateur detective of St. Jim's was on the track.

"What is it, Skimmy? Have you thought of anything?"

"I should like to take up this case, Merry."

"Oh, I see!" grinned Tom Merry.

"I shall call it the Case of the Broken Window," said Skimpole. "You are sure that you did not break the window, Tom Merry?"

"Quite sure, fathead!"

"And you are sure, you others, that you didn't do it?"

"Rather, ass!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then it must have been somebody else!" exclaimed Skimpole triumphantly.

The chums looked at one another in amazed admiration.

"My word!" said Digby. "That beats Sherlock Holmes hollow! Did you work that out all in your own brain, Skimmy?"

"Certainly," said Skimpole.

"Wonderful!" said Tom Merry. "After this nobody need say anything about Sexton Blake. He's out of date—quite done in."

"That's not all," said the gratified Skimpole. "I'll jolly soon discover who it was that busted the window!"

"Got any clues?" asked Figgins.

"I shall soon find some. Did you notice any footmarks in the quadrangle last night, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, a few hundred."

"H'm! Let me see, suspicion points very strongly against Tom Merry," murmured Skimpole aloud, as he consulted his notes.

"Eh?" ejaculated Tom. "I've told you that I didn't do it, haven't I, ass?"

Skimpole smiled in a superior way.

"I know you have; but surely you know that I cannot, as a detective, accept anybody's word. Everybody is under suspicion until the guilty party is found. That is one of the greatest maxims of Sherlock Holmes and Frank Ferrett."

"You unutterable duffer!"

"Violent language is a proof presumptive of guilt, Merry, and I warn you to be careful," said Skimpole, shaking his head. "The motive having been established—"

"The motive! What motive?"

"The motive for the crime—I mean for busting Linton's window last night," explained Skimpole. "The first duty of a detective is to discover the motive of the crime. Sexton Blake always does that first. The motive in this case was evidently revenge upon Mr. Linton, by giving him a fearful shock. Now, you had an imposition from the Form master yesterday, and had to take it in so early that you were kept out of the gym. when you wanted to be there with Manners and Lowther, as I happen to know."

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

"Why, that was your motive for throwing the stone through Mr. Linton's window."

"But I didn't throw it."

"That remains to be proved," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "But I promise you that I shall investigate the matter thoroughly, and bring the truth, whatever it is, to light."

"You silly, ass, if you—"

"Enough," said Skimpole, with a wave of the hand; and he walked away with his notebook under his arm.

Tom Merry glared after him. Then the comical aspect of the case struck him, and he burst into a laugh.

"Well, of all the tame lunatics," he exclaimed, "that chap takes the Huntley and Palmer, and no mistake."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I thought till now that Gussy was the biggest ass in the School House; but that chap Skimpole is an easy first."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You're right," said Figgins, with a nod of the head. "He's more dangerous as a detective than as a Socialist, in my opinion. I say, Merry, I hope this thing will turn out all right for you. After all, you've got plenty of witnesses to prove that you didn't chuck that stone, haven't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so; but, of course, we should all stick together, if we had done it, so that doesn't go for much. But I think the doctor will believe me."

"Good. That's the best of having a reputation of being truthful, and living up to it," said Figgins admiringly. "Now, if it were Gore, for instance, the Head would take it for granted that he was telling whoppers."

"Gore!" ejaculated Manners. "By Jove, that's the very fellow who might have done it! He was licked by Mr. Linton yesterday, till he could hardly crawl!"

"And it served him right, too," said Tom Merry.

"That wouldn't be any comfort to Gore, though. I remember Lowther remarking that he thought somebody was awake in the Shell dormitory when we went out."

"That's so."

"I had already thought of Gore," said Tom Merry slowly. "But there's no way of proving it, and so it wouldn't be fair to mention his name. Besides, if we knew it for certain, we couldn't betray him to the masters."

Figgins shook his head.

"No, you couldn't very well sneak, even on a rotter like Gore," he remarked. "But it's hard cheese. I say, Merry, of course you know we don't bear you chaps any grudge for that raid last night. All's fair in war."

"Rather!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn heartily. "And we'll come to the feed, just to show that there's no ill feeling, Tom Merry."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Right-ho! We'll expect you."

And then the breakfast-bell rang, and the New House chums walked away to their own House to breakfast. Tom Merry & Co. re-entered the School House. After breakfast came chapel, and after that, while the juniors went into the class-rooms, Tom Merry made his way to the Head's study, to face the music.

CHAPTER 12.

Ferrers Locke is Called In.

DR. HOLMES'S brow was very stern as Tom Merry entered his study. The Head of St. Jim's had heard from Mr. Linton a full account of the night's happenings, and the outrage, unparalleled in the history of St. Jim's, had moved him to the deepest anger. That a boy should venture to hurl a stone through a Form master's window, at the risk, too, of injuring him, was quite unprecedented. Dr. Holmes's mind was made up that the matter should be sifted to the very bottom, the true culprit discovered and expelled from the school. The good old doctor was never hard upon boyish pranks and frolic. But the occurrence of the previous night was not to be regarded in the light of a prank. It was an outrage, and nothing less.

"Merry, I have some questions to put to you," said Dr. Holmes, his keen glance taking in the quiet, calm face of the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry was looking very serious, for he knew that it was a serious matter. But there was no trace of fear in his looks.

"Yes, sir," said Tom quietly.

"The outrage that occurred last night was quite unprecedented," said the Head. "I have never been so surprised in my life as I was this morning, when Mr. Linton told me about it. I am pained and annoyed to think that such a piece of hooliganism can have occurred at this college."

The doctor paused impressively. Tom Merry did not speak.

"I understand that you have told Mr. Linton that you know nothing about it, Merry?"

"I have told him so, sir, and it is true."

"But you were out of your House at the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"A joke on some of the New House fellows."

"That was very reprehensible, Merry. But, if it turns out that you did nothing worse than play a joke on the New House boys, I shall overlook it."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Under the circumstances, I shall take note of nothing that happened last night, excepting the outrage upon your Form master," said Dr. Holmes impressively. "But that is a matter which cannot be allowed to rest in doubt."

"I suppose not, sir."

"Who were your companions in this foolish expedition, Merry?"

"Lowther, Manners, Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy, sir."

The Head smiled slightly.

"I expected as much. And they were with you all the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then none of them could have flung the stone without your knowing it?"

"No, sir."

"And you declare that they were as innocent of the matter as yourself?"

"Quite, sir."

The doctor wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"Now, answer me carefully, Merry. I have always known you to be truthful, and I should be sorry to doubt your word. Did none of your companions leave you, after you were out of the School House, even for a few moments?"

Tom Merry hesitated for a moment.

"Come, Merry, I see you have something to tell me. What is it?" said the doctor encouragingly.

"Manners was away from us for a few minutes, sir; but he had rejoined us, and we were all together under Figgins's window, when we heard the crash of the stone breaking the glass."

"You are quite sure he had rejoined you?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"You tell me positively that you were all together close to the New House at the time when the stone was flung at Mr. Linton's window?"

"Yes, sir. Manners had left us a few minutes to set his camera—"

"To what?"

"To set his camera."

"At night-time?"

"He wanted to take a photograph of the School House by moonlight, sir. It can be done, you know, with a long exposure. He set it in position, and then came on to the New House and joined us. It was a good twenty minutes after that we heard the stone smash Mr. Linton's window. Manners was with us the whole time."

"I can only conclude, Merry, that if this rascally action was committed by one of your party, you are all in a conspiracy to shield the culprit."

Tom Merry flushed crimson.

"I hope you do not think such a thing of me, sir."

The Head looked puzzled.

"I hardly know what to think," he replied. "Judging upon the evidence as it stands, I should certainly say that the stone was hurled by you or one of your companions, as there is not the slightest evidence to prove that anybody else left the School House."

Tom Merry was silent.

"But I can hardly believe so of a boy with your good and clean record," said Dr. Holmes. "I should never willingly have believed you capable of an action of this kind, Merry, and I must say that I have never known you to tell a lie."

"I hope I should never tell one, sir."

"I hope not, Merry. I hope that no boy under my charge

will descend to the petty meanness of prevarication. Yet—" The doctor paused. "If someone else was guilty of this outrage, he knows very well that you are under suspicion, but he does not come forward. That boy, whoever he is, must be false and wicked. This matter shall be sifted out. Yet how? It would be useless to ask the guilty party to confess, and accept the punishment of expulsion from the school."

Tom Merry could hardly help smiling at the idea. The culprit was hardly likely to accept an invitation to make a clean breast of it, when the reward of his confession was to be kicked out of St. Jim's.

Suddenly the doctor's clouded face lightened.

"Ah, yes, a good idea! I will send for a detective!"

Tom Merry started.

"A detective, sir!"

"There is nothing else to be done. Such an investigation, which quite baffles me, would probably be a mere nothing to the trained intelligence of a detective," the Head murmured, half to himself. "Ferrers Locke—"

"Ferrers Locke!" said Tom Merry eagerly.

He was glad to hear the name of the famous detective on Dr. Holmes's lips. Tom Merry had, as it happened, had opportunities of aiding Ferrers Locke in more than one of his cases, and the detective was his firm friend. He was a friend, also, of Dr. Holmes. That he would come from London to oblige the Head was certain, though what he would think of being called down to the country to investigate the mystery of a broken window was a question Tom Merry did not care to ask himself.

But the Head was evidently pleased with the idea.

"Ferrers Locke would come, I am certain, to oblige me," he murmured. "Merry, I have told you that this matter shall be investigated thoroughly. Mr. Locke shall be wired for. You may rely upon it that the truth will come to light, and that the guilty party will be brought to justice. You may go."

Tom Merry left the Head's study. Five minutes later, Buttons, the page, was hurrying down to Rylcombe with a telegram, which was soon speeding over the wire to the office of Ferrers Locke, at Baker Street.

Tom Merry went into the Shell class-room with a thoughtful brow, and Lowther and Manners whispered eager inquiries as he sat down. A sentence was enough to explain the result of the interview with the Head, and Manners and Lowther whistled softly over the name of Ferrers Locke.

"By Jove, it will be all right now!" said Manners. "But what a case for Ferrers Locke—to find out who busted a pane of glass in a window!"

Monty Lowther grinned.

"I wonder what Locke will say when he comes and learns what he's wanted for, Tommy?" he remarked.

"Well, he will come as a friend, to oblige the Head," said Tom Merry. "Anyway, we're pretty sure now that the truth will come to light."

"Not much doubt about that. Hallo! What are you muttering about, Skimpole?"

The Form master had left the room for a few moments, and the amateur detective of St. Jim's was leaning eagerly over his desk and nudging Lowther.

"Did you say Ferrers Locke was coming here?" asked Skimpole.

"Yes; he's coming down."

"To investigate what happened last night?"

"Of course. You don't think he's coming down for a study feed, do you?"

"But it's unnecessary—"

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, I'm looking into the case, you know—"

"Ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to laugh at, Tom Merry. I am looking into the case, and, without being conceited, I don't think Ferrers Locke could improve much upon my methods—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I really think the Head will be wasting money in paying Ferrers Locke a big fee to do what I could do equally well, if not better."

"You had better tell him so," chuckled Lowther.

"And I shall," said Skimpole determinedly. "I am quite able to attend to the matter, and I don't see why it shouldn't be trusted into my hands. I shall explain that to the Head."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo! What's going on there?" called out Gore, from further up the Form. "Got any joke on, Lowther?"

Lowther turned towards him, a thought coming into his mind. He fixed his eyes upon George Gore as he replied:

"There is some news, Gore."

"What is it?"

"Ferrers Locke is coming down to St. Jim's to-day to discover who it was broke Mr. Linton's window last night."



As Tom Merry passed down the passage the master's door suddenly opened, and George Gore came out. He was hugging his hands in his arm-pits, and apparently trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

Gore started, and turned as white as chalk. The Terrible Three exchanged glances. There was no further doubt in their minds as to the guilty party. But Mr. Linton re-entered the room at that moment, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER 13.

Skimpole Takes the Case.

TAP!
 "Come in," said the Head resignedly.
 The door of the doctor's study opened, and Skimpole entered. The doctor glanced at him over his pince-nez.
 "What do you want, Skimpole? I am busy."
 "It is an important matter, sir—"
 "Dear me! Well, speak, then, but be quick."
 "It's about the affair that happened last night—"
 Dr. Holmes was interested at once. His look of impatience dropped from his face, and his eyes fixed more attentively upon the amateur detective of St. Jim's.
 "Do you know anything about that, Skimpole?"
 "I hope to know something about it, sir."
 "I do not understand you."
 "I hear that you have sent for Ferrers Locke, the famous London detective, to investigate the matter, sir."
 "That is no secret."
 "May I point out to you, sir that it will be quite an

unnecessary waste of Mr. Locke's valuable time to come down here—"

The Head's glare would have frozen anybody but Skimpole into silence. But the amateur detective went on without even noticing it.

"As the matter can be better seen to by someone on the spot," went on the junior. "You know, sir, it is a great maxim of statesmanship to trust the man on the spot."

"Bless my soul!" gasped the Head.
 "I am willing to take up the case, sir—"
 "Eh?"

"I have lately taken up detective work with marked success, sir—much more success, I may say, than I achieved as a Socialist propagandist—"

"Skimpole!"

"And I am perfectly convinced that I can deal with the case quite as well as Ferrers Locke possibly could."

"Bless my soul!"

"I therefore ask you to leave it in my hands, sir," said Skimpole. "I will prove to you I can discover the criminal—"

"The what?"

"The fellow who busted—who broke the window, sir. You can safely leave it to me," said Skimpole reassuringly.

"Are—are you mad, boy?"

"Certainly not, sir. It will be best to send a wire to Mr.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE TELL-TALE!"

A TALE OF
TOM MERRY & CO.

Locke, telling him that he need not come, as the matter is in good hands."

"Boy!"

"With your permission, sir, I will send the wire. I thought of sending it first, before I spoke to you on the matter, to save time; but, upon second thoughts, I considered it best to consult you."

The Head seemed to recover himself.

"I am glad, Skimpole, that upon second thoughts you considered it better to consult me," he said. "If you had sent that telegram, I should have given you a public flogging in the presence of the whole school."

"Oh, sir!"

"I should give you one now, sir," exclaimed the Head, "but that I consider you are scarcely responsible for your words and actions."

"Oh!"

"Leave my study instantly!"

"But, sir—"

"Go!"

"My dear sir, allow me to point out that this visit to St. Jim's will be a totally unnecessary waste of Mr. Locke's probably valuable time—"

"Skimpole!"

"While if I am excused from classes for a few days I shall be able to attend to the matter with complete success—"

"Will you go?"

"Certainly, sir! But I should like to point out—"

The doctor made one step towards his cane, and seized it; then another step towards Skimpole. But the amateur detective of St. Jim's had a wary eye on him, and he was gone in a twinkling. The doctor breathed hard.

"Dear me," he murmured, "that lad is quite a trial to me! Bless my soul!"

Skimpole walked away at a rapid pace, but slackened down as he discovered that he was not called back. There was a frown upon his face.

"How obstinate some old gentlemen are!" he murmured.

"The Head is quite a trial to me! I suppose I shall have to investigate this case under the disadvantage of having Ferrers Locke, the detective, going over the same ground. That will be very annoying, and may lead to complications—"

"Hallo, Skimmy, what are you muttering about?"

The Terrible Three blocked the way, and the amateur detective of St. Jim's halted. They grinned at him.

"So you've been to see the Head?" asked Tom Merry.

"Certainly!"

"Did he lick you?" asked Lowther.

"No, but he seemed very annoyed," said Skimpole. "He is very short tempered and obstinate. Really, he tried my patience very much!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is he going to wire Ferrers Locke not to come, now that you've taken up the case?" asked Manners.

"No; I am sorry to say that he was obstinate on that point. He seems to have no regard for the feelings of Mr. Locke."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, Ferrers Locke has a great reputation as a detective, and he will be naturally desirous of keeping it up, and so consider how humiliating it will be to him to be outdone by a mere beginner like myself."

"Outdone, you ass!"

"Certainly! I am already on the track, and I shall certainly clear up the mystery, and Ferrers Locke will probably not have a look-in at all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He laughs best who laughs last," said Skimpole loftily. "We shall see what we shall see, Tom Merry."

"Is that another of your deductions? It's wonderful!" said Tom Merry, looking very much impressed. "Do you hear, kids? We shall see what we shall see—"

"Amazing!" ejaculated Lowther.

"But when shall we see it?" asked Manners.

"Ah, perhaps Skimpole can tell us. I say, Skimmy, when shall we see what we shall see?" demanded Tom Merry.

"If you're going to make a joke of the matter, Tom Merry—"

"You've done that yourself, old kid! Have you got any fresh clues yet?"

"Yes; I have examined the quadrangle in front of Mr. Linton's window, and I have found that there are plenty of footprints in the damp earth—"

"Good! As there were seven of us over the ground last night—"

"And something like a hundred this morning—" said Lowther.

"There are bound to be footprints enough to furnish clues to a whole army of detectives," finished Manners.

Skimpole sniffed.

"If you don't want to hear my clue—"

"But we do," said Tom Merry. "But is it safe to trust us? You have already proved my guilt to your own satisfaction, you know—"

"No, that was only a provisional theory—"

"Well, that's a good word, anyway!"

"A provisional theory," went on Skimpole, "which I have now abandoned, on fuller investigations. I think I can lay my finger on the guilty party now, and am only waiting to collect proofs."

"And who's the guilty party?"

"Figgins!" said Skimpole triumphantly.

The Terrible Three gave a roar.

"Figgins?"

"Yes; certainly! You didn't suspect that, did you?" said Skimpole, with much satisfaction. "I thought you would be surprised!"

"Ha, ha! So we are! Aren't we, kids?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"How do you make out that it was Figgins, Skimmy?"

"I have discovered his footprints in some soft ground close to the School House. Now, what was a New House boy doing over on this side?"

"He came over this morning to speak to us."

"The footprints are older than this morning."

"Well, he came over last evening to invite us to a feed."

"It's all very well to cavil at my theory, Tom Merry—"

"But how do you know the footprints belong to Figgins, anyway?" asked Lowther curiously.

"Oh, I have no doubt at all on that point. I know them by their size."

"Ha, ha, ha! You had better tell Figgins that!"

"I shall tell Figgins nothing till I am ready to clap him on the shoulder, and denounce him—"

"If you know what's good for you, kid, you'll leave out the shoulder-clapping part of the programme," said Tom Merry seriously. "When you start denouncing Figgins, it will be much safer to keep out of his reach."

"Of course, I—"

The sound of wheels in the quadrangle interrupted Skimpole. Tom Merry ran to a window in the passage, and looked out.

"It's the station cab from Rylcombe!"

"Ferrers Locke, for a ducat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

He was right.

Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, had arrived, and a minute later the chums of the Shell saw him shown into the Head's study.

CHAPTER 14.

Ferrers Locke on the Scene.

"FERRERS LOCKE, I am glad to see you!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, shaking hands heartily with the famous detective. "Pray take a seat! You have come down very quickly, and in good time for lunch."

The detective smiled.

"I understood by your wire that something unusual had occurred, and that you wanted my assistance at once," he replied. "I stayed only to put a few things into a bag, and caught the next train; and here I am."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Locke!"

"Not at all! By your kindness I was able to benefit by the assistance afforded me by one of your boys, and I am glad to be able to repay the debt, if possible."

The Head was silent.

It occurred to him, now that the keen-faced crime investigator was seated in his study, that the affair at St. Jim's was a decidedly insignificant one upon which to engage the services of a man accustomed to dealing with great issues, and entering the lists with the greatest criminals of modern times.

Ferrers Locke looked at him.

"What can I do for you, Dr. Holmes?" he asked.

The Head hesitated.

"Don't be afraid of taking up my time," smiled the detective. "I have several important cases now on hand, waiting my time, but a day's holiday in the country is a pick-me-up for a tired city-dweller. But surely no crime has been committed at the school! Is it a case of another burglary?"

"Oh, no; nothing of the sort!"

"I hear that on one occasion a boy belonging to St. Jim's disappeared—D'Arcy, I think. Is it another case like that?"

"Oh, no!"

"But something is wrong, I suppose?" said the detective, in surprise.

"Well, yes. In fact—"

The Head hesitated once more, and the detective looked

decidedly curious. The doctor seemed embarrassed by his curious glance.

"Well, doctor?" said Ferrers Locke impatiently. "The fact is, Mr. Locke, that—that a window has been broken—"

"Eh?"
"And we do not know who threw the stone—"
"Eh?"

"So if you will investigate the matter—"
Ferrers Locke rose to his feet, a very peculiar expression upon his clear-cut face.

"Do you mean to tell me, Dr. Holmes, that you have wired me from London to investigate the mystery of a broken window, and to discover what mischievous lad threw a stone at it?" he exclaimed incredulously.

Dr. Holmes coloured.
"Not exactly that, Mr. Locke. I should not waste your time like that. I know that the case sounds absurdly insignificant for a man like you to take up; yet it is important in the sense that the honour of some of my boys is involved, among them Tom Merry."

"Ah," said Ferrers Locke, dropping into his chair again, "that alters the case!"

"I thought that you would look at it in that light," said the Head, looking rather relieved.

"Certainly! Tom Merry has aided me in my work. If it is a question of clearing his name of any suspicion, I will gladly undertake the task."

"I am glad to hear you say so."
"As to his honour," said Ferrers Locke, with emphasis, "there can be no question about that; I would stake my life upon it!"

"I am glad to hear you say that, too!" exclaimed the Head. "I should have said the same, almost, I think; yet this affair is certainly very puzzling."

"Let me know exactly what has happened," said the detective quietly.

"I will do so."
And the Head related the mysterious occurrence of the night, Ferrers Locke listening attentively, and putting in a question here and there.

The detective wrinkled his brows a little when the Head of St. Jim's had finished.

"That is a very curious case," he remarked. "There seem to have been seven boys absent from the School House at the time—"

"Yes, Tom Merry and his friends; but if there was another, he is unknown to them, according to their own declaration."

"Which I have not the slightest hesitation in wholly believing," said Ferrers Locke. "This stupid and brutal trick is not of the kind that could possibly be played by Tom Merry. I am certain of that. It was evidently done for revenge upon Mr. Linton—"

"Tom Merry had been given a severe imposition by Mr. Linton, the same day," said the Head slowly.

"H'm! You have told me that the window was closed against Tom Merry when he returned to the School House. Does not that prove that someone else was up?"

"But it may be untrue about their leaving by the window. They may have gone out by the door, and left it ajar, and it may have closed of itself."

"I should like to see Mr. Linton."

"I will send for him here."

The doctor rang, and sent for the master of the Shell, who came into the study in a few minutes. He shook hands with Ferrers Locke.

"I wish to ask you a question, Mr. Linton," said Ferrers Locke. "Dr. Holmes has acquainted me with the circumstances of last night's happenings. After your window was broken you came down to look in the quadrangle for the culprit?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"How did you get yourself out of the house?"

"By the door in the front porch."

"Was the door fastened when you came down?"

"Certainly it was!"

"Merely by a catch, or in some more secure manner?"

"The great door is always bolted and chained of a night,"

said Mr. Linton, looking puzzled. "It would be hardly safe to leave it on the catch, especially after the attempted burglary here some time ago."

"Was it bolted when you came down last night?"

"Yes."

"You remember drawing the bolts?"

"Certainly, and unfastening the chain."

"Good! You see, doctor," went on Ferrers Locke, turning to the Head, "the door might have closed after the boys went out, if they had left that way, but it could not have become chained and bolted. It is clear that they left

by the window, as they were in the porch attempting to re-enter when Mr. Linton discovered them."

"Very true," murmured the doctor.

"So the question is, would it be possible for the window to fasten itself on the inside? Could it catch if blown shut?"

"It opens on a hinge," said Mr. Linton. "If left open it might blow shut, but it could not possibly become fastened, as the fastening is in the nature of a bolt, and must be slipped into place with the hand."

"Good! Then it is quite clear that there was someone else up last night as well as Tom Merry and his friends?"

"It appears so," said Mr. Linton, while the Head nodded assent.

"The question is, who was it?" resumed Ferrers Locke. "It appears that you punished Tom Merry yesterday, Mr. Linton."

"Yes; an imposition."

"A severe one?"

"It was necessary to be severe on that occasion."

"Good! That supplies the motive for Tom Merry's action, if he committed this outrage, which I am sure he did not commit, by the way. I would take his word against any apparent evidence. But was there anyone else in the School House whom you have also severely punished yesterday, or lately, Mr. Linton?"

The master of the Shell gave a start.

"Yes, now I think of it, certainly!"

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"Perhaps we are coming to it now," he said. "If a punishment may be taken as a motive in Tom Merry's case, it may be taken as a motive also in the case of the unknown person who was also up last night."

"I suppose you are right."

"Was it a School House boy?"

"Certainly; Gore, of the Shell."

"Was the punishment a severe one—more severe than that inflicted upon Merry?"

The Form master smiled slightly.

"Decidedly. Gore was guilty of the most unparalleled insolence, and I considered it necessary to cane him severely. I was very near bringing him to Dr. Holmes for a flogging, and the caning which I decided would meet the case was the severest I have inflicted upon any boy for a long time."

"What character does this boy Gore bear?"

"Not a particularly good one. He is in my Form, and I have sometimes observed him. He is something of a bully towards smaller boys, and frequently untruthful."

"In short," said Ferrers Locke, "the kind of boy who might be supposed to harbour revengeful feelings, and gratify them, and then seek to escape the consequences by allowing the blame of his actions to fall upon others?"

"Well, yes, that would not surprise me."

"I think it would be as well to examine first whether Gore threw this stone in at Mr. Linton's window," said Ferrers Locke.

The doctor nodded.

"I am inclined to think, Mr. Locke, that you have hit upon the truth, in the few minutes you have given to the case," he remarked.

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"It is quite possible, but we will not make sure yet. I have said that I believe Tom Merry's word against any other. There is one point, however. Were the companions who left the School House with him, with him all the time? If they separated he could not know but what—"

"Only one of them appears to have left the others, even for a short time," said the Head.

"Which one?"

"Manners."

"Ah, I remember Manners! I like the lad."

"He is one of the best boys in the Shell," said Mr. Linton. "He gives trouble sometimes, as indeed Tom Merry does, but he is never guilty of anything really deserving severity."

"So I should have said, from my observation of him, on the occasion of my previous visits here," the detective observed.

"But, according to Tom Merry's account, Manners rejoined the others, and was with them when they heard the window breaking," said the doctor.

"Good! I will see Tom Merry, and question him; but unless I am greatly mistaken, sir, you will find that Tom Merry has spoken the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"I hope so, indeed!"

And Ferrers Locke left the study. He knew of old the way to the quarters of the Terrible Three, and he expected to find Tom Merry and his chums there, as morning school was over. He passed down the flagged corridor leading into the School House and ascended the stairs to the upper corridor.

CHAPTER 15.

Rival Detectives.

"MR. LOCKE, I believe?"

Ferrers Locke stopped, and looked at his questioner.

He did not remember to have seen before the youth with the large head and spectacles and unshapely limbs in baggy garments who now stopped him in the passage.

"My name is Locke," he said. "Do you want to speak to me?"

"If you please, Mr. Locke."

"And who may you be?" asked the detective, looking at his interlocutor curiously.

"My name is Skimpole."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, sir. I have lately taken up serious work as a detective."

Ferrers Locke stared.

"Of course, I do not wish to cause any jealousy on your part," said Skimpole; "and I am giving you this explanation in order that you may not regard me in the light of an interloper. It is, as a matter of fact, you who are the interloper!"

"Really?"

"Yes; I have taken up the case of the broken window, and am elucidating the mystery in what I cannot but describe as a really masterly style," said Skimpole modestly. "I have had some false clues, but I am right on to the facts at last, and I expect every moment to lay my finger upon the villain!"

"You don't really say so?" ejaculated the detective, with considerable amusement. "Then it appears that I have come down to the school for nothing, Master Skimpole."

Skimpole nodded.

"Yes, I am sorry to say that that is the case. There is, in fact, no room for you here, Mr. Locke. I asked the Head to wire to you not to come, as I had taken up the case, but he refused."

"Too bad!"

"He became so excited that I could not press the matter."

"I am not surprised at that."

"But now I am about to make an appeal to your personal sense of fair play, Mr. Locke," said the amateur detective of St. Jim's earnestly. "Of course, you may regard my speaking to you like this as cheek—"

"You are quite right on that point," said Ferrers Locke drily.

"But I have really no alternative. The case is mine, as I have taken it up, and am handling it with great skill. I shortly expect to denounce the perpetrator—"

"Dear me!"

"So, in common fairness, I ask you to step out, and leave the matter to me."

Ferrers Locke shook his head gravely.

"I am afraid that cannot be done, Skimpole."

"It's what I should call cricket!"

"Have you anything more to say before I box your ears for your impertinence?" asked the detective blandly.

Skimpole started back in alarm.

"Please don't do anything of the kind, Mr. Locke! I was only putting the case fairly to you. If you refuse to draw out, I have another proposition to make to you."

"I'm afraid I haven't time to hear it now."

"Oh, please listen! I am willing to share my clues with you, on condition that when the culprit is bowled out, we share the honour and glory."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"I'm afraid I cannot agree to even that, Skimpole."

"Then we are to be rivals?"

"Ha, ha!"

"Then you will force me to act before I have really completed my case," said Skimpole. "I shall denounce Manners at once."

"Manners?"

"Dear me, now I have let it slip out!" exclaimed Skimpole, in great distress. "I trust to your honour, Mr. Locke, not to make use of the information I have given you, unless you share the glory with me, as I suggested."

"Certainly not!" said Ferrers Locke, greatly amused.

"If Manners turns out to be the guilty party, you shall have all the honour of the discovery."

"Thank you, sir; that is only fair play!"

"But I should really like to know your reason for suspecting Manners," said Ferrers Locke curiously. "Have you suspected anybody else, so far?"

"Yes, Tom Merry first, and then some footprints near the School House made the case look very black against Figgins. But I have come to the conclusion that it was Manners, all

the same. He separated from the others last night in the quad, I have heard from D'Arcy."

"But he joined them again before the window was broken."

"So they say, but their memories might easily be at fault. Besides, the footprints I have found near the School House would really be Manners's quite as likely as Figgins's, as their feet are about the same size, and the marks are not very distinct. Sherlock Holmes attached much importance to footprints, and so do I. It is part of my system."

"I should advise you to give up detective work till you are a little older," said Ferrers Locke, laughing, and he walked away.

Skimpole looked after him a little dubiously. Then he shook his head.

"I wonder whether he's really laughing at me, or whether he's pretending, because he envies my splendid grasp of the problem?" he murmured. "He doesn't think Manners did break the window, or perhaps he's trying to put me off my guard. You can never trust a rival. At any rate, I had better lose no time in denouncing Manners, or Ferrers Locke may get there first."

It did not occur to Skimpole that the proposed denunciation came under the head of "sneaking." He was too enthusiastic to care for a little thing like that, or to think about it at all.

He hurried away to find Mr. Linton. The Form master's study was drawn blank, but Skimpole ran him to earth in the masters' room, where he was in conversation with Herr Schneider, the German master at St. Jim's.

"May I speak to you, sir, on a very important matter connected with what happened last night?" said Skimpole.

"Certainly!" said Mr. Linton.

Herr Schneider strolled away, and Mr. Linton fixed his sharp eyes upon the amateur detective of St. Jim's.

"What have you to tell me, Skimpole?"

"I have lately taken up detective work, sir."

"What are you talking about?"

"Having studied the methods of Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, Frank Ferret, and—"

"Is the boy raving?" murmured Mr. Linton, looking round in amazement.

"Certainly not, sir! I have been investigating the case of the broken window, and I have discovered the guilty person."

The master of the Shell started.

"You know who broke the window last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was it?"

"Manners, sir, of my Form."

A look of contempt crossed the Form master's face. His glance was not very favourable as it dwelt upon the excited face of Skimpole. Mr. Linton was anxious to know whom the culprit was, but he had no love for tell-tales.

"And how do you know it was Manners?" said the Form master, in a cold and cutting voice.

Skimpole was far too enthusiastic to notice the Form master's chilling manner.

"I have deduced it, sir."

"Explain yourself at once!"

"From the clues I found—"

"Once and for all, Skimpole, tell me whether you have any real reason for connecting Manners with what happened last night!" exclaimed Mr. Linton impatiently.

"Certainly, sir! He separated from the others—"

"I know that already, and attach no importance whatever to the circumstance."

Skimpole was rather dismayed.

"Well, sir, I have found his footprints close to the School House—"

"Boy, are you so utter a fool as to ask me to attach any importance to that?" the Form master exclaimed in amazement.

"If you please, sir—"

"Get along at once! Don't say another word!"

"But, sir, my deductions—"

Mr. Linton reached out towards Skimpole's ear, with evidently hostile intention. The amateur detective of St. Jim's dodged, and scuttled out of the masters' room. He was feeling rather dismayed at the reception his startling revelation had met with. But he was not defeated yet.

"I am afraid I must regard Mr. Linton as failing in his duty as a Form master," the amateur detective murmured to himself. "I suppose I had better go to Mr. Railton."

Skimpole did not let the grass grow under his feet. He hurried at once to Mr. Railton's study, and found the master of the School House there.

"If you please, sir—" he commenced.

"Well, what is it, Skimpole?" asked the housemaster, kindly enough. He knew some of the peculiar little ways of Skimpole, and was inclined to be patient with him.

"I have lately taken up detective work, sir."



"Look at the mud on the carpet," said the amateur detective, pointing to the floor, where Figgins & Co., had been standing. "I see that you fellows have been for a tramp in Rylcombe Lane, Tom Merry."



"Eh?"

"And have discovered who broke Mr. Linton's window last night?"

"Do you mean to say, Skimpole, that you have come here with the intention of telling tales?" demanded the housemaster severely.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Skimpole, rather taken aback. "Certainly not, sir! I have discovered who broke—"

"You may go, Skimpole!"

"But I have discovered—"

"Leave my study!"

"But I have—"

The housemaster picked up a cane. Skimpole scuttled hastily out of the study. He paused in the passage to consider the situation. An amateur detective's path seemed to be set with thorns. There was only one other person to appeal to, and that was the Head. After his previous reception in the Head's study, Skimpole felt a natural diffidence about tackling him again. But unless the Head listened to him, he would have no resource but to throw up the case and leave all the honour and glory of the discovery to fall to Ferrers Locke.

There was clearly nothing else to be done. Skimpole took his way slowly to the study of Dr. Holmes. He reached the door, and stood undecided there, trying to make up his mind to knock. He was still standing there, hesitating, when the door opened, and the Head came out, to go to his lunch. Dr. Holmes stared at the boy, who started back in alarm. A frown crossed the doctor's brow.

"What are you doing here, Skimpole?"

"I—I—I—"

"Answer me at once!"

"I—I—I—"

"If you do not explain yourself, Skimpole—"

"I—I—if you please, sir, I told you that I had taken up detective work lately, and I—I have discovered who broke the window last night."

"Indeed! I am naturally anxious to discover the offender, but I do not believe you know anything about the matter; and, in any case, I refuse to listen to you!"

"But, really, sir—"

"Come into my study, Skimpole," said Dr. Holmes, turning back into the room with a grim expression upon his face.

"Certainly, sir," said Skimpole, following the Head with alacrity, feeling that at last he had made an impression, and was to be listened to sympathetically.

The doctor picked up the cane off the table.

"Hold out your hand, Skimpole!"

The amateur detective started back in dismay.

"If you please, sir—"

"Hold out your hand!" thundered the doctor.

Skimpole reluctantly obeyed. He received a cut across the palm which made him jump, but he was not beaten yet.

"If you please, Dr. Holmes—"

"The other hand!"

"But—"

"The other hand!"

And the other hand was held out, and the cut was harder than the first. Dr. Holmes threw the cane upon the table.

"Now you may go, Skimpole, and if I hear any more of this nonsense I shall cane you severely. Not a word, sir. Go!"

And Skimpole went.

CHAPTER 16.

Ferrers Locke Evinces an Interest in Amateur Photography.

FERRERS LOCKE knocked at the door of Tom Merry's study. He could hear a buzz of voices within; the Terrible Three were discussing something with great interest, and the detective's knock passed unnoticed.

He smiled, and knocked again. The buzz of talk ceased, Tom Merry's voice was heard:

"Come in, fathead, whoever you are!"

Ferrers Locke entered the study. The Terrible Three looked at him, and Tom Merry turned very red.

"Mr. Locke! Oh, I'm sorry, sir!"

The detective laughed.

"That is all right, Tom. I know you did not know it was I. You know I have been sent for to investigate the matter which occurred last night."

"Yes, sir."

"Suspicion appears to rest upon you and some friends of yours."

"Yes, I am sorry to say."

"There is no ground for it?"

"None at all, sir."

"I was sure of that."

"Have you discovered anything, sir?" asked Monty Lowther. "I think the Head more than half believes us; but we shall remain under a cloud until the thing is cleared up."

"I have some idea, I think, as to the truth," said the detective quietly. "We shall see! When you left the dormitory last night did you leave any other boys awake?"

"We cannot be sure of that, sir," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Lowther thinks he heard one of them move."

"As if he were awake, do you mean?"

"I am sure of it!" said Lowther.

"If that is correct, you were seen to go. Do you think it is likely that the outrage was committed by a boy of your Form?"

"Well, sir," said Tom Merry haltingly. "I don't see very well how we can speak, as the Head will have to be told all you discover. It would amount to sneaking."

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"I understand. You do not wish to be put into the position of betraying a Form-fellow to punishment."

"That's it, sir."

"Yet the boy, whoever he is, is allowing you to remain under the shadow of suspicion, as he knows well."

"Yes; that is true."

"But we can't give him away, all the same, sir," said Manners. "It wouldn't be—well, it wouldn't be cricket."

"I suppose not."

The detective paused for a moment, looking kindly at the embarrassed chums. The juniors waited for him to speak.

"I understand from the Head that you saw no one while you were in the quadrangle last night," went on Ferrers Locke, after a pause, "and you did not see the person who fastened the window?"

"Quite right, sir."

"And the stone could not have been thrown by one of you without the knowledge of the rest—excepting Manners?"

Manners flushed.

"I was away from Tom only a few minutes, Mr. Locke, and I was with him again before the stone was thrown."

The detective looked at him keenly.

"Why did you go out at all?"

"To raid the New House," said Tom Merry frankly. "To-day is Kerr's birthday— We're telling you this much in confidence, of course, sir?"

"That is understood."

"Well, Figgins & Co. had laid in a big feed to celebrate Kerr's birthday, and we got wind of it, and we raided their study at near midnight and collared the grub."

The detective smiled.

"I see. And you brought it home safe, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, sir! We hid the bags in the wood-shed, or else Linton would have had them. We brought them in this morning immediately after school, and they're safe here now. We've invited Figgins & Co. to the feed. It's coming off in the club-room this evening. If you're still at St. Jim's, then, sir, we'd be glad if you came."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"Thank you, Tom! We shall see. But to come back to business. If you left the house on a raid over the way, why did you separate? I do not mean to imply that I think Manners guilty, but I should like to have that point cleared up."

"Oh, it was his beastly old camera!"

"His camera?"

"Yes, he had a fancy for taking a photograph of the School House by moonlight, and he took the camera out with him and exposed the film, and fetched it in after the raid, you see. That's how we came to go on ahead. He wasn't long."

"Ah, yes, I remember; Manners is the photographer of the Merry Hobby Club," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile. "Have you the camera here, Manners?"

"Yes, sir," said the amateur photographer, rather wonderingly. He could not fathom why Ferrers Locke should ask about his camera.

"I should like to see it."

"Certainly, Mr. Locke!"

Manners fetched his camera out of the cupboard. Ferrers Locke picked it up and looked it over curiously.

"Have you removed the film?" he asked.

"No; I haven't had time to see to it since the photograph was taken. I was thinking of doing it after dinner," said Manners. "I don't know yet whether it's a success or not."

"Ah! So the negative is not developed?"

"No, Mr. Locke."

"Would you mind if I developed it for you?" asked the detective genially. "I was an expert at the business, you know, and the negative would really be safe in my hands. Mr. Railton would allow me to use his dark-room. I have a particular reason for wishing to see the result of your moonlight photograph."

Manners was puzzled and gratified. To find someone to take so keen an interest in his amateur photography was pleasant enough.

"I should be very pleased, sir!" he said eagerly. "But there's no need to have Mr. Railton's dark-room. I have the daylight developer—"

"H'm! I think I should prefer the dark-room," said Ferrers Locke. "I may take this away, then, Manners?"

"Certainly, sir," said the wondering Manners.

"Then I shall see you later."

And Ferrers Locke left the study with the camera in his hand. They heard him knock at the door of Mr. Railton's study below. The Terrible Three looked at one another.

"What on earth does he want the camera for?" said Tom Merry at last.

"Oh, he takes an interest in amateur photography, of course!" said Manners.

Monty Lowther sniffed.

"There's something more than that in it."

"I don't see what more there can be in it—"

Tom Merry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"I can! My only Panama hat!"

"Well, what is it?"

"You know the camera was set to take in the front of the School House, and it was placed as far back as the chums—"

"I know that."

"So it must have taken in anything that went on in front of the house," said Tom Merry excitedly.

"What about that?"

"Don't you see?"

"Blessed if I do!"

"Why, if there's an image at all on the negative, there will be an image of the chap who threw the stone at Mr. Linton's window!"

Manners and Lowther gave a simultaneous shout.

"My hat!"

"I knew he had something up his sleeve!" cried Tom Merry. "It was Gore, as we know; and if the photograph is there, Gore is bowled out."

"Let's go and get it back!" said Lowther.

"Come on, then!"

The Terrible Three ran swiftly downstairs. But as they went they heard the click of a key in a lock, and knew that it was the detective locking himself in the dark-room. It was too late!

CHAPTER 17.

The Birthday Feed.

TOM MERRY knocked at the door of the dark-room. He knocked again and again, but no answer came from within.

"Mr. Locke!"

But the detective did not reply.

"It's no good," growled Manners. "He's developing the negative, and he won't answer us till he's finished. I wouldn't!"

"We can wait."

And the chums of the Shell waited. A little later the door of the dark-room opened, and Ferrers Locke came out. There was a bland smile upon the detective's face. He handed Manners his camera.

"Thank you, Manners!"

"Is it a success, sir?" asked the amateur photographer eagerly. Manners was a photographer before anything else.

"First rate!" said Ferrers Locke. "I have never seen anything so successful, considering the circumstances."

"The School House has come out well?"

"No: unfortunately the School House has not come out very well, the way being filled up by an object which was interposed much nearer the camera."

Tom Merry looked at his chums.

"And what was that, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"So far as I have made out, it was the figure of a boy in the act of hurling a stone," said Ferrers Locke quietly.

"I guessed it."

"Ah, you guessed, did you, Tom? That was why you were thundering at the door?" said the detective, laughing.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, with a clouded brow. "Will the picture be recognisable, sir? Will you know who the chap was?"

"Undoubtedly, I think, when the finished print is obtained. It would be hard to recognise the face while all the lights are dark. The side of the face was fortunately turned towards the camera, and so the profile will be very clear."

"It's all up!" said Lowther. "There will be no mistaking Gore's nose, if that's the case."

"So you knew it was Gore!" exclaimed the detective, looking at Lowther.

"We—we guessed, sir," stammered Lowther. "I suppose it was Gore. I—I wish we hadn't had a hand in this. It will look like sneaking. Gore deserves all he gets, I know, but if he's expelled the fellows will put it down to us."

"I have thought of that, Lowther. I shall intercede with the Head, and save him the expulsion."

"Will the Head give way?"

"He will learn nothing from me if he doesn't."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry, his face brightening. "That will make it all right. The thing will be cleared up without Gore being expelled. It's all serene."

"I shall take that negative to Gore, and explain," said Ferrers Locke. "I shall tell him to go to the Head and confess, and, with that proof in my hand, he will hardly care to refuse. The Head will promise not to expel the culprit, for the sake of having the truth known. Gore will certainly be flogged; but he deserves that, and more."

And the detective nodded and left them. And the Terrible Three went in to dinner, pretty well satisfied with the way things had turned out. As Ferrers Locke anticipated, the Head conceded a point for the sake of learning the facts, and Gore, when he found that it was in Ferrers Locke's power to prove his guilt, was glad to save himself from expulsion by confessing.

The flogging of Gore was an event long remembered by the revengeful lad. It was not often that the Head of St. Jim's let himself go, but this time he let himself go with a vengeance, and Gore almost crawled away from the study when the infliction was over. But he found no sympathisers. His trick upon the Form master found no admirers, and his

meanness in attempting to throw the guilt upon Tom Merry & Co. earned him general contempt. He was not expelled; but his punishment was so severe that he almost wished he had been.

The exposure of Gore was a surprise to Skimpole. The amateur detective of St. Jim's was already on the track again. He had found some more clues which exonerated Manners, and he had almost proved the guilt of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to his satisfaction, when he learned that Gore had been the guilty party, and had confessed. It was rather a set-back for Skimpole; but he soon recovered his spirits. As he explained, even the greatest of detectives could not expect to be absolutely successful in his first case.

Ferrers Locke had quickly wound up the case, and the Head thanked him warmly for his prompt services. The famous detective remained the evening at St. Jim's, for the express purpose of joining the feed in the Merry club-room. And a merry feed it was.

The preparations Figgins & Co. had made for celebrating Kerr's birthday were not wasted. The only difference was that the feast was given in the School House, instead of in the New House. It was a signal victory for the School House chums, and a defeat for the New House; but under the kindly influence of good cheer, the New House quartette forgot all that. Fatty Wynn, at least, was entirely happy.

Figgins & Co., the Terrible Three, and Study No. 6 gathered joyfully to the feed, and Skimpole and Ferrers Locke completed the party. And when Figgins made a speech and referred to the two great detectives, Skimpole blushed modestly, and Ferrers Locke laughed good-humouredly.

It was a feed which made Kerr long remember his birthday, and when it was over, the juniors all pressed him warmly to have another birthday soon. And Kerr said he would.

THE END.

(Another double-length tale of Tom Merry & Co. next Thursday, entitled "The Tell Tale.")

WHAT
DO YOU
THINK
of "THE
GEM"
Library?

"Rotherham.
"Dear Editor—I have had all three numbers of 'The Magnet' Library, and like the tale about Harry Wharton, Nugent, and Cherry very much. The serial about 'Maxennis, detective,' is becoming equally interesting.—Yours truly,
"FRANCIS B. BAENSLEY."

"Stanstead.
"Dear Sir—I notice that at the end of every GEM there is an intimation that you are pleased to hear from all readers. No doubt that interesting paper is intended to amuse boys, but I may tell you that they also delight the girls. I am especially interested in Tom Merry & Co., and eagerly wait for Thursday to come. I think 'The Gathering of the Clans' and 'Miss Priscilla's Mission' exceptionally good tales.—Thanking you, I am, your constant reader,
"LU."

"Luton, Beds.
"Dear Editor—I am a reader of 'The Magnet,' and I saw you were anxious to know how people liked your new paper, by a few lines on the last page. I have had influenza since last Sunday, and your third issue cheered me up. They are excellent tales, and they seem quite real. I picture them in my mind. If every reader of 'The Magnet' liked to read them as much as I do, they would be greatly liked. I agree with you that Bob Cherry is a decent sort, Nugent is all right, Wharton can be nice when he likes. Bulstrode is a bully in his name and in habits. Vaseline is above a cad, and, if there is such a boy, I would like to give him what he deserves. The other boys, whether decent or not, I do not know, because you have not said much about them.—I remain, yours truly,
"H. LITTLE."

Vaseline is not quite so bad now.—EDITOR.

"Binstead, I.W.,
"Dear Sir—Just a line to say how fine the school tales are which now appear in THE GEM. I do hope they will always be about 'St. Jim's' and nothing else. I keep all my old copies, and read them many times, and laugh over the fig-pudding, etc.; they are a splendid cure for the blues.—Yours truly,
"EVELYN WINIFRED DUFFETT."

"Catford, S.E.
"Dear Editor—After having read the first two numbers of 'The Magnet,' I send herewith my opinion of the same. I have read most boys' books published, but I think I have yet to read one to beat 'The Magnet.' I consider the tale of Harry Wharton quite out of the ordinary, and containing splendid examples for boys, especially those of Bob Cherry and Nugent. I live in a tobacconist's shop, and we sell 'The Magnet.' I thought that if you cared to send me any advertising matter you may have with regard to 'The Magnet,' I might be able to push the sale a lot. I am sure that when once read 'The Magnet' will be always read. I must close now by wishing you every success with 'The Magnet.'—I remain, yours sincerely,
"ARTHUR T. SPENCER."

WHAT
DO YOU
THINK
of "THE
MAGNET"
Library?

"East Dulwich, S.E.
"Dear Sir—I am very pleased with 'The Magnet Library,' and have read all three numbers with great interest.—Yours truly,
"HAROLD BOX.
"P.S.—This may be published."

The ONLY NEW AND ORIGINAL SCHOOL TALE by this famous author.



TEMPEST HEADLAND

A SPLENDID NEW SCHOOL TALE.

By S. CLARKE HOOK.

READ THIS FIRST!

Billy Barnes, Cyril Conway, and Snowy White Adonis Venus, are three great chums at Tempest Headland School.

Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, finds them very troublesome pupils; as does also Herr Ludvig, the German master.

Venus is a black boy, and is taken as a fag by Graft, a bully.

Cyril offers to give a dormitory "feed" in honour of his mother's birthday. He and Venus break bounds after lights-out, and make for the village "tuck-shop."

On their arrival there they are tempted by the odour of good things, and sit down to enjoy some of Mrs. Jones's delicious pies, jam puffs, and so on.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Tug of War!

Then Cyril ordered a hamper for the dormitory. It was a large one, kept specially for the purpose. Some of the boys used to assert that Mr. Jones had been a smuggler in his time, and that he had taught his wife the tricks of the trade. Be this as it may, Mrs. Jones had helped to smuggle into the college a fearful lot of contraband.

Having paid for the goods, and sixpence extra for luck, and the use of the silver fork and glance at the silver spoon, Cyril shook hands with the old lady, and took one side of the hamper, while Venus took the other.

The only difficulty they experienced was getting the hamper over the wall. They had got two dozen of ginger-beer in it, so that it was not only heavy but also breakable.

"I think we have only smashed one bottle," observed Cyril.

"Nunno! Dat's all," answered Venus, "and dat bottle can be for Snigg. Dat boy is too much ob a sneak to deserve any. I hope we ain't too late to find de back door open. Golly! All de lights are out. I'm most afraid we hab left it rader late."

"Eh? It does look like it, doesn't it? But never mind. We shall be able to squeeze through the pantry window. You can do that, you know, and then come and let me in by the back door. Perhaps it is just as well that everyone is in bed."

The small window was open, but it scarcely looked sufficiently large for a boy of Venus's size to squeeze through.

"I dunno 'bout dat window," he observed dubiously. "Seems to me it's too high, and ain't broad enough. I dunno why dey want to make windows in dat silly fashion."

"You can't have windows made purposely for you, Venus," observed Cyril. "It is plenty large enough. I have been through that window a score of times."

"Was tinkin' weder you would like to go frough once more, so as to sort ob show me how it is done."

"Rats! Here, I will give you a leg up! That's the road! You are jolly heavy, too! Now, then, through you go!"

Cyril gave him a vigorous shove, and the upper portion of Venus's body disappeared from view, while his legs shot into the air in the most strange manner.

Cyril heard a gurgling sound, then Venus spoke.

"Golly! I hab plunged my noddle into a large basin ob someting cold and clammy, and I'm mighty certain I'm making a drefful mess 'bout de place."

"Ha, ha! What have you put your head into?"

"I rader tink it is cream."

"Oh, well, that's good for the hair. Go on! Shift the basin out of the way."

Venus did; he shifted it on the floor.

"I say," exclaimed Cyril, "you are not making much row!"

"I'm mighty glad ob dat," observed Venus, struggling through, and knocking down some more crockery. "I thought I was making a good bit. I tink dat is de butter gone now."

"Never mind. I dare say it has gone to look for the cream."

"Well, I can't say dat I mind much, only I was tinkin' de cook may when she sees de mighty slop I hab made. Dat butter seems to be sort ob slippery, too. I hab just trodden in it, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if I tread it ober de carpets."

"Well, go and open the door. You would never do for a burglar, Venus; you are too awfully noisy."

There was a little light in the kitchen from the fire, which was still burning, and Venus found his way to the back door; then he gave Cyril admittance, and having locked the door, he helped Cyril upstairs with the hamper.

But this was where Mopps shone. He had seen those worthies go out, and at once guessed their object. By catching them he would get a nice lot of dainties, and then he would be able to report them, and have the satisfaction of knowing that they would get a caning, which was the penalty for breaking bounds.

He allowed them to get about half-way up the stairs, and then he came after them.

"Now, what are you varmint's doing?" he demanded, dealing Venus a slap over the head that made him yell—not because it hurt him, but it startled him. He scrambled past the hamper, and gave assistance at Cyril's end.

"You ain't taking that up, and so I tell you," cried Mopps. "I shall conferscate this little lot, and shall report you for having broken bounds. Let go, you young varmint's!"

Venus and Cyril did nothing of the sort. The latter got a grip on the baluster, as well as on the handle of the hamper; then Venus, who had also got hold of the handle, felt himself gripped round the body by one of the boys from their dormitory, who had a deep interest in that tug of war.

"Look here, Mopps," exclaimed Cyril, "you go away. This hamper isn't yours."

"Bust me, I'll have it!" roared Mopps, giving a terrific wrench.

Mopps was a heavy weight, and something had to go. The upper handle went, so did the hamper, so did Mopps, and the way Mopps and the hamper went down those stairs gave the impression that the porter was getting hurt, while his howls confirmed this impression.

They landed at the bottom in a heap. Ginger-beer mingled with smashed jam-tarts, while Mopps was in the most awful state.

The lid of the hamper, which had not been fastened down, flew open, and the contents shot on Mopps' chest and face, while ginger-beer foamed all over him.

All the time he was howling at the top of his voice, and then a voice that quickly produced silence arose. It was the doctor's!

"We are in for a licking, Venus," observed Cyril.

He was perfectly correct; they were. The doctor went into matters, and decided that a couple of canings were necessary, and they were duly administered.

"Still," remarked Cyril, "we have the consolation of knowing that Mopps did not 'conferscate' our provender."

The Result of the Examination.

"My dear Mopps," exclaimed Cyril, entering the porter's lodge after tea the next day, "have you seen Venus?"

"No, I ain't, and don't want to; and the same remarks apply to you. You two boys ought to be tied up in a sack and drowned."

"Oh, my misguided Mopps, you don't know what is good for you! I feel sure that you would gain a great deal by gazing on Venus and me. We may not be exactly beautiful—"

"You ain't, by long chalks, you idiotic-looking sheep's-head! I never seed two such utter little varmint in all my born days; and if you don't get out of my room—"

"Hush, Mopps! I hear groans that remind me of Venus when he's been whacked. I think he comes. Yes, he cometh."

"Golly, golly!" groaned Venus. "Ain't dis drefful? I thought I should find you here, Cyril."

"Where does the calamity come in?"

"I ain't seen him," groaned Venus. "I don't tink he could hab come in at all. Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Are you referring to Mopps as dear, because I would say the man would be dear at any price?"

"Nunno, I ain't tinkin' ob Mopps just now. I'm tinkin' ob a beautiful nigger named Venus."

"Snowy White Adonis Venus, you mean?"

"I ain't got breff to gib dat nigger his full names. Are dere splinters ob spine-bone sticking out at my back?"

"No."

"Well, I'm glad ob dat, 'cos Graft has been slap-dashing at my back in a frightful manner."

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mopps. "I'm glad of that, and—"

"Well, I ain't," interposed Venus, "and I dunno when I shall feel glad at anyting again. I'm mighty certain I sha'n't feel any gladness till dis pain has gone, and it don't feel a bit like going."

"What's the bully been hitting you for?" inquired Cyril.

"Spect it was something I did to him some time back, but I ain't interested 'bout dat part ob de business. It don't seem to matter to me what he has hit me for, 'cos de feeling is just de same."

"It's time that bully was brought to his senses. Are you much hurt, Venus?"

"Oh, oeh! Should tink I am."

"Well, clear out of my room, you varmint," growled Mopps, "else you will get a lot worse hurt. How dare you come meeting in my room? I never came across sech imperant boys in all my life."

"De agony dat I'm suffering is too much for words, and— Yah, yah, yah! Was just tinkin' how we could get level wid dat Graft. And see dis, Mopps; he has sent me here to fetch him a jug ob hot water."

"Hang his hot water!" exclaimed Cyril. "Let the ugly bully get his own water. Come along with me, Venus; I will give him my opinion. Is the brute alone?"

"I dunno. He wasn't alone when he was whacking me."

"Well, if he is not alone we won't interfere with him. Come and see."

"I shall tell him what you have been calling him," declared Mopps.

"You are a very nice man for people who like your sort, Mopps. They keep a lot of such cattle in Borstal prison. It seems a waste of money, because I really believe in the survival of the fittest, as far as creatures of the Mopps' breed are concerned. I think you ought to be sent to the lethal chamber, and painlessly destroyed, the same as they do with other mangy mongrels that roam the streets."

"Oh, you venomous microbe!" howled Mopps. He did not understand all of Cyril's observation, but what he did understand of it did not please him at all. "I'll tell the doctor that you are going to murder me. I will, straight!"

Cyril gazed calmly at the infuriated man, then a slight and extremely contemptuous smile came over Cyril's face, and he left the room, followed by Venus, who was shouting with laughter.

"Now, stop that fearful guffaw, and we will interview Graft," said Cyril. "If he should hear you laughing like that ne will think you like being thrashed, and will do it again. Myes! He is alone. Come in, Venus. Pardon me for locking your door, Graft. No, Venus has not brought your hot water. I refused to allow him to do so, and Venus always does what I command, when it suits his purpose. I shall not detain you for long, Graft. Would you mind turning the ether way? Your underdone suet-looking face disgusts me. It's too flat. I wonder if we could punch the beastly-looking thing into shape? Of course, Graft, you cannot help your face. It is not its ugliness that I mind so much as its viciousness. Now, Graft, I intend to speak very seriously to you."

Then, quite oblivious of Graft's furious rejoinder, Cyril

commenced in a style that he intended to represent Dr. Buchanan's.

"I am not at all satisfied with you, Graft. I do not know how you will come out in the examination, but I shall have something to say about that to-morrow morning when the results are made known, but of late I have observed that you have neglected your studies. You are now verging on madness, and you should bear in mind that as you have your way to make in the world, it is incumbent on you to strive. You are not nearly as far advanced as a lad of your age should be. Not only this, but you give yourself airs that are very ridiculous in a schoolboy, and would be extremely bad taste in a man. Not being gifted with a brilliant intellect, you should strive to supply the deficiency by hard work. Do not let me have to speak to you again concerning this. There is one other matter that I intend to deal with. It has come to my knowledge that you have been bullying again. Now, I give you fair warning that the next time this occurs, Venus and I will place you across that table and flog you till your hootings awake the echoes. Good-evening!"

"I suppose you think you are clever," sneered Graft, making a desperate effort to conceal his fury, "but you will have cause to repent those words, my lad. Ah, you will have good cause! I do not forget."

Cyril unlocked the door, took the key out, gave Graft a contemptuous look, then he and Venus left the study, and Cyril thoughtfully locked the door on the outside and took the key away.

"It's all right," observed Cyril. "He dare not tell, because it might come out why we locked him in. Now, what were you guffawing about?"

"Why, dat boy Graft has got some money, and instead ob paying his bills, he's going to invite some ob de swells from de oder college to a sort ob feed in de open. Yah, yah, yah! He's had a tent put up, and all de provisions are to be sent in to-morrow morning. Yah, yah, yah!"

"I fail to see that that is funny, Venus."

"Nunno, dat ain't funny, but dere's an old cow in de next field, and dey hab to pass it. Graft is frightened ob cows, 'cos I watched him pass dat one, and when it came walking up to him he bolted for de gate, and came home de oder way, which took a mighty long time, and he had to burst frough several hedges and jump some ditches. Now, I was tinkin' dat if we could entice dat cow to stand at de gate and sort ob wait for dem, it would be rader amusing."

"Quite correct, Venus; but that cow is a furious bull, as a matter of fact, and the brute nearly tossed me on several occasions. However, we will think it over. To-morrow being a half-holiday, we ought to be able to upset Graft's little party, and make him look a bigger idiot than he really is. It will want some doing, too."

The following morning the doctor read out the result of the examination papers, and he spoke in the highest terms of Cyril's work. Then he slated Graft.

"Your paper is a disgrace for a boy in the Sixth Form," he said. "Although the questions are certainly easier, Conway's paper is far better. There happens to be a similar question in both papers. His is answered correctly; yours is incorrect from the beginning to the end. His paper is better than yours."

"I fear it must be very bad, sir, if it is only better than Graft's," murmured Conway.

"Silence! I am extremely annoyed with your work, Graft. You have cause to be ashamed of yourself."

"I assure you I am nothing of the sort, sir," snarled Graft, who was so angry that he was not inclined to show the doctor much respect. "Probably Conway has cribbed all his answers; he is quite capable of it, and is the most cunning little rascal I have ever met."

"That is not my opinion of the lad. Listen to me, Conway. I wish you to do one of these papers this afternoon, and—"

"Oh, golly, golly!" groaned Venus.

The doctor gave him a glance that quickly quelled him.

"You can have Monday afternoon instead," continued the doctor. "I particularly wish to see how you would answer the questions, and shall remain in the room while you complete the paper. Graft will do the same."

"I have a particular engagement this afternoon, sir," cried Graft.

"Can't I do it now, sir?" inquired Cyril. "Half-holiday, fine day. Might be wet on Monday."

"There is only a quarter of an hour before dinner-time, and—"

"Plenty of time, sir," declared Cyril, taking the paper and seizing a pen. "If I can't answer questions in a quarter of an hour, I can't answer them. Myes—er—I

(Continued).



THE TEMPEST HEADLAND

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don't know. Let me see, now—er—was it—well, when was it—

"I don't wish you to hurry over the paper," said Dr. Buchanan. But Cyril was not paying the slightest attention to him; he was worrying over the paper; and he turned to the second question, then to the last one, and scribbled down an answer to one of the middle ones. Then he seemed to get a better start, and he dodged about in a manner that caused the doctor to smile. He remembered how he had often done the same in his youth. The doctor continued to speak about the papers, but it made no difference to Cyril; nor did the fact that Venus was leaning over him, urging him to go ahead. He did not want to lose that afternoon, because the way they had worked their plans was likely to prove funny. Besides that, he was on his mettle, because he wanted to make the bully appear ridiculous in the eyes of the other fellows.

"That's about the best I can manage, sir!" he exclaimed, showing up the paper as the doctor ceased speaking.

"I do not think it is the best you can do, Conway," said the doctor, "for the simple reason that you have not given the matter sufficient time; but— Mr. Rolls, kindly look at this paper, and at this one. You can take Graft's first, while I am examining Conway's."

Now Mr. Rolls was Cyril's master, and he was justly proud of his pupil, although he had not taught him for very long. Even in that short time he had come to the conclusion that the lad had excellent ability.

Mr. Rolls looked surprised as he read Graft's answers, then he glanced at the bully, who looked extremely furious; but Graft lowered his eyes before Mr. Rolls' steadfast gaze.

"There is not one question correctly answered," he said, handing the paper back to the Head. "I am astounded. The questions are comparatively simple—at least, there are some of them that surely might have been answered correctly!"

"Conway's answers are briefer than I would have desired," observed Dr. Buchanan; "but he has answered every question—and he has answered every question correctly. Look at that, Mr. Rolls. You have cause to be ashamed of yourself, Graft. You asserted that the young lad had cribbed his answers to the junior paper. You cannot bring such a false accusation against him with regard to the senior paper—the one with which you have failed so lamentably. He has never seen one of these papers, and yet he has answered every question correctly. I do not wish to compare his intellect with yours, but I can plainly see that you have grossly neglected your studies. It is evident that you have not worked at all."

"I suppose you will wish us to believe that he has worked, sir?" sneered Graft, who was beside himself with rage.

"He has certainly done so," answered Dr. Buchanan. "I am aware that he is not studious—that is to say, that he hurries through his work—but no lad could fill up a paper as he has done without considerable work; your paper gives me the impression that you have done no work at all. Do you consider your pupil to be studious, Mr. Rolls?"

"Indeed I do not," answered the astonished master. "I never catch him working, although I often catch him playing practical jokes. All the same, I agree with you; the lad must have worked. I hope he does not work at night!"

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Venus.

The idea of Cyril working at night was really too funny. Sometimes he would work for a quarter of an hour or so in the daytime, but he was the unlikeliest boy on the face of the earth to work at night. The fact is, Cyril did not like work, and only did it as a painful duty; but he seemed to have a knack of never forgetting anything he happened to learn, and this was a very great advantage in the case of an examination. Graft, on the other hand, never tried to learn anything, and if by chance he did learn something, he always forgot it again. However, he did not care much about the matter, and would rather have been laughed at by the Fourth than that his afternoon entertainment should have been spoilt.

All the same, Cyril and Venus were determined that the entertainment should be spoilt; if they could manage it, and Cyril was rather inclined to leave matters to Venus.

That worthy was remarkably busy over his dinner, and then he turned his attention to cows, which, to his way of thinking, included bulls.

"Do you know what cows are fond ob, Cyril?" he inquired.

"Well, I believe they are fond of their calves, as a rule. I don't know that there is any exception to that rule."

"I don't see how we can carry a calf about wid us to entice dat cow."

"No, there would be an objection to that arrangement; then, as this particular cow happens to be a bull, why, it might not love that calf as dearly as a mother cow should do."

"I was wondering weder a potato, or anyting like dat, would induce it to keep near de gate, so as to prevent Graft returning from his picnic."

"I have my doubts, and think a good, strong rope would have more effect. You see, Venus, if you were to attach that rope round the bull's neck, and tie the other end to the gate, it would be bound to stop there."

"Do you tink it would hab de same effect if you were to do de tying part ob de business?"

"I rather fancy it would be better for you to perform the operation; I am not good at tying knots."

"I dunno dat I am, eider. Still, if we could entice de cow wid a potato, and den get de oder side ob de gate and do de tying part ob de business, why, dat would be sort ob safer. Still, we will decide dat when we get dere. You go and find de rope, while I find de potato. I suppose dey do eat potatoes?"

"I dare say they would, especially if they were mashed, with a little butter and pepper. I really don't know what bulls prefer in the way of dainties."

"Do you tink a jam tart would be better? I know I would prefer a jam tart to a raw potato; but den, I ain't a cow."

"Try him with one of the doctor's cabbages," suggested Cyril. "I feel sure a good, crisp cabbage would gladden the heart of any cow, and make it sort of gently disposed towards you."

"I was tinking weder you would not rader offer it to de cow?"

"No, my dear Venus, I would much prefer your doing so. All you will have to do is to guard against it tossing you, and—there you are!"

"I know all 'bout dat, Cyril; but what I'm worrying 'bout is where would I be if dat cow decided on tossing me?"


"In the air—until you came down. After you had come down you would be on the ground until the animal tossed you again. Of course, it is just possible that you might drop on the cow's horns, but I don't suppose you would remain there very long. But come along, we will see what we can do to soften the heart of the cow."

"I don't want it to be too gentle."

"It won't be if we tie it to the gate. If it should be, we can stir it up with a stick. Hurry up!"

(Another long instalment next Thursday.)

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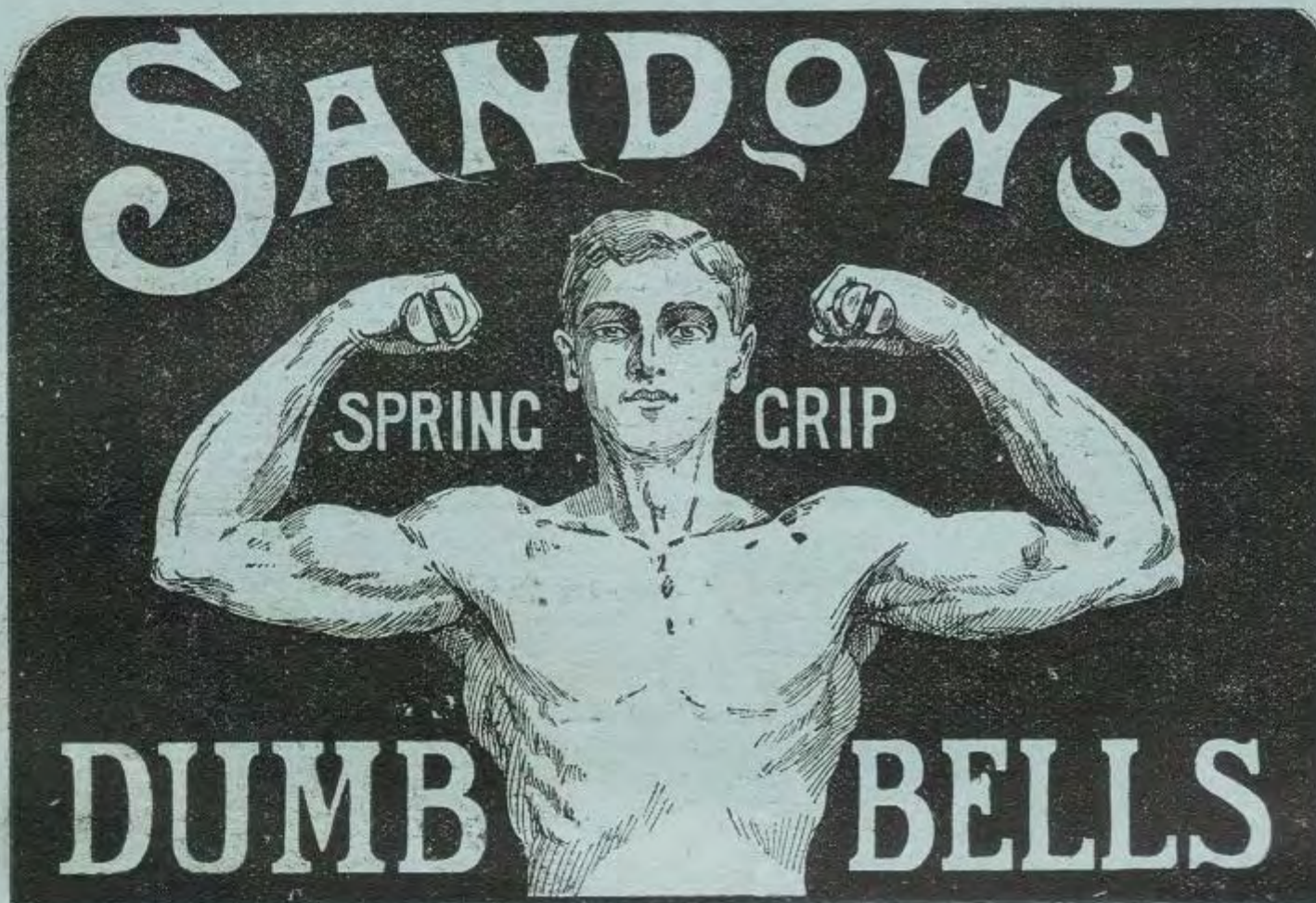
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