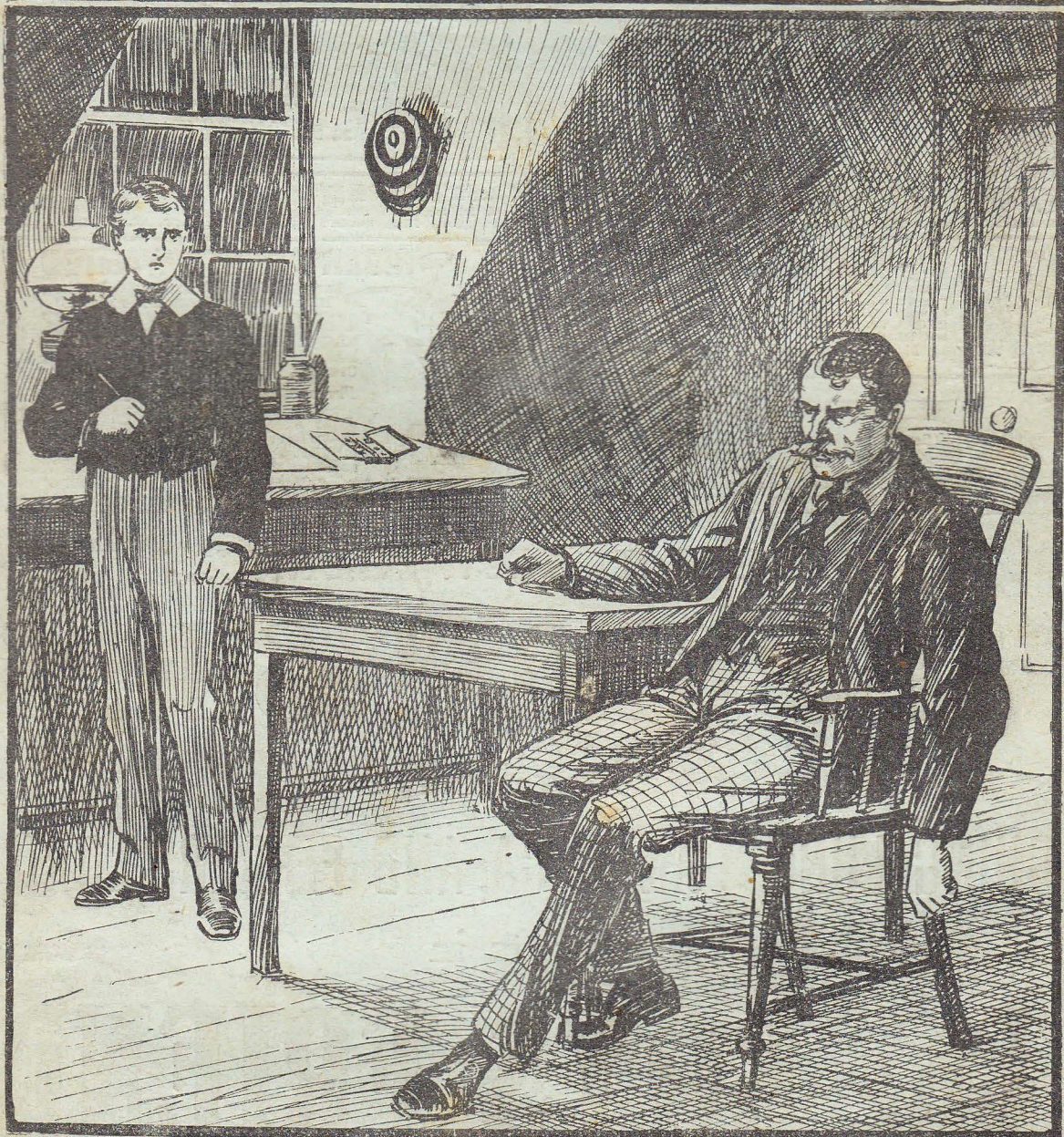
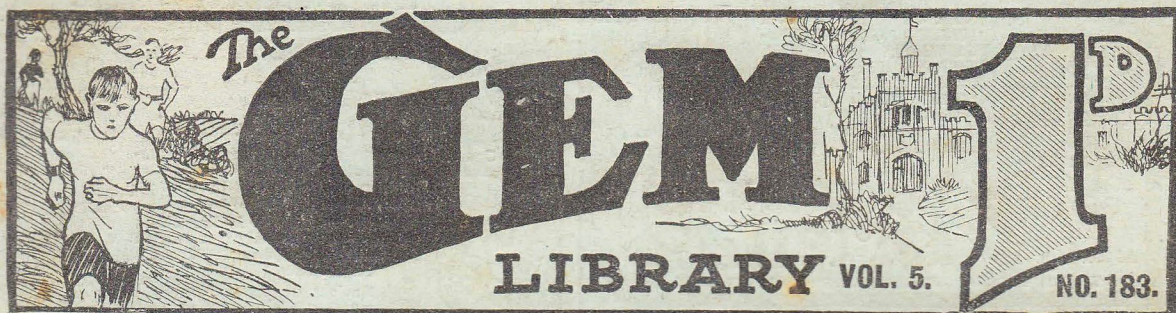


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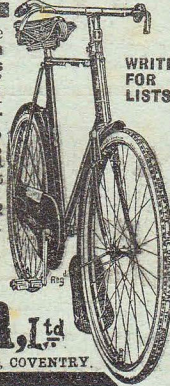


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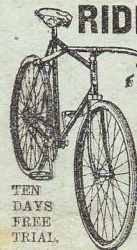
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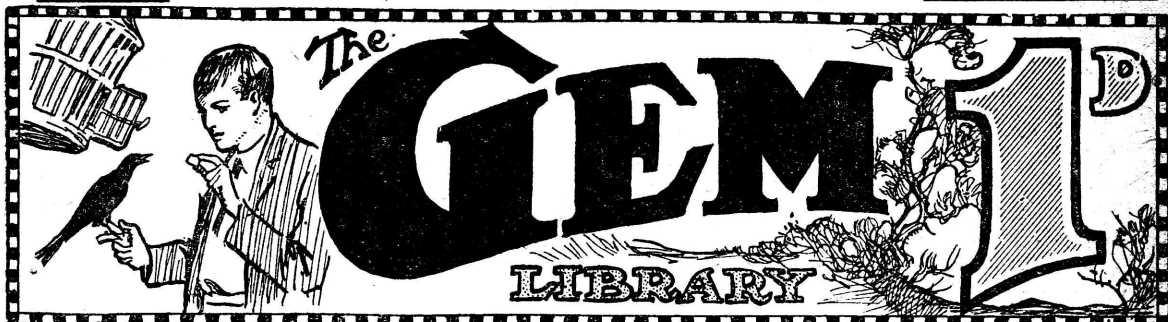
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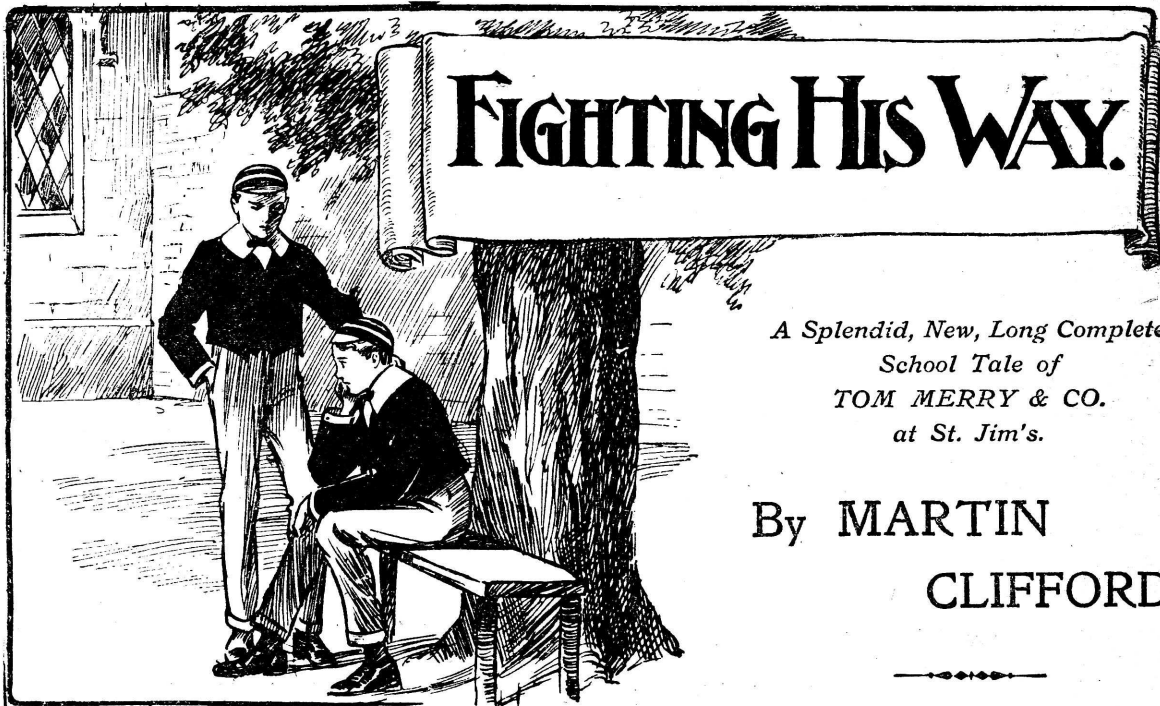
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TOM MERRY & CO.  
at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN  
CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.  
Very Rough.

"BUTTER-FINGERS!"  
"Oh, you ass!"  
"Fathead!"

Tom Merry & Co., as a rule, were polite. Indeed, the nice manners of the Terrible Three had often been remarked on. Tom Merry was nice. Manners was nice. Monty Lowther was nice. Jack Blake, of the Fourth, was nice. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was very nice indeed.

But there were times when their patience failed, and this was one of them.

They could stand many things. Manners said that he could stand Monty Lowther's jokes; and Lowther said it was possible to put up with Manners and his eternal camera. Blake could stand D'Arcy and his fancy waistcoats, and Arthur Augustus took great credit to himself for being able to stand Blake and his rude remarks.

But there were some things they could not stand.

And a fellow who muffed the easiest of easy catches on the cricket-field was one of them.

Hence the chorus of forcible observations when Dick Brooke let the round red ball slip through his fingers and drop into the grass.

"Oh, you ass!"  
"Yah! Butter-fingers!"  
"Booh!"

Brooke, of the Fourth, stood with his face growing crimson, looking down at the ball at his feet. His blue eyes had a strangely startled look in them. He did not seem to hear for the moment the chorus that greeted his misfortune.

It was a great misfortune. The School House juniors were playing the New House juniors at St. Jim's. The School House were all down for 90, and it was a single innings match. The New House were in, and Figgins was last man. When Figgins went in to join Kerr, with the New House score already at 87, the School House fellows had groaned. There was simply no chance left—not an earthly! A single boundary from Figgins, and the game was up; and Figgins was good for many boundaries.

Figgins had grinned as he took his place at the wicket. Figgins, perhaps, was so confident that he was for once a little careless. The School House fieldsmen were looking out for chances, and they still had a wild hope of catching Figgins out. If Figgins lost his wicket, the game belonged to Tom Merry & Co. There was still the ghost of a chance—if Figgins gave it them.

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"HIS PAST AGAINST HIM," AND "DEEP SEA GOLD."

And he did.

Jack Blake was bowling to Figgins, and Figgins swiped the ball away with a carelessness that was really inexcusable. It sailed fairly into the hands of Brooke at mid-on.

Brooke made a catch at it.

It was the easiest catch in the world, and Figgins stood shamefaced, and the New House crowd snorted. Before the ball reached the fieldsman they knew that all was up—that Figgins was out first ball, and the New House beaten by 5 runs. And then the unexpected, the impossible, happened. Brooke muffed the catch!

The yell of indignation that greeted his failure to hold the ball showed how unexpected his failure was. Brooke was no fool, and he had played cricket with credit before, or Tom Merry would never have put him in the junior House team. Brooke was a "day boy," and it was a great honour for a day boy to be in the eleven at all. And he had muffed the catch!

Some of the fellows could scarcely believe their eyes. The ball had sailed into his hands so easily, just as if Figgins was specially bent upon giving him an easy catch as a special favour.

And he had let it slide!

No wonder the New House juniors grinned and chuckled. No wonder the School House fellows yelled.

The variety of names they found for Dick Brooke was amazing. Their vocabulary seemed to be really inexhaustible.

"Butter-fingers!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Chump!"

"Duffer!"

"Idiot!"

And Brooke stood still, with crimson cheeks, too startled even to stoop and pick up the ball. But Figgins and Kerr did not run. They had escaped, and that was enough for them. Figgins breathed deep with relief. His carelessness had not been punished as it deserved; the New House were let off with the fright, so to speak. The innings would go on, and Figgins would not be careless twice. The School House was booked for a licking after all.

Tom Merry came up to Brooke, and his face was flushed, his eyes sparkling. It was seldom that Tom Merry, the School House junior captain, lost his temper, and never on the cricket-field. But he was very dangerously near to losing his temper now. He clapped the unlucky fieldsman on the shoulder.

"Gone to sleep?" he demanded roughly.

Brooke started, and stared at him.

"I—oh—no!" he stammered.

"What did you miss that catch for?"

"I—I—"

"Are you dotty?"

"N-n-no."

"Been dreaming?"

"No."

"Then why didn't you hold the ball?"

"I—I—I didn't see it."

Tom Merry simply snorted.

"You didn't see it? Figg dropped it right into your hands, as if on purpose, and you didn't see it? You wool-gathering ass! You champion duffer! Oh, you fathead!"

"I—I—I'm sorry!"

"Sorry! You've chucked the match away!" said Tom Merry. "You're not so sorry as I am. I'm sorry I played such a blithering duffer. Why couldn't you tell me you were blind, or in the habit of going to sleep standing up like a horse—hey?"

"I—I—"

"Oh, go and eat coke! Buzz off!"

"Eh?"

"Buzz off!"

"But I—I—"

"We'll play without you," said Tom Merry angrily. "A fellow who lets his side down like that is more use off the field than on it. Get off!"

Brooke drew a sharp, quick breath.

"You mean that?" he muttered.

"Mean it?" roared Tom Merry. "Of course I mean it! Buzz off! You're not in the team now, and never will be again, you hopeless fathead! Get out of my sight!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy," began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who was at cover-slip. "I—"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy!"

"Weally—"

"Are you going, Brooke?"

"Yes, yes," muttered Brooke. "I—I'm sorry! I can't say how sorry I am. But—but this is a shock to me, too. I—I—"

"For goodness' sake, get off!"

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"Very well!"

Dick Brooke walked slowly away, his head drooping. Some of the cricketers looked at him with sympathy. They had seldom seen a player get such a "slanging" on the junior ground at St. Jim's. Tom Merry fielded the ball, and tossed it back to Jack Blake. His face was still flushed and angry.

Jack Blake bowled, and this time Figgins made no mistake. He let himself go at that ball, and it sailed away, away, away into the blue. Kerr was about to run, but Figgins waved him back.

"No need to run," he called out.

And there wasn't. It was a boundary, and it scored 4 for the New House, and gave them the winning run. The New House had won the match, and Figgins and Kerr were not out. There was a roar from the New House fellows round the ground.

"Hurrah!"

"Who's cock-house at St. Jim's now?"

"New House! New House!"

"Hurrah!"

Tom Merry walked off the field, with knitted brows. The losing of the House match meant much to him; and the School House had been so near to victory, if only Brooke, of the Fourth, had made that catch. It was cruel to be beaten at the finish like this, when it might have ended so differently, and it was no wonder that Tom Merry's usually sunny temper was excited and angry for once.

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Small Soda.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came out of the cricket-pavilion with a cloud upon his aristocratic brow. Blake and Digby and Herries were with him, and they all looked clouded, too. All the School House fellows, as a matter of fact, were exasperated. Some of them were suggesting ragging the fieldsman who had muffed the easy catch and lost the match for his House. That suggestion was frowned upon by Tom Merry & Co., and the would-be raggers dropped the idea. But all were annoyed, and they had not yet finished their remarks upon the subject. Arthur Augustus, however, seemed to take a view of the matter somewhat different from the rest. He turned a severely reproving eye upon Blake and Herries and Digby.

"Weally, you fellows—" he remarked.

"Even Gussy is ratty," said Blake, with a grunt. "I should never have imagined that anything would shake Gussy up out of the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But look at him scowling now!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Quite right, Gussy; it was rotten!"

"Beastly!" said Digby.

"My dog Towser would have made that catch," said Herries. "Towser would make a better fieldsman than that champion ass, Brooke."

"Weally, you fellows, I was not scowlin'. I was fwownin'."

"Comes to the same thing," said Blake, "and there's plenty to scowl about and to frown about, too. I could say strong things, if I knew any words."

"Same here!" said Digby. "The silly ass simply chucked the match away—chucked it away! Bah!"

"I am not watty with Bwooke," said Arthur Augustus.

His chums stared at him.

"Not ratty with Brooke?" repeated Blake.

"Certainly not! I am not watty at all, unless it is with you fellows," said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, deah boy. I wegard Bwooke's blundah as most deplowable, of course. It was feahfully wotten!"

"Of course it was! He chucked the match away!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah! But I wegard it as a chap's dutay to be considewate," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Suppose you muffed a catch like that, Blake—"

"I couldn't."

"How would you feel?"

"Rotten, I suppose," said Blake. "But I couldn't do it."

"Well, I suppose Bwooke feels wotten, too," said D'Arcy; "and when a chap feels wotten, what's the good of makin' him feel wottener? It's not cwicket, deah boy."

"Well," said Blake, after a long pause, "there's something in that. I always said that Gussy could talk sense at times."

"Weally, Blake—"

"The chap must be feeling pretty beastly," agreed Digby.

"But he deserves it. If he can't play cricket, what was he in the team for? That's what I want to know."



The ball sailed right into Dick Brooke's hands, just as if Figgins was bent on giving him an easy catch as a special favour. But Brooke muffed the catch, and a yell of indignation greeted his failure to hold the ball. "Yah! Butterfingers!" roared the School House juniors. (See page 2.)

"Oh, that ass, Tom Merry put him in. This is what comes of having a Shell fellow for junior captain."

"But Bwooke has always played decent cwicket," said D'Arcy. "Let us be just, deah boy. He has come an awful cropper to-day, but there must be a weason for it."

"Oh, the reason is that he's a silly ass!"

"But he isn't a silly ass, you know. He's a clevah chap. He can do things at Gweck and German that make my head ache to look at," said D'Arcy. "And he has played good cwicket."

"Come to think of it, he has," assented Blake.

"Then the weason is that he must be ill."

"Ill! He doesn't look ill."

"Pewwaps he has been studyin' too hard," suggested D'Arcy. "I take wathah an interest in Bwooke, you know. I think he's a decent chap. I've often noticed that he has vevy wed and heavy eyes in the mornin' in class. I suppose that comes from svottin'."

"If he's ill, he should have given Tom Merry notice. We could have played Reilly or Macdonald instead quite easily."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"There must be something wrong with a chap to make him miss a catch like that," Blake remarked thoughtfully. "It wasn't as if it was a difficult one—it was the easiest thing in the world. A fag in the Second Form would have made the catch. Anyhow, the silly ass got a good slanging on the field."

"Yaas, and I werged that as wathah wotten of Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Blake chuckled.

"You'd better tell him so, then."

"I intend to do so, deah boy. He must have hurt Bwooke's feelin's fwightfully, and I considah that he ought to apologise to Bwooke."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' to speak to Tom Mewwy on the subject, and put it to him as one gentleman to anothah," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

And he nodded to the chums of the Fourth, and walked away. Blake and Herries and Digby grinned.

The Terrible Three were reposing under an elm on the side of the cricket-ground when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up. Tom Merry was sitting with his back against the trunk of the tree, and Manners was lying on one elbow in the grass. Monty Lowther was sitting up. The Terrible Three had glasses of lemonade—Mrs. Tiggles's home-made lemonade—and Monty Lowther had a syphon of soda-water, which he was squeezing into his glass. The chums of the Shell were busy in discussion—and the discussion, of course, was upon the subject that exercised the minds of all the School House juniors just then—the loss of the House match.

They looked up grimly at Arthur Augustus. The swell of St. Jim's adjusted his eyeglass in his right eye, and stood surveying them.

"I have somethin' to say to you, Tom Mewwy," he remarked.

"Go ahead," said Tom Merry tersely. Tom Merry was

CHAPTER 3.

Biff!

getting over the episode of the cricket match, but he was not quite his old sunny, good-tempered self yet.

"It's about Bwooke."

Tom Merry sniffed.

"Oh, blow Brooke!"

"Yaas, blow him as much as you like; but evewy chap is entitled to have his feelin's considahed," said D'Arcy. "I wegwet to say that I uttahed some oppwobwious wemahs when he muffed that catch."

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"I think we all did," he remarked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And he deserved them," said Manners. "A fellow who would muff a catch like that deserved to be boiled in oil."

"Well, Tommy gave it him straight from the shoulder, anyway," said Lowther.

"Perhaps I pitched it a bit too strong," said Tom Merry reflectively. "But it was enough to make a chap wild, wasn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah! At the same time, I twust that, havin' had time to weffect on the mattah, you are sowwy to have spoken so wuffly to the poor chap."

"Oh, rats!"

"You must wemembah," said D'Arcy impressively, "that the chap must have felt wotten, anyway. Then he must have been ill, or somethin', to miss that catch. Besides that, he is an awflly decent chap. He comes of a vewy good family, as old as ours."

"Rats!"

"And the fact that they have fallen upon bad times makes it all the more necessary to treat him with special politeness," said D'Arcy. "I have heard that his fathah lost all the family money, and they have been on the wocks. It's vewy hard on a chap."

"Oh, blow!"

"That is not a sensible answah, Tom Mewwy. My opinion is that you ought to go to Bwooke and expvess your wegwet for your wude wemahs."

"Piffle!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Oh, travel off, Gussy," said Monty Lowther. "You make me tired."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Buzz away, you bothering bee!"

"You uttah ass—"

Monty Lowther's fingers were playing with the nozzle of the soda syphon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took a step towards him.

"I twust that you will all thwice apologise to Bwooke—"

"Rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Lowthah, I shall have no wescource but to give you a feahful thwashin'."

"Rats!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus excitedly pushed back his cuffs, and stooped over Lowther, to drag him up. Monty Lowther grinned.

Swish!

"Ow-w-w-w-w-w-w-w!"

The jet of soda-water caught Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fairly under the chin. He staggered back with a series of wild gasps.

"Sizzzzz!"

"Yawwooh! Oh, oh! Oooococh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry.

"Lowthah, you ass—you uttah bwute! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz-zizzzz!

The swell of St. Jim's fairly tock to his heels, leaving the Terrible Three rolling in the grass and roaring with laughter.

TOM MERRY rose to his feet with a yawn. Cricket in the blazing hot weather had tired him, and he was greatly inclined to slack down, and lie in the deep rich grass, and sip lemonade, under the shade of the elm-tree. Monty Lowther and Manners yawned, too, as Tom Merry rose, but did not offer to follow his example.

"Where are you off to?" demanded Manners lazily.

Tom Merry looked down at him.

"I'm going to see Brooke, I think."

"What for?" asked Lowther. "Hasn't he had enough? You're not going to give the poor brute another ragging?"

Tom Merry coloured, and laughed a little uneasily.

"No," he said, "I'm not! I'm going to take Gussy's advice, and tell Brooke I'm sorry I slanged him so much on the cricket-ground."

"Oh, that's rot! He muffed the catch!"

"And I lost my temper," said Tom Merry. "It was rotten, slanging him as I did—he must have been feeling bad enough already. Gussy is right, though I was thinking of it before Gussy spoke."

"Well, we all called him names," said Manners. "I remember giving him quite a list."

"Come with me and make it up, then."

"Too hot!" yawned Manners. "You can tell him I'm sorry."

"Say I'm sorry, too," said Lowther lazily.

Tom Merry laughed and walked away. He wondered where Dick Brooke was. Brooke was a day boy, and so he had no study at St. Jim's. He did his preparation at home, and he went home for his meals; and so, in consequence, he did not enter very intimately into the life of the school.

His home was near St. Jim's, but he had never asked any of the fellows to it. He was on friendly terms enough with the boys of his Form, and he was generally liked, though considered to be a quiet fellow, with rather too strong a turn for study. "Swots" were not too popular in the school. But Brooke was always willing to lend a lagging scholar a hand with his Latin, and when a fellow was fished out of a difficulty by the day boy, he was willing to admit that even a swot might have his uses.

Tom Merry had seen little of Brooke. He was in the Shell, while Brooke was in the Fourth. But what little he had seen, he had liked. Brooke was a quiet fellow, with pleasant ways and a kind heart, and although no one had ever heard a word of complaint pass his lips, a keen observer could have told that he had more to bear than most boys of his age.

There were strange rumours current in the Lower School, too, about Brooke. It was known that he belonged to a very old family in the neighbourhood—a family that had owned its thousands of acres in Sussex when St. Jim's was still a monastic establishment, and Henry VIII. had not interfered with it yet. The Brookes had gone down in the world for some generations—hard drinking and hard living old fellows had left a legacy of incumbered estates and weakened constitutions to their successors in the old place. Dick Brooke's father had dissipated the last of what was left, and was generally supposed to have gone to the dogs.

Whether he lived with Brooke, most of the fellows did not know. Brooke's mother was with him, at all events, and some of the fellows had seen her in the village—a quiet, pale lady very plainly dressed. Brooke had a sister, too, as some of the fellows knew. Sometimes in conversation he would speak of his mother or his sister, but of his father, never.

Injudicious fellows had spoken to him on the subject, but Brooke always dried up immediately.

As a day boy, Brooke was left out of a great deal that went on in his Form at St. Jim's. He had no study, he was seldom seen in the common-room or the gym, and he was not able always to turn up to cricket practice. It was a great thing for him to get his name in the list for the junior eleven, and Tom Merry had been partially actuated by kindness of heart in putting it there. Brooke, of course, was good at cricket, or Tom Merry's kindness would not have gone so far as that.

Tom Merry was thinking of these things as he looked for the Fourth-Former. Tom regretted more every minute that angry outburst on the cricket-field. He realised that something must have been wrong with Brooke at the time—perhaps some family trouble in his poor home.

"Seen Brooke?" he asked, as he met Mellish, of the Fourth. Mellish was talking to Crooke, of the Shell, the biggest cad in Tom Merry's Form.

The two of them chuckled.

"Oh, yes," said Mellish, "I've seen him! I've got some news about him, too."

Tom Merry looked at him inquiringly.

"You know the chap's got a reputation for being a swot,

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and sticking to work, and so on," said Mellish. "Never supposed to go on the razzle, or anything of that sort."

"Nothing of that sort about Brooke, I imagine," said Tom Merry.

Mellish grinned.

"That's all you know, then," he said. "He's been seen with an awful beast—helping him along the road last night. Levison saw him."

"Oh, Levison!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"Oh, it's the truth!" said Mellish. "It's right enough. Levison wouldn't make it up. He'd been down to Rylcombe, you know, and, was coming back late, when he passed them. He says he doesn't know whether Brooke had been drinking or not, but the man he was with was right over the line."

"It's not true."

"What rot!" said Crooke, of the Shell. "Why shouldn't it be true? The fellows say all sorts of queer things about Brooke's father. The man he was with may have been his father."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"The less you say on the subject, until you get some proof, the better," he said, "and even then, the less said the better. If Brooke's father gets into scrapes, that's a reason for feeling sorry for the poor chap, not for dropping on him."

Crooke sneered.

"Oh, of course, that's the line you would take!" he said. "You've got a special sympathy for beggars and cads, I suppose."

"Not for cads," said Tom Merry. "I can't get on with you, can I?"

"Why, you rotten cad——"

Biff!

"Yaroo!" gasped Crooke. "Ow!"  
Tom Merry's fist had come forcibly in contact with his nose. He dropped in the grass with a bump, and Tom Merry's eyes glittered down at him.

"Now, if you want to repeat that, you've only to get up and do it, and I'll biff you again," said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

"Ow!"

"You'd better shut up about Brooké," said Tom Merry, glowering at the two juniors. "If the chap's in low water, let him alone. As for his being a rotter, I don't believe it; he doesn't look one. Let him alone."

"You were slanging him enough to-day, yourself," sneered Mellish.

"And I'm going to tell him I'm sorry."

Tom Merry walked away, leaving Mellish, sneering and scowling, and Crooke of the Shell sitting in the grass rubbing his nose. The two cads of the Lower School looked at one another ruefully.

"The—the high-handed rotter!" muttered Crooke savagely, struggling to his feet. "I'll make him smart for that, somehow! I'll make that precious friend of his sit up! We all know that Brooke is simply a beggar—he pays his fees here himself, and where does he get the money from?"

"Some of the chaps say he works for it," said Mellish.

Crooke sneered.

"What can he work at? I suppose he doesn't turn a mangle, does he? Or hold horses outside the Green Man? He must cadge it somewhere, or else steal it. I think that it would be only a duty to show Brooke up, and let the school see him in his true colours. The fellow oughtn't to be admitted here."

Mellish chuckled.

"It would be one at Tom Merry, anyway," he said.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Hard Lines.

"**B**ROOKE, old man!"

Tom Merry spoke the words softly.

He had found Brooke!

For some time he had looked for the junior in vain. He had feared that Brooke had gone home, as it was a half-holiday at the school, and there was nothing to keep him there after the cricket match was over. Tom Merry at once thought of walking down to Brooke's home after him; but then he hesitated. Brooke had never asked anybody home, and Tom Merry felt that a visit unasked would look like an intrusion, whatever his object might be in making it.

Then he had suddenly caught sight of Brooke. It was in a secluded corner of the old quad—in a recess shut in by the chapel wall and the angle of the library, shaded by old elms. In the shady corner, which seemed as far removed from the world as some hermit's cell in the desert, Brooke sat on an old wooden bench under one of the trees. His attitude was drooping, one of complete dejection. His elbows were upon his knees, and his face was buried in his hands.

Tom Merry stopped short.

Brooke was evidently taking his failure very much to heart. Tom Merry would have gone without speaking; but he thought that probably Brooke had heard his footsteps, and would look up.

"Brooke!"

The junior did not speak.

"Brooke, old man!"

Brooke started.

He raised his face from his hands, and Tom Merry saw that it was as pale as death. There were dark rings round the eyes, and an unaccustomed wrinkle deep in the boyish forehead.

He looked at Tom Merry dully, almost as if not recognising the captain of the Shell.

"Did—did you speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes, Brooke."

"I—I wasn't listening," said the boy. "What is it—what did you say?"

"It's about the cricket."

Brooke looked quite blank.

"The cricket?" he said.

"Yes; the match this afternoon."

"Oh, yes, I forgot!" said Brooke hurriedly.

Tom Merry stared at him in astonishment. He had forgotten! Forgotten miffing the catch, and losing the match for his House! It seemed incredible! Besides, if he had forgotten, what was he worrying about? Was that dejected attitude over something else, then, and not over the failure on the cricket-field at all?

Tom Merry flushed a little. He was prepared to forgive Brooke for that blunder, and to say he was sorry for slanging him. But if Brooke attached so little importance to the matter that he had already forgotten it——

"You forgot!" said Tom Merry.

In spite of his good intentions, his voice was very sharp. It seemed to rouse Brooke from his strange absence of mind.

"Yes," he said. "I—mean I didn't exactly forget, but I've been thinking about something else. I'm sorry I muffed the catch, Merry—very sorry indeed. I'm afraid I lost the match for the House."

"You did!"

"I—I'm sorry! It's my last cricket match, so it really comes rougher on me than on you, though, of course, it was bad for the School House."

"You can't play in the House team again, of course—not for some time, anyway," said Tom Merry; "but I don't see why it should be your last cricket match. Do you mean to say that you're giving up cricket?"

Brooke nodded.

"You don't mean that, Brooke?"

"I do."

"But you'll keep to practice at the nets, I suppose?"

"What's the use?"

"What's the use! Why——"

"I mean, I shall never be able to play again," said Brooke. "I muffed the catch—the easiest I could have had. I was bowled in my innings by an easy ball."

"Yes, I remember."

"It isn't because I can't play cricket," said Brooke, with a catch in his voice. "You've seen me play all right."

"I know I have; I simply couldn't understand what had come over you this afternoon," said Tom Merry.

Brooke was silent. His wide, blue eyes were looking straight at Tom Merry, with a strange, haunted look in them. It struck Tom Merry how red they were at the lids, and how they seemed to be sunken, and what dark circles were under them.

"You've been over-doing the study," he exclaimed.

"What do you do it for, Brooke? You're not working for a scholarship."

"Oh, no!"

"Then why do you swot of a night?"

"I don't."

"You don't!" echoed Tom Merry, in surprise. "You look as if you do. You give one the impression that you're grinding over your books till about midnight every night."

Brooke shook his head.

Tom Merry regarded him in silence. True, there might be another explanation of Brooke's worn and jaded look—if there was anything in Mellish's hint that he was addicted to late hours and reckless habits.

"But what's the matter, then?" Tom Merry asked. "Why did you make such an exhibition to-day, Brooke?"

"I couldn't help it."

"You weren't fit?"

"I was quite fit."

"Then why did you do it? Don't think I've come here to slang you again," said Tom Merry hastily. "It's just the reverse of that. I came to look for you, to say I was sorry for slanging you on the cricket-ground. And I am sorry."

"It's all right."

"But now, why did you miss the ball, when Figgins dropped it fairly into your hands?" asked Tom Merry.

Brooke was silent.

"Can't you answer, Brooke?"

"I suppose so," said the boy drearily, "I missed the ball because—"

"Because what?"

"Because I didn't see it."

Tom Merry stared.

"Brooke, old man! What do you mean? Why couldn't you see it?"

"Because my eyes are going rocky, and I can't see!"

"Good heavens!"

## CHAPTER 5.

### No Followers.

**B**ROOKE let his face drop into his hands again. Tom Merry stood in silence, looking at him, shocked and startled by what he had heard. He had never dreamt of anything of that sort. Brooke's eyes were open, and blue, and steady; no one would have fancied that there was anything wrong with them. There were signs, true, which a professional man would have known at once; but the boys noticed nothing—Brooke himself had noticed nothing, or nothing to arrest his special attention—till now! Perhaps he had wondered sometimes, when he found himself peering and peering to see things that other fellows saw without an effort. But it was not till this afternoon upon the cricket-field that the truth had rushed upon the mind of the unhappy lad. His eyes were failing him!

"Good heavens!" repeated Tom Merry. "Are you sure, Brooke?"

"Yes."

"But you're not—not—you're not going—blind?" stammered Tom Merry, in horror.

Brooke shook his head.

"Oh, no! Not so bad as that—nothing like that! Only they're rocky—I—I suppose I shall have to wear glasses! It's because of—of—"

He broke off.

"Because of what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"You've been straining your eyes," said Tom Merry. "You stay up late, and use your eyes all the time, don't you?"

Brooke was silent.

"I don't know what you do it for, Brooke; but it's madness. You'll have to chuck it at once."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because—"

He was silent again. Tom Merry sat down on the bench beside him. They were only acquaintances—hardly friends; but Tom Merry might have been Brooke's closest chum at that moment as he tapped him on the shoulder.

"Brooke, old man, you'll have to take care. First of all, you'll have to see somebody about your eyes—an oculist, you know."

"It's all right."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry. He realised that perhaps the fees of a professional man would be a considerable object to Brooke. "You could go to a hospital, you know, if you liked, Brooke, old man. You get advice for nothing there."

"I shall go in the vac."

"Dr. Holmes would give you leave to go now."

Brooke smiled slightly.

"Dr. Holmes is kind enough to me as it is, without my imposing upon his kindness any further," he said. "What would most of the fellows say if they knew that a St. Jim's chap was so poor that he had to go to a hospital?"

"H'm!"

"It wouldn't be specially nice for the Head, either. Besides, I couldn't get away from home now, anyway. I'm sorry I told you anything about it," said Brooke, with a look of distress. "You surprised me into it. Of course, you won't mention it to anybody else?"

"I won't if you don't want me to."

"Thanks!"

"But you'll have to have it seen to, Brooke."

"Oh, what's the use?" said Brooke. "As a matter of fact, I've had advice on the subject once, because my eyes felt tired. I was advised to use them as little as possible, and always to go to bed early, and never to work or read by artificial light."

"And didn't you follow the instructions?"

Brooke laughed.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I couldn't!"

"I don't want to take too much interest in your private

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affairs, Brooke, old man," said Tom Merry quietly; "but that advice appears to me to be jolly good, and you'd do jolly well to take it and follow it."

"You don't understand," Brooke rose to his feet. "It's time I was off; I shall be late for tea. Thank you very much for your kindness, Tom Merry. It's pleasant to have a talk with a decent chap, anyway."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I wish I could help you," he said.

"Oh, that's all right! I've been letting my tongue run away with me, that's all," said Brooke. "Good-bye!"

"Just a minute, Brooke."

Brooke turned back.

"What is it?"

"Just a word," said Tom Merry. "It's really a warning. One of the fellows has been saying that he saw you last night."

Brooke started violently.

"Saw me last night?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Where—where?"

"In Rylcombe Lane."

"Oh!"

"He says that you were with a chap who was the worse for drink," said Tom Merry, chilled by a sudden feeling that the story was true, after all. Nothing else could explain the agitation in Brooke's manner. "I thought I'd mention it to you, as a chap has to be careful. Of course, as a day boy, you're not under the master's control as we are; but if the Head heard anything of the sort—"

Brooke nodded.

"I understand," he said. "Thank you! I shall be careful."

And he hurried away.

Tom Merry watched the slight figure of the day boy as he disappeared through the school gates. Then the hero of the Shell walked away with a clouded brow. He did not quite understand Brooke, and he felt that the day boy had not been wholly frank with him. But doubtless Brooke had reasons for holding his tongue about his own affairs.

Tom Merry, as he looked towards the gates, started a little.

A few moments after Brooke had disappeared, two forms emerged from behind the porter's lodge, and followed him—Levison and Mellish of the Fourth. Tom Merry's eyes gleamed. It was perfectly clear that the cads of the Fourth were following Brooke.

Tom Merry ran quickly down to the gates. Levison and Mellish had passed out into the road, but the hero of the Shell overtook them in a few minutes. They turned in the road at the sound of his hasty footsteps.

"Stop!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

Levison gave him a look of defiance. Mellish drew back a pace behind Levison. Levison was not a fighting man, but he was made of the sterner stuff of the two.

"Well, what do you want?" Levison exclaimed.

"You are following Brooke."

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said," exclaimed Tom Merry angrily.

"You were following Dick Brooke."

"Did he go this way?"

"You know he did."

"Oh, if we know he did, there's no reason to argue about it, is there?" said Levison. "I don't know whether there are any byelaws in this district forbidding chaps to walk in the same direction as Dick Brooke."

"You were following him."

"Well, if he's ahead of us on the road, we're bound to follow him, ain't we, if we go in the same direction?" said Levison blandly.

"Where are you going, then?"

"Oh, down to Rylcombe!"

"Very good! Then you'll pass the turning that Brooke takes through the wood," said Tom Merry quietly. "I'll come with you past the stile."

"Thanks! We don't want you."

"Not at all," said Mellish.

"That makes no difference. You're not going to follow Brooke."

"Now, look here!" said Levison. "Why shouldn't we? He never asks a chap home, and no one has seen his house. My belief is that he lives in a giddy hovel, and his mother cooks the family dinner in an iron pot slung over a camp-fire."

And Mellish chuckled at that excellent joke.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom Merry. "The Brookes used to be rich enough, if that's a reason for thinking well of them, and I suppose it's a reason to you. That chap, Dick Brooke, was better off than most fellows at St. Jim's until a couple of years ago. Then his pater came a cropper. If they're poor now and want to hide their poverty, I should



think any chap with a grain of decency would let them alone."

"That's your opinion?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I want it, I'll ask for it," said Levison, with an insolent drawl. "Until then, would you mind the trouble of keeping it to yourself?"

Tom Merry's eyes flashed. He raised his hand, and pointed back to the grey old gateway of St. Jim's.

"That's your way," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"You're going in."

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'm not going in!" he said.

"You are, or you'll put up your hands here and now," said Tom Merry, his fists clenched hard. "Yes, and Mellish, too; I'll take both of you at once, if you like."

Levison and Mellish looked at one another. They did not look as if they wanted to accept the offer.

"Well," said Tom Merry sharply, "what are you going to do?"

"I—I remember old Schneider gave me a German imposition," stammered Mellish. "Upon the whole, I think I'll go in and get it done, Levison."

"Then I'll come with you," said Levison.

Tom Merry smiled scornfully. He did not care upon what excuse the cads of the Fourth went in, so long as they did go in and did not follow Dick Brooke. And he kept them in sight till they were fairly in the School House, to make assurance doubly sure.

## CHAPTER 6.

### Dick Brooke at Home.

DICK BROOKE turned from the lane into the wood, and followed the footpath under the old elms and beeches. He had no suspicion that he had been followed from St. Jim's, and that Tom Merry had stopped the spies in the lane. He walked on moodily, his eyes bent on the ground. He had heavy thoughts in his mind.

The footpath wound through the wood and came out on the edge of the wood by Wayland Moor. Mile upon mile of that furzy expanse had belonged to the Brookes, in the old times when they were great people in the county. Mile upon mile of rich woods, and sunny wheatfields, and rolling down had belonged to them. And all had gone—gone in high living and reckless prodigality. The Brookes had always loved to look upon the wine when it was red. Dick sometimes wondered if the family weakness would ever come out in himself. His ancestors had lived hard, drunk hard, and played hard. They had left him nothing—nothing but a constitution impaired by their excesses; he was paying the price of their recklessness in that. But so far he had shown no sign of following in their footsteps so far as reckless living was concerned. Perhaps he owed that to his mother.

The wood was left behind the boy now, and he followed a lonely track upon the moor. A big tree stood black against the summer sky, now tinted with the sunset, and by the tree was a rambling house. Behind it was a patch of wood. The house was old, rambling, in places quite ruined. It was large enough, or had been large enough, for a family of a dozen to find ample room there. But it had fallen hopelessly into decay, and only part of it was habitable, and that part was inhabited by the Brookes. It was all that was left to them of what they had once possessed. That rambling old house, with a patch of unproductive land on the moor, remained to John Brooke, still in his possession because it was worth practically nothing. He could never have found a purchaser; if he could have found one, he certainly would have done so, for in John Brooke's veins the reckless blood ran as wildly as ever, and he could not resist the red wine and the cards. For the rest of the family it was fortunate that the ruined house and the barren patch of the moor was of little or no value in a purchaser's eyes.

Dick Brooke pushed open the creaking garden gate. There was a patch of garden in fairly good order; Dick looked after that himself. A girl was reading on a bench by the gate. She rose as Dick came in, and laid down her book, and put up a soft, pink cheek for her brother to kiss.

"Is father home?"

Amy shook her head.

"No."

"Has he been home all day?"

"Not since this morning."

"When did he go out?"

"At eleven."

"What did he look like?"

"Not very well, Dick. I am afraid—"

The girl paused. Dick understood what was in her mind, and he said no more, but passed up the garden to the house. He entered through an old stone porch thick with clamber-

ing, clustering honeysuckle. There was a quiet, shady room within, with the tea-table laid, and Dick's mother sat there. She greeted the boy with a smile.

"You are late, Dick."

"Yes, mother."

"Did the cricket match keep you?"

"Yes; and I—I stayed a bit after."

"I hope you won."

Brooke flushed.

"We lost!" he said.

"You are hungry, Dick?"

"Not very."

He sat down at the table and had his tea. His talk all the time was quiet and cheerful. Immediately the meal was finished he rose. His mother gave him an anxious look.

"You are too tired now, Dick."

He shook his head.

"Not a bit of it, mum. I feel as fresh as a daisy; cricket always livens me up. As a matter of fact, I oughtn't to have given the time to the match this afternoon, but Tom Merry asked me to play, and it would have been rotten to decline. It was a big chance for me, too. But it won't happen again."

"Why not, Dick? You must not think of giving up your cricket!"

"I'm not up to the form of the House team. It's lucky, too, as I should have to make excuses not to play. Work comes first—as it ought. I'm jolly lucky, anyway, to be able to keep myself at St. Jim's. That might have gone, as well as everything else in the wreck."

"It might, Dick, my dear boy—my dear, dear boy!" said Mrs. Brooke. "I could not bear the change so patiently myself if I did not see you so patient, and think that perhaps Providence has a kind intention in all this. If you had been born rich, Dick, as your father was, who knows whether you might not have learned to grow up like the rest? It may be this struggle in your youth that will save you from that."

"I hope so, mother."

And Dick, with a cheerful nod and a smile to his mother, went upstairs. He came into a large, barely-furnished room. There were two large windows, looking out northward over the moor, and well lighting the room so long as the day lasted. There was no carpet on the floor; the planks were bare. The walls were bare save for a picture or two—pictures done in pencil or crayon by Dick's father. For John Brooke had his good times, and when he was sober he was clever with pen and pencil. Even in his cups he was a strange mixture of wisdom and folly, and even at his worse he always had the respect and love of his son. Dick Brooke was not the lad to sit in judgment upon his father, whatever might be his father's faults.

Dick's first action when he came into the work-room—for such the room was—was to take off his outer clothes and fold them up carefully. He laid them upon the little bed in the corner of the room. Then he donned a shabby suit—old clothes that he kept for working in, for Dick could not afford to be extravagant with his clothes, and he made one suit last a length of time that would have astounded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and, indeed, most of the fellows at St. Jim's.

As a matter of fact, most of Dick's clothes remained to him from the time of his prosperity—before his father, who had long been on the downhill path, had come the final "cropper." And so long as John Brooke had had anything left he had spent it as freely upon his family as upon himself. It was exactly like him to send his son to an expensive school like St. Jim's when he had hardly enough money left to keep the wolf from the door, and it was exactly like Dick to contrive by his own efforts to remain at St. Jim's after the family had made their final plunge into poverty.

Dick looked very different now. The tidy Eton suit gave him the appearance of any other fellow at St. Jim's. The old, shabby clothes he now had on looked like those worn by any working lad in the village; and clothes make a great deal of difference in the appearance.

Across the room, under the window, ran a bench, built by Dick himself. Upon the bench lay the materials of Dick's work—the cardboard, the rolls of paper, the colour-box, the pens, and the brushes.

For Dick worked—and worked hard. Early in the morning, before he walked the two miles to school, he worked there for a couple of hours. After school he worked again, and when work demanded it he kept on into the late hours of the night. That was the cause of the heavy eyes and the pale cheeks that the St. Jim's fellows remarked on, and attributed to "swotting."

Dick certainly "swotted," but he "swotted" not at Latin or mathematics, but at work to keep the wolf from the door, to keep his fees at St. Jim's paid, to meet the bills of the local tradesmen. That was the reason of Dick Brooke's

"swotting." After leaving school he seldom looked at a school book. He was deeply devoted to his studies, and yet he never took the top place in his class. He had no time for it.

Standing at the bench, he worked quietly, steadily. Quaint Old English letters grew under his brush in Indian ink touched with red and gold and shades of blue. The pen sank lower over the moor, and Dick paused in his work to light the lamp. A weary look was in his eyes, and an ache gradually grew in his stooping shoulders. But he did not pause in his work.

There was a step on the stairs—a slow, uncertain step, as of a man lurching as he came up, and stumbling to and fro.

Dick paused then and listened. He knew what it meant. He had heard that step before many a time.

The door opened. Dick turned his head quietly, and stood with the brush still in his hand. Into the dimly-lighted room a figure came stumbling.

It was his father!

### CHAPTER 7. Father and Son.

JOHN BROOKE nodded to his son with a smile—a smile that was partly affection and partly vacancy. He was a finely-built and handsome man—the Brookes had always been a handsome race till it came to Dick's turn. Dick was not what one would have called handsome, though he had a face that one liked.

But John Brooke was fine-looking, and, even in liquor, he never quite lost his dignity, never quite lost his old air of distinction. There was hardly a line on his wide, white forehead, hardly a wrinkle round the deep, handsome blue eyes. There were many, many more lines on the son's face than on the father's.

"Hallo, Dick! Working again?" said Brooke, in the deep, pleasant voice that was rendered only a little uncertain by the drink. "Working—eh?"

"Yes, dad," said Dick.

"It's time you chucked it, Dick."

"I'm nearly finished."

"You're a good boy, Dick," said John Brooke, laying his hand upon Dick's shoulder and standing unsteadily and regarding him affectionately. "I don't know what we should do without you, Dick. What would your mother do?"

Dick smiled.

"And Amy, Dick?"

"It's all right, dad."

"And what should I do—eh?"

Dick was silent.

"I don't know," said John Brooke, watching his son's face with intoxicated gravity—"I don't know where you got your senses from, Dick. The Brookes never had any sense. They had good looks—eh? You have the sense and not the good looks, Dick. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes," said Dick.

"It's all the better for you, Dick. I suppose you get it from your mother. Your mother's a sensible woman, Dick, excepting in one thing—in marrying me," said John Brooke. "That was bad."

"Oh, no, father!"

"I suppose you think I've been drinking?" said John Brooke suddenly.

Dick could not help smiling. It was pretty plain that his father had been drinking, and heavily, too.

"Haven't you, father?"

"Only a little to cheer me up," said John Brooke. "A man needs cheering up when he's come a cropper, as I have. It's only three years, Dick, since I was as decent as any man in the county, and you were a rich man's son. And now what are we?"

"Still decent, I hope, dad."

"And I'm a burden on you, Dick."

"No, no, no!"

"Yes, I am," said John Brooke, shaking his head solemnly; "I'm a burden on you. I ought to do something. Still, I've educated you, Dick; I've helped you on at the school, haven't I?"

"Yes," said Dick, smiling.

"Where's your 'Horace'?" said John Brooke, stumbling a little. "I'll go through it with you, Dick."

"It's all right, dad—"

"Where is it?"

"It's here, dad, but I—I haven't time now."

John Brooke shook his head.

"I can't have you neglecting your studies, Dick. What's that you are doing?"

"It's an illuminated text, dad."

"What's it for?"

"For Mr. Ebenezer's chapel in Wayland."

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"How much will you get for it?"

"Fifteen shillings."

"Rotten, Dick—rotten!"

"It's not so bad, dad; and Mr. Ebenezer always pays, too, and some of them don't," said Dick. "Sit down and have a rest, dad."

"Not yet, Dick. I've been neglecting you. I ain't much use now, I know, but I can still keep an eye on your studies and keep you up to the mark," said John Brooke. "I hope I shall never cease to be a scholar, Dick. Where's the book?"

Dick handed him his "Horace." John Brooke sank into a chair and opened the book, and blinked over it with uncertain eyes.

Dick went on with his work. He had much to do, though he was getting to the end of his task. But his father's voice called to him:

"Dick!"

The lad turned round.

"Yes, dad?"

"Take the book and construe."

Dick sighed, but he obeyed. He made it a rule of his life never to disobey his father, or fail in respect to him, though John Brooke's interruptions of his work were a worry sometimes.

John Brooke was seldom quite sober in these days, but he had a sense of duty in his own peculiar way. He fancied that he was helping considerably in his son's education, and sometimes his conscience would smite him hard, and then he would take Dick on a personally conducted tour, so to speak, through the classics. And even in his least sober moments John Brooke was always a scholar. Sometimes, when he had been drinking hard, he would sit in the little parlour of the Green Man, babbling in half a dozen languages, much to the amusement of the honourable company there.

Dick construed, his father listening with an expression of extraordinary gravity.

"Very good, Dick," he said. "How are you getting on in your class?"

"Very well, father."

"Are you top of the Form yet?"

"No, dad."

"I was top of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's in my day," said John Brooke. "We could always do everything but manage our business affairs, Dick. When I was in the Sixth I was captain of the school. They used to call me Old Brooke. I remember when we played against Greyfriars—great Scott, that was thirty years ago, that match, Dick! You still play Greyfriars, don't you?"

"Yes, dad."

"I was top of the Fourth," said John Brooke, blinking at him. "The Form-master said my verses were models—models, Dick! I said to him one day, when he praised them—What do you think I said, Dick?"

"I don't know, dad."

"Quod si me lyricis, vatibus inseres, sublimi feriam sidera vertice," said John Brooke, chuckling. "He laughed, Dick; he said I was a clever lad."

"So you were, dad."

"Yes, so I was," said John Brooke, nodding—"so I was! But you're a cleverer lad, Dick. You can make money, and I could only spend it. Take example by me, Dick. Never drink."

"I won't, dad."

"Never gamble."

"Very well."

"It's in the blood, though," said John Brooke, still nodding at him—apparently having forgotten that he was nodding, and keeping it up from force of habit. "That's bred in the bone, you know, Dick. You can't help it."

"I shall try, dad."

"Keep away from the races, and never touch a card. Dick—that's your only chance," said his father. "Once you begin, you're done for. Though, as a matter of fact, Dick, I think that I shall be able to get us all out of this hobble."

"How so, dad?"

"I've got a certain tip for a race, Dick—a rank outsider that must go romping home, with nine to one against," said John Brooke, in a deep whisper. "What do you think of that, Dick, hey?"

Dick's heart sank.

He had heard before of John Brooke's certain winners, and they always came in about tenth or eleventh.

"Better let it alone, dad, I should say. Besides, you haven't any money to lay the stakes, have you?"

"Oh, that's all right! I've told Mr. Banks—"

"Mr. Banks! The bookmaker?"

"Yes, lad. I've told him about you—about the way you get in money, you know, with that rubbish—I mean your



"The Jams of India have the power of conferring Jamhoods on their followers," said Inky Minor. "It is the same-ful thing as knighthood in this country. I think so highly of the esteemed Gosling that I have determined to confer the honour of Jamhood upon him." Gosling looked quite fluttered. "Oh, Master 'Urree Singh," he said. (An amusing incident in the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, entitled "Inky Minor," by Frank Richards, contained in this week's issue of the "Magnet" Library. Now on sa'e. Price One Penny.)

illuminating, and so on, and he knows I should be able to pay up."

"Oh, dad!"

"So I've laid the bet on tick, you see," explained John Brooke. "Don't look so solemn, Dick. It's dead sure—nothing more certain under the sun, and it's run to-morrow morning, too. It's only nine pounds, Dick, to win ninety if it comes off—and when I get the ninety, I shall be able to turn myself round a bit. I've always felt that if I had a little capital, I could get us all out of this fix. Folk have turned up their noses, Dick, as if we're down in the world for always; but we're not. We're going up again, my lad—up like a rocket—right up, and we'll make the family name respected again, Dick. You'll see."

And John Brooke sank back in the chair, and left off nodding, and went to sleep. Dick turned back to his work with a heavy, heavy heart.

He was a careful, saving lad—he needed to be. But he had never refused his father money—and now there was to be a larger raid than usual upon his little store. But the lad did not complain. That his father would lose the bet—that he would have to pay Mr. Banks the nine pounds, Dick had not the slightest doubt. The bookmaker was simply swindling him in all probability. And the money would have to be paid—John Brooke was very touchy about a debt of honour, as he called it; the tradesmen's bills might go, but a debt of honour had to be paid. It would have to be paid, but Dick did not

want his father to win the bet, either. If he won, and was flush with money, it would only lead to new recklessness, new folly till the money was gone, and encourage him to attempt to retrieve his fallen fortunes in the same way again. And his last state would be worse than his first.

So Dick worked on, uncomplaining, while his father slept, breathing heavily, in the chair. And when his task was done, Dick did not go down—he began a fresh task. For money would be wanted when John Brooke's debt to the bookmaker had to be paid, and money could not be had without work. And the lad never thought of complaining; his only thought was to be thankful that he could get the work to do.

## CHAPTER 8

### Mr. Lathom wants to Know.

TOM MERRY glanced at Dick Brooke when he came into the school the next morning. Dick came just in time to join the Fourth Form as they were going to the Form-room, and Tom Merry met him in the hall. Dick was looking pale and worn, and his eyes were very heavy. The hero of the Shell tapped him on the shoulder in a friendly way.

"Hallo, Brooke!"

"Hallo!" said Dick

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"You're looking pretty seedy"  
 "Am I?"  
 "Yes," said Tom Merry. "This won't do, you know. You were up late last night, Brooke."  
 "I was rather late."  
 "It won't do, my son," said Tom Merry, patting him on the shoulder. "Whether it's study, or whether it isn't, it won't do, you know. You'll have to take more care of yourself. How are your eyes?"  
 "Oh, all right."  
 "They don't look all right. Look here, your Form-master will notice it, and speak about it if you're not careful. That's all."

And Tom Merry walked off to join Manners and Lowther, and go into the Shell-room. Dick turned slowly after the Fourth-Formers. It had not occurred to him, but he realised that he needed to be careful. It was a favour to him, in a way, to allow him to stay on at the school, after his people had come such a "cropper," and it was known that the Brookes were quite ruined. Dr. Holmes, of course, knew that the boy paid his own fees. But Dick realised that it would not do to come to a school like St. Jim's, looking like an overworked factory lad.

"Bwooke, deah boy—"  
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined him. Dick Brooke gave him a friendly nod. He liked Arthur Augustus, as most of the fellows did. The fall of the Brookes had been long before D'Arcy came to St. Jim's. Dick had been in the Second Form—a decidedly juvenile fag—at the time. Most of the St. Jim's fellows had almost forgotten that Dick Brooke had, in the first place, come to St. Jim's as a boarding scholar, and as the son of a rich man and a local landowner.

"I'm sowwy, Bwooke—"  
 "Sorry for what?" asked Brooke, with a smile.  
 "About speakin' wudely yestahday, on the cricket-field," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I looked out for you aftah the match, but could not find you—partly owin' to havin' to go in and change my things, aftah Lowthah had squitted sodah-watah ovah me in a beastly wude mannah. When you muffed that catch yestahday, deah boy, I called you an ass."  
 "Did you?"  
 "Yaas, watah! I am sowwy, and I withdraw the expession."

Brooke smiled.  
 "It's all right, D'Arcy—I'd forgotten it."  
 "As one gentleman to another, I am sowwy," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "Blake, deah boy, I twist you are sowwy, too."  
 "Oh, I'm sorry if I hurt Brooke's feelings," said Blake.  
 "But it was a rotten bungae, anyway."  
 "Weally, Blake—"  
 "Gussy himself couldn't have done worse," said Digby.  
 "Why, you uttah ass—"  
 "Oh, rats!"  
 "Weally, Digby—"

Brooke went into the Form-room, leaving the swell of St. Jim's still arguing indignantly. Mr. Lathom came in, and the Fourth Form took their places. Mr. Lathom, the kind, little, short-sighted master of the Fourth, peered at Brooke through his spectacles. But he made no remark upon the boy's pale looks.

The lessons proceeded, and Dick fervently hoped that he would escape. He had had to miss his prep. the previous evening, and he had looked the matter up as much as he could during his walk to the school that morning. When Mr. Lathom called upon him to construe, he rose in great uneasiness.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Lathom. "You may sit down, Brooke. You will construe, Herries."  
 "Yes, sir."

Brooke sat down in great relief.  
 Herries' voice went numbling on with a droning sound, in the hot summer morning. Brooke leaned a little forward on his desk, sleepily. He had not been to bed before midnight, and he had been up at five. He was sleepy and tired, and the Form-room seemed unusually hot and stuffy, and the droning voice lulled him to slumber.

"Brooke!"  
 Mr. Lathom rapped out the name sharply.  
 Brooke started.  
 He realised that he had nodded off, and had lost his surroundings for a moment—or was it for minutes, or longer? He did not know. Kerraish was standing up construing now; Herries was sitting down. Brooke glanced at the Form-master, who had advanced towards the class, a frown upon his face. Brooke could not see Mr. Lathom very clearly till he came near.

"Ye-es, sir!" stammered Brooke.  
 "Brooke! You had fallen asleep!"  
 "A-a-asleep, sir!"  
 "Yes."

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"I—I'm sorry, sir."  
 "I saw you fast asleep at your desk," exclaimed Mr. Lathom angrily. "What is the matter with you, Brooke?"  
 "N-n-nothing, sir."  
 "If you take no interest in the lessons, Brooke, you might at least keep up a decent appearance of doing so," said Mr. Lathom.  
 "I—I—"  
 "I will speak to you after the lessons, however," said Mr. Lathom, peering at Brooke, and noticing how harassed he looked.

"Yes, sir."  
 Some of the fellows looked at Brooke sympathetically. He was evidently in for an inquiry, at all events. Levison grinned at Mellish.

"It'll come out now," he muttered.  
 "What will?"  
 "About Brooke's little goings on," said Levison. "Of course, it's clear enough he was up late last night, and he hasn't got over it. I know the little game. I've been to the Green Man myself, though I've never happened to meet Brooke there. Old Joliffe is very close about the fellows who come; but I'll bet that Brooke is one of them."  
 "But he hasn't any money," said Mellish.  
 "Oh, they were rich once!" said Levison. "I dare say he has relations with money—or perhaps that's where the money goes, and that's why he's so poor."  
 "I shouldn't wonder."

"Serve him right if he does get shown up too," said Levison. "He is a rotter, and it will give Tom Merry a twist. He likes Brooke, and backs him up."

Mellish chuckled. Mr. Lathom's voice in sharp tones, interrupted his chuckle.  
 "Levison! Mellish! You are talking! Take fifty lincs each!"  
 "Oh!"

And Levison and Mellish talked no more.  
 When the Form was dismissed after morning lessons, Mr. Lathom made Brooke a sign to remain; and Dick stayed behind after the other fellows had gone out. He came up to the Form-master's desk.

Mr. Lathom looked at him kindly but keenly through his spectacles.  
 "You look very worn and tired, Brooke," he said.

"Yes, sir."  
 "What have you been doing? Have you been studying late into the night?"  
 "No, sir."

Mr. Lathom smiled a little. It would have been easy for the boy to reply in the affirmative. Certainly his looks would have borne him out. But Dick Brooke was as open and truthful as the day.

"But you went to bed very late?"  
 "I suppose so, sir."  
 "Why?"

"I—I was occupied, sir."  
 The Fourth Form-master looked at him sharply.  
 "You are a day boy, Brooke, and so do not come under my observation like the other boys," he said. "I hope you have not been falling into any bad habits."

Brooke flushed.  
 "I hope not, sir. I live at home with my mother, so I suppose I am as well looked after as any boy here."  
 "Apparently you are allowed to stay up till very late hours, Brooke," said Mr. Lathom drily. "You are sleepy and tired, and not at all in a condition to do your work in a satisfactory way to-day."

"I'm sorry, sir. I will be more careful."  
 "What were you doing last night—what was this occupation which kept you from your bed, when you ought to have been there? I ask as your Form-master."

"I—I was using my colour-box, sir."  
 "You were painting—at night—till a late hour?"  
 "Yes, sir."

"That was very injudicious indeed," said Mr. Lathom. "It must cease, Brooke, or I shall have to write to your parents, and urge them to keep a sharper eye upon you. Now you may go. Remember, my boy, I am speaking to you for your own good, and that alone."

And the Fourth Form-master dismissed Brooke.  
 Dick went out heavily from the Form-room. Mr. Lathom certainly was speaking to him for his own good, but Mr. Lathom did not understand. He did not know that there was a bitter need of money in the Brooke household, and that Dick Brooke was the only one who could supply it.

# ANSWERS

## CHAPTER 9

## What Levison Knew.

"RATS!"

"It's true!"

"Bosh!"

"I tell you it's true."

"It's no good your telling us anything of the sort, Levison," said Jack Blake. "In the first place, I know it isn't true. In the second place, I've very strong doubts whether you could tell the truth if you tried."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And there was a chuckle from the juniors in the common-room in the School House. Levison scowled angrily at Blake. But he did not care to do more than scowl. Jack Blake was not a foe to be lightly tackled fistically.

"I've seen him," said Levison.

"Rubbish!"

"Yaas, wublah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I don't believe a word of it."

"I don't either," said Tom Merry, with a scornful look at the cad of the Fourth; "and if it were true, it's no bizney of Levison's."

Levison sneered.

"You have taken quite a lot of interest in the doings of the other black sheep," he said. "I remember when Lumley-Lumley used to go down to the Green Man, you went after him once, and yanked him away by main force—you and the others."

"I guess it was a good thing to do, too," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, "and I'm obliged to Tom Merry for doing it. You won't be able to make a row between us two on that score, Levison, my son."

"Wathah not!"

And Tom Merry laughed.

"You've suspected me of wanting to go down there, too, and interfered with me," said Levison.

"So I will again if you try to disgrace the school by behaving like a cad," said Tom Merry. "So would a good many of the other fellows."

"Yaas, wathah! Undah such cires. I should considah it necessaw to give Levison a feahful thwashin'."

"Then why don't you take up Brooke's case, Tom Merry?" Levison demanded. "I tell you he goes to the Green Man."

"Well, in the first place, he's a day boy, and doesn't live at St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "He's under the eyes of his parents, and if they let him go out late at night, they're responsible. But that's not all. I know perfectly well that Brooke is decent, and doesn't go to the Green Man."

"Wathah not!"

"I'm quite sure of it," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley. "I used to go, and I never saw him there; I know that."

"I wogard that as pwoof positive."

"Rats!" said Levison. "Joliffe is very deep; he never tells one fellow about another. I was a long time finding out that Knox went there. Anyway, I know Brooke goes."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw him coming out this evening."

Tom Merry laughed scornfully.

"Yesterday you had a story about seeing him the previous night; now you've seen him coming out of the Green Man this evening," he said. "I don't believe it."

"Nor I, wathah."

"Well, it's true; and since we're setting up such a high, jolly standard of goodness, I think he ought to be stopped," said Levison.

"Wats!"

"It's all lies," said Blake, "and you jolly well wouldn't say it if Brooke were here. You can talk about a day boy; he's not likely to come in and hear."

"I think he ought to be made to repeat what he's said before Brooke to-morrow morning," said Kangaroo, of the Shell.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

Levison gave a defiant glance round.

"I'm quite ready to do it," he exclaimed.

"Good! I'll remind you of that to-morrow morning," said Tom Merry. "We shall have a quarter of an hour after third lesson, and you can tell Brooke what you think of him; and we'll all see fair play."

"Good egg!" said Blake.

"I'm ready!" repeated Levison.

And he walked away with Mellish. His chum looked at him rather uneasily as they went into the study in the Fourth Form passage.

"I say, Levison, you've rather got yourself into it this time," he said.

Levison scowled at him.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"I mean it won't do, you know. If you repeat that before Brooke in the morning, he'll deny it point-blank."

"Well, supposing he does?"

"Well, Brooke has a reputation for telling the frozen truth, you know, and the fellows will believe him, and not you, you see. Better have left it alone."

"But it's true," said Levison fiercely.

Mellish coughed.

"Oh, of course it's true, if you say so!" he answered.

"But—but at the same time, I should let it drop if I were you."

Levison clenched his hands, and made a step towards his study mate. Mellish promptly retreated round the table.

"Here, hold on!" he exclaimed. "What are you up to?"

"You don't believe me?" shouted Levison.

"Well, you see—"

"Do you believe that I saw Brooke coming out of the Green Man this evening, or don't you?" Levison shouted.

"You see, Brooke isn't that kind of a chap."

"Then you don't believe me?"

"Yes, I—I do, you know."

"You cad!"

Levison chased Mellish round the table. Mellish, in great alarm, dodged out of the study and bolted down the passage. Levison pursued him to the door, and stood panting with rage.

It was hard on Levison, in a way. He felt the keen annoyance which an habitually untruthful person naturally feels when he tells the truth for once, and cannot get believed.

Mellish did not stop till he was in the common-room. He was afraid of Levison when the latter was in one of his savage tempers. He ran breathlessly into the junior common-room, and almost collided with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's stepped back in haste.

"Pway be careful, you ass!" he exclaimed. "If you had wun into me you would have wumped my waistcoat feahfully, and pewwaps disawwanged my tie."

"What's the row?" asked Blake. "Is some fag in the Second Form after you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, I wogard that as funnay. Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish scowled.

"It's Levison," he said.

"Levison! Dissension in the family?" asked Monty Lowther sympathetically. "Never mind. They say that when rogues fall out, it's better for us chaps."

"Ha, ha; ha!"

"He's ratty because I don't believe what he said about Brooke," said Mellish. "Of course, it isn't true, and Levison ought to have the sense to pitch a better yarn, if he goes for the chap at all. That's what I say."

"Upon the whole, Mellish, deah boy, I weally think that you are not quite so uttah a wottah as Levison is," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Of course, you are a mean beast; but there are degwees of mean beastliness, and—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Eh?"

"Shut up!" growled Mellish.

"Weally, Mellish, you should be aware by this time that I do not allow myself to be addressed in that mannah, especially by a person of your descwption. Will you kindly hold my eyeglass, Blake, while I give Mellish a thwashin'?"

"Certainly," said Blake, "with pleasure."

"Pway take my jacket, Tom Mewwy," said D'Arcy, peeling it off with great care, too occupied in getting the jacket off without rumpling it to observe that Mellish was retreating towards the door. "Mind you don't cwase it."

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Pway take my tie, Lowthah. I do not wish to get my tie damaged."

"Right-ho!"

"Now, Mellish, you wottah!" said D'Arcy, pushing back his cuffs, and turning towards the spot where the cad of the Fourth had been standing. "Now, you feahful outsidah—Bai Jove, he's gone!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where has he gone?"

"Out," grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's indignantly. "Why didn't you tell me he was boltin'?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was amusing to see you undressing in public," explained Monty Lowther. "Are you going to take anything more off?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Manners will hold your collar, if you like, and Reilly here will take your braces with pleasure. Your trousers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't be a silly ass, Lowthah. I wogard you as silly chumps not to tell me that Mellish was boltin'. But pewwaps—"

Arthur Augustus rushed to the door. But Mellish was long out of sight. And the swell of St. Jim's returned slowly into the common-room, and donned his jacket, his tie, and his eyeglass, amid the grins and chuckles of his friends—grins and chuckles which the swell of St. Jim's saw and heard with his aristocratic nose very high in the air.

CHAPTER 10.  
The Truth.

BRooke was very silent when he came to St. Jim's on the following morning. The deep wrinkle in his brows seemed to have deepened, and his mouth was drawn down a little at the corners. Several times, when fellows spoke to him, he did not reply, so deeply was he immersed in his thoughts.

During morning lessons Mr. Lathom glanced at him sharply several times. But he did not call him out, although certainly he was so absent-minded with his work that it could not possibly escape notice.

After third lesson the Fourth had a respite, and when they crowded out into the quad, Jack Blake and his friends did not forget that Levison had something to say to Brooke.

The Shell came out a minute or two later for the recess, and Tom Merry & Co. joined Brooke. Brooke had shown a desire to get away from the crowd into some quiet spot by himself, but the juniors did not notice it.

"Brooke, old man—"  
"Yes?" said Dick in his quiet, patient way.  
"Levison's got something to say to you."  
"Yes?"  
"Come on, Levison!"  
"Say it to his face, you cad!"  
"Now, then, speak up!"  
"Yaas, wathah."

Levison came swaggering forward. For once he had been telling the truth, and it gave him an unusual confidence. Brooke looked at him in amazement. He did not know in the least what Levison had to say to him. He had never been even on speaking terms with the cad of the Fourth.

"What is it?" he asked.  
"I saw you last night," said Levison.  
"Indeed!"  
"Yes, coming out of the Green-Man."

Brooke changed colour. All eyes were fastened upon him, and the wavering in his cheeks could not pass unremarked. The fellows exchanged glances. Tom Merry felt a chill. Was there some truth, after all, in Levison's statement? Even Levison, certainly, might tell the truth sometimes.

"Well?" said Brooke quietly.  
"Well," said Levison, "isn't it true?"  
Brooke was silent.  
"I was coming back from the village," said Levison, looking round; "I had to pass the Green Man, and I looked towards the place—"

"Thinking of the times you'd been there, I suppose," Monty Lowther remarked.

And there was a chuckle.  
"Perhaps," said Levison defiantly. "Anyway, I looked towards it, and there was Brooke coming out of the side gate from the back of the pub. He didn't pass me—he just tramped on with his head bent down, as if he had been drinking, and wasn't sure there was any ground under his feet—just as Taggles does."

"I had not been drinking," said Brooke. "I have never touched intoxicating liquor of any sort in my life."  
"But you were there!" Levison exclaimed triumphantly. Brooke nodded.

"Yes, I was there."  
"What were you there for, then?" asked Levison.  
"That's my business."  
"Yes, and I jolly well know what it was!" Levison exclaimed. "Whisky and water and cigarettes, and a quiet game of nap with old Joliffe and Banks in the back parlour. I know all about it. I don't say I object to it myself—"

"We know you don't," said Blake.  
"But what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," said Levison. "If I'm to be sniffed at for going there, and Mellish and other fellows, too, let Brooke drop his blessed righteous manners, and be sniffed at, too. He's always turned his nose up at it in public, the giddy Pharisee, and all the time he was worse than the worst of us."

"But I don't believe it," said Tom Merry. "You weren't in the Green Man last night, Brooke, surely?"  
"I went there," said Brooke.  
"Not to drink—or smoke—or play?"  
"Certainly not."  
"Or to look on at that kind of thing?"  
"Indeed, no."

"Then what did you go for?" asked Levison with a sneer.  
"That's my affair."  
"You didn't see Banks or Joliffe?" asked Tom Merry in relief.

"Yes, I saw them."  
"But not to speak to?"  
"I spoke to Mr. Banks."  
"But—but—but he's a bookmaker," said Tom Merry. "You know you oughtn't to do that, Brooke; you're know it's forbidden. You're a day boy, I know, but you're under the same rules as us in those matters."

"I know it."  
"Well, then, what did you speak to Banks for?"  
"I can't tell you, Merry; but it was important. I didn't like going there," said Brooke miserably; "I had to."  
"But why?"  
"I can't tell you."

Levison burst into a scoffing laugh.  
"Why don't you own up?" he exclaimed. "We all know the little game, and you can't possibly expect to take us in. There's no harm in being a bit doggish. Own up."

"I am not in the least doggish, as you call it," said Brooke quietly. "I have more serious matters than that to think of. I went to the Green Man for reasons of my own—very different from your reasons for going. I think that a boy who goes there to drink or smoke or play cards for money is a blackguard—a low cad! If that's your reason for going, you know my opinion of you!"

"Well, that's straight from the shouldah, anyway," said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard Bwooke as a twuthful chap, deah boys. I can't see why he should go to the Gween Man, but I certainly believe he went there for no harm."

"Same here," said Tom Merry. "But it's rotten silly to put yourself under suspicion in this way, Brooke. If the masters came to hear of it, they mightn't believe your explanation as we do, and you might be expelled from the school."

Brooke winced.  
"I don't believe a word of the explanation," said Levison. "I know very well what Brooke went there for—and I stick to my opinion."

"You are a cad!" said Brooke quietly.  
"And you are a blackguard!"  
"Very well," said Brooke between his teeth. "Come into the gym, and stand up for your words, if you have any courage."

Levison hesitated. As a matter of fact, he was not over-supplied with courage, excepting for wordy warfare. But the juniors closed round him, and he was hustled off to the gym.

"You can't talk to a chap like that without puttin' your hands up, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wegard Bwooke as bein' quite within his wights in givin' you a feabful thwashin'!"  
"Oh, ring off," growled Levison angrily.  
"Weally, Levison—"

"Rats!"

D'Arcy frowned majestically; but before he could proceed to crush Levison, Tom Merry and Manners hurried the cad of the Fourth into the gym. Levison was far from keen about it, but he submitted to having the gloves put on his hands. Dick Brooke faced him in his shirt sleeves, also with the gloves on.

"Go!" said Blake.  
"Yaas, wathah! Go, deah boys!"  
"I rather think Levison would be glad to go," murmured Monty Lowther.  
"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"Time!" said several voices.  
"Pile in!"

Brooke "piled in," and then Levison had no choice about the matter. He was a little taller than Brooke, and much more stoutly built, but he was unwilling to fight, excepting with his tongue. He retreated before Brooke's attack, and went right round the ring formed by the grinning juniors.

"Pway stand up, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "This is not a backin' and fillin' match, you know—it's supposed to be a fight."  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison ground his teeth. He screwed up his courage, and met Brooke's attack, and several of his blows came home upon the day boy's face. Levison pressed on harder and harder, encouraged by his success. Brooke's brows were deeply wrinkled, and his blue eyes were gleaming under them.

Hammer and tongs they went at it for several minutes, and then Levison dropped on the floor of the gym.  
"Ow!"  
Jack Blake stepped forward to give him a hand up. But Levison only gasped.  
"Ow! Lemme alone!"

"Get up, my man!"

"I can't!"

"Knocked out, bai jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in disgust. "Why, my deah fellow, that blow wouldn't have knocked out a fly. Wats!"

"Are you done?" asked Brooke.

"Yes," growled Levison.

"Very well."

Brooke peeled off the gloves.

"Bai Jove!" D'Arcy remarked. "I think I nevah saw such an uttally wotten fight in all my life! In all my expewience—"

"Extending over seventy or eighty years," murmured Lowther.

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah. In all my expewience, I have never seen such an uttally wotten show. I wegard you as a wottah, Levison!"

"Ow!"

"I wegard you as havin' made an exhibish. of yourself, and bein' a disgwace to the Fourth Form. You are not weally hurt at all, but you haven't the couwage of a white wabbit."

Levison staggered up. As a matter of fact he had had some hard knocks, but he was quite in a condition to go on if he chose. He did not choose.

"Mind your own business, D'Arcy—for a change," he suggested, and he put on his jacket, with Mellish's assistance, and went out of the gym.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wegard Levison's last wemark as decidedly impertinent. Do you think I'd bettah go aftah him and give him a feahful thwashin', Blake, deah boy?"

"Well, he's had onc, though it wasn't very fearful," grinned Blake. "Come and have a ginger pop at Mrs. Taggles's instead."

"Pewwaps, undah the circs., I can let him off. But—"

"Exactly. Come and have the ginger pop."

And Arthur Augustus came and had the ginger-pop.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Levison's Little Game.

"**B**AI JOVE!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was late in the afternoon. Lessons were over at St. Jim's, and all the fellows were out of doors. The day boys had mostly gone home, and the other fellows were on the cricket field or the river, or strolling about the shady quadrangle, complaining of the blazing weather and enjoying it all the time.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was stretched upon a green bank, looking out dreamily at the river, with thickets behind him and trees above him. It was a lovely spot for a rest, and D'Arcy felt in need of a rest. Since afternoon school he had been hard at work removing the stains of soda-water from a fancy waistcoat, due to one of Monty Lowther's little jokes, and he felt that he was entitled to repose afterwards. So he was reposing in the grass, and the quiet of the river, and the hum of the insects sent him nearly off to sleep.

As he lay drowsily, voices came to him from the towing-path on the other side of the thick clump of bushes.

He recognised Levison's voice at once.

"I've found out where the cad lives."

"My hat! Have you?" That was Mellish's voice.

"Yes. In a rambling old den on the moor, the other side of the Wayland road—a good two miles from St. Jim's."

"His people there?"

"I saw a little girl and an old woman—they were washing up dishes," said Levison, with a soft chuckle. "I suppose they were his mother and sister. I've heard that he's got a mother and sister."

"What about his pater?"

"I don't believe he's got one. I believe old Brooke went right to the dogs, and he's probably in prison by this time."

There was a chuckle in several voices.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

He sat up in the grass.

He knew that Levison & Co. were talking about Dick Brooke, and he understood that Levison must have followed the day boy home, and that now he had returned to tell his friends what he had discovered.

"The mean cad!" muttered D'Arcy. "I shall have to give him a feahful thwashin', aftah all. I wegard that as impewative."

"I think we ought to show the cad up," went on Levison's voice. "Suppose five or six of us walk in."

"Walk in!" ejaculated Mellish.

"Yes. Why not? We find ourselves by chance in that direction. We see a rotten old house where no servants are kept, and we walk in and treat 'em as if they were cottagers, you see, order 'em to make tea, and pay for it."

"My word!" said Crooke.

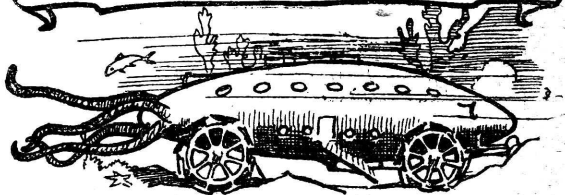
"What do you think of the idea?" said Levison. "There's



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nothing to be afraid of. I saw a little girl and two old women, altogether, besides Brooke himself. Brooke can't do much if there are half a dozen of us, and it's a lonely place."

"He might complain to the Head."

"I don't think he'd like to show himself up like that. Besides, we've got an excuse ready. We took them for cottagers, and didn't mean any harm."

"You are a deep bounder, Levison."

Levison chuckled.

"I mean to get even with Brooke," he replied. "Hallo! What's that?"

"That" was the sound of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy crashing through the bushes, in the direction of the plotters. D'Arcy had no intention of playing eavesdropper. What he had heard he had heard by chance and accident, and he did not wish to hear any more. He only wished to get near Levison, to hammer the cad of the Fourth.

But Levison & Co. did not wait.

At the sound of someone at hand, they ran down the towing-path, and disappeared in the trees before D'Arcy was through the thicket.

The swell of St. Jim's came out upon the towing-path, and found it deserted.

"Bai Jove!" he muttered, as he looked up and down. "Bai Jove! The uttah, wotten cads! The feahful wottahs! They're gone."

D'Arcy reflected for a moment.

That any decent fellow would fall in with Levison's plan of paying an uninvited call upon the Brookes, for the purpose of putting the day boy to shame, was impossible; but there were several fellows of Levison's own kind who would regard it as a good joke. Crooke and Mellish, and several others of the same sort, would enter into it with zest. There was no doubt that the visit would be paid.

D'Arcy's eyes gleamed with indignation at the thought.

He walked down the towing-path, and turned up to the school, and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he caught sight of the Terrible Three strolling under the trees. He quickened his pace, and called to them.

"Stop, deah boys!"

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "What's the excitement? Have you lost your necktie?"

"No, you ass!"

"Got a splash of mud on your bags?"

"Certainly not."

Lowther gave a dramatic sigh of relief.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Then it's nothing serious. What is it—just a death, or a fatal accident, or some trivial matter like that?"

"Pway don't be an ass, Lowthah! I want you fellows to help me."

"Help you home?" asked Lowther. "Life too exhaustin', you know. Too much fag to live in the beastly hot weather, don't you know. What?"

"I want you to help me to stop a set of wottahs frowm waggin' Bwooke."

The Terrible Three looked interested at once.

"Levison, I suppose," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What is he doing?"

The swell of St. Jim's explained. The chums of the Shell listened with darkening brows. Even Monty Lowther saw nothing humorous in the intended jepe.

"Oh, the cads!" said Tom Merry.

"The worms!" said Manners.

"The rotters!" said Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass approvingly upon the Terrible Three.

"I am vevy glad that you agwee with me in this mattah, deah boys," he said. "You will back me up, I suppose."

"What-ho! What are you going to do?"

"Well, I suppose those wottahs have started already—

as they will want to get back before callin'-ovah. I think we ought to go aftah them, and stop them."

"Good!"

"Levison said it was a wamblin' old house on the moor, on the othah side of the Wayland woad, about two miles frowm the coll," said D'Arcy. "I wathah think I know the house. We've passed it in papah-chases."

"I think I've seen it."

"Then we can start at once!"

"Better make sure that Levison has gone. He mayn't have started yet."

"Vevy good. Only we shall lose time. Howevah, p'waps you are wight. Here's Blake. Let's ask him if he's seen the wottahs."

"Blake, old son—seen Levison?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake was coming down towards the river, with an oar over his shoulder. He stopped and turned round, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy just dodged the blade of the oar.

"Weally, Blake—"

"What a gift Gussy has for getting in the way!" Blake remarked. "It's quite genius with him. What do you fellows want with Levison? He's gone out."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, he went down towards Rylcombe a few minutes ago, with Crooke and Mellish and Swayder and Gane."

"Then he's started."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on," said Tom Merry.

"But what's the little game?" demanded Blake, mystified.

"They're going to Brooke's house to rag him. Levison has spied on him, and found where he lives," said Tom Merry. "We're going to stop the cads."

"Good!" said Blake. "Take this oar down to the boat-house, Gussy, and tell Herries I'm not coming. I'll go instead of you, now."

"Wats!"

"Now, look here, Gussy!"

"I am bound to go, deah boys, because I am goin' to give Levison a feahful thwashin'!"

"Then I'll leave it here," said Blake, leaning the oar against a tree. "Now, then, off we go! There are five of the cads, and I suppose we're enough to snatch them bald-headed. We'll take one each, and wipe up the ground with them."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors hurried on the track of Levison and his precious friends.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Face to Face.

"HERE we are!" exclaimed Levison.

Levison & Co. halted on the moorland path.

The sun was setting on the moor, throwing the furze and gorse into a blaze of gold. The old house, with the bunch of trees behind it, stood out against the red sun. The windows gleamed as they caught the rays.

It was Dick Brooke's home.

The cads of the School House drew nearer, and looked over the fence, concealed by the ragged trees that grew within. They could see into the garden between the trees, and they saw a boy and a girl seated on a rough wooden bench. The girl had an exercise-book on her knee, and a pencil in her hand, and an expression of almost distressed attention on her face. The boy—it was Dick Brooke—had a French grammar in his hand, was evidently giving instruction.

Levison chuckled softly.

"That's his sister," he said. "You see, she's like him, only better looking. He's teaching her French. Ha, ha!"

There was really nothing comic in it, but the cads of St.

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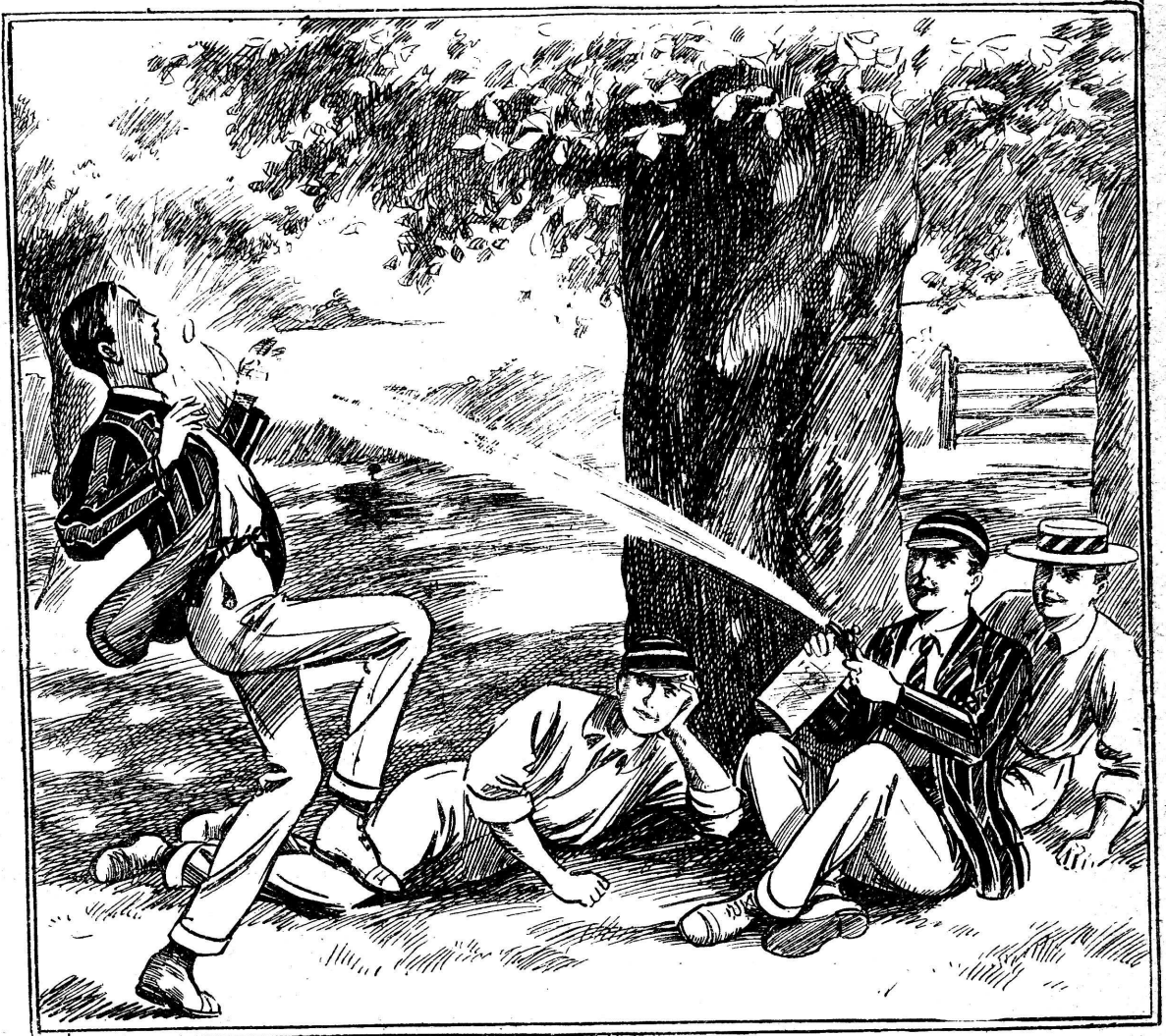
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MASTER A. HUGHS, Amos Lane, Wednesfield.

MASTER H. EVANS, Shareshill, near Wolverhampton.

MASTER H. DUFFY, 58, Bloomfield Road, Tipton.





The jet of soda-water caught Arthur Augustus fairly under the chin. He staggered back with a series of wild gasps. "Ow. Yawoock!" (See page 4.)

Jim's laughed softly together. Brooke's voice came faintly from the garden.

"Vous ne m'avez pas attendu comme vous me l'aviez promis—Avez is the imperfect, you see, Amy."

"Yes, Dick."

Levison & Co. skirted round the garden, and came to the gate near the house. Through an open window at the side of the house came a sound of clinking crockery.

"Washing dishes!" murmured Mellish.

They could see in at the window, and they saw an old dame with a wrinkled visage so occupied. Crooke chuckled.

"Is that his mother?"

"No. There—there's the mater."

A plainly dressed, quiet-looking lady had entered the kitchen, and was speaking to the old servant in low, quiet tones that did not pass the window. There was a dignity in her calm face that abashed Levison & Co. somewhat.

They drew back out of sight of the window.

"Can't see any sign of his father," said Gane.

"No; he hasn't one," said Levison.

"But I've heard of his pater. He used to be a big bug in these parts when I was a fag in the Second Form," said Swayder. "Dick Brooke was in the Second Form along with me at that time, and they used to live in a big house—the one Colonel Royston has now—and he had no end of tin. He didn't put on any side then, but he was well known to have a rich father. I never heard of the old chap pegging out."

"Well, he doesn't seem to be about."

"It won't be much of a joke to have an irate parent slogging us with a cane, or something," said Mellish rather nervously.

"Well, we could bolt."

"Yes, I suppose we could."

"Come on," said Levison resolutely. "We'll just walk up to the front of the house, and walk in. No need to stand on ceremony with poor people, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotten cads!"

Levison & Co. simply jumped.

It was Tom Merry's voice. They had been turning the corner of the garden fence, to get to the gate, and they almost ran into Tom Merry & Co.

The latter had just arrived, looking very red and breathless after a rapid tramp from the school. They had run part of the way, hoping to overtake Levison & Co. before they reached the house.

The two parties looked at one another.

Levison put on an air of defiance. Mellish drew a little behind the others. If it came to fighting, Mellish did not want to be in the forefront of the battle.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass, and looked the cads of the School House up and down in a really withering way.

"You uttah worms!" he said.

"Look here, what's the row?" said Levison. "Why shouldn't we take a stroll on the moor, if we like?"

"Perhaps Tom Merry's bought it up," suggested Mellish. "You didn't come here for a stroll on the moor," said Tom Merry scornfully. "You came here to spy on Brooke and worry him."

"Brooke! Is Brooke here?"

"You know that this is Brooke's house."

Levison looked astonished.

"Brooke's house!" he exclaimed. "Fancy that! Are you sure that Brooke lives here, Tom Merry! How did you know?"

"You uttah wottah!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I heard you talkin' on the towin' path, and I was comin' to thwash you when you bolted. I know all about it."

Levison's expression changed.

"Oh, you know all about it, do you?" he said. "Well, in that case—"

"We're going to stop you, you rotten cad," said Jack Blake.

"I'm going in here," said Levison. "It's dry weather, and we're thirsty. We're going to ask these poor people to make us some tea. We shall pay for it."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed.

"Yes; I know how you have planned to insult Brooke," he said. "But you're not going to do it. You're going straight back to St. Jim's now."

"We're going to do nothing of the sort."

"Then we'll make you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And when you're back," went on Tom Merry, "you'll promise honour bright never to try this game again, or I'll go in to Mr. Railton and explain the whole matter to him, and see if he can keep you in order."

"Sneak!"

"You can call it what you like, but you sha'n't disgrace the School House if I can prevent it," said Tom Merry grimly. "Brooke's people haven't done you any harm, and you sha'n't insult them. And mind, in any case, you are going to have a hiding."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now get off."

Levison stood his ground.

"I'm not going," he said.

Tom Merry clenched his fists. Blake took a step forward, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed his eyeglass into his pocket out of harm's way. Monty Lowther and Manners pushed back their cuffs with a business-like air.

Levison's lip curled in a bitter sneer.

"If you make a row here, they'll hear it," he said. "Brooke and his sister are in the garden, mugging up French."

"And just now you said that you didn't know it was Brooke's house," said Blake.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"You'd better not begin making a row, that's all," he said. "I suppose you don't want a hooligan kick-up here, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Tom Merry. "But you're going."

"I'm not going."

"I don't want a row here, but that would be better than letting you carry out your caddish scheme. Will you go?"

"No!"

"Then go for the cads!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Here, hold on," exclaimed Mellish. "I'll go—I—"

But Tom Merry & Co. did not hold on. They rushed to the attack, and Levison & Co. were simply swept off their feet by the rush.

## CHAPTER 13.

### Tea at Brooke's!

TOM MERRY selected Croke, as the biggest of the party, and he dropped Croke with an upper-cut that made the Shell fellow's jaw ache for days afterwards. Croke rolled on the ground and yelled. D'Arcy laid Levison across him with a right-hander, straight from the shoulder. Blake knocked Gane against the fence, and there being no further retreat for Gane, he had to put his hands up, and he and Blake slogged away at one another; Gane getting most of the knocks. Manners and Swayder engaged one another, and hammered away; and Lowther made for Mellish. But Mellish did not wait. He darted off in the direction of the wood, and never paused even to take breath till he was among the trees.

"Well, you blessed swindler," exclaimed Monty Lowther, pausing after pursuing him a dozen yards, "I'm not getting any of the fun! Come back, you rotter!"

But Mellish did not come back; he disappeared into the wood. Monty Lowther turned back discontentedly. Only

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Swayder was still fighting with Manners, and he was getting the worst of it. He rolled on the ground, roaring, as Monty Lowther arrived upon the scene of action.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Get up, you howwid slackahs! You are not half-licked yet."

"Rather not! Get up!"

There was a rustle in the garden, and two faces looked over the fence—Dick Brooke's and Amy's. The girl was looking very startled.

Brooke stared at the chums of St. Jim's, and then at the sullen-faced, savage-looking juniors on the ground.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed.

D'Arcy swept off his hat to Amy.

"Good-evenin', Bwooke!" he said cheerfully.

"What are you fellows doing here?" asked Brooke, flushing.

Tom Merry coloured. Brooke made Amy a sign to go to the house, and the girl went slowly up the garden. Then Brooke stopped over the fence. There was a hard and angry look in his eyes.

"I suppose you fellows didn't come here by chance?" he said.

"Wathah not."

"Then you share the curiosity of some of the other fellows, and you wanted to see the kind of place the day boy lives in?" said Brooke bitterly. "Well, here you are—look at it. It's poor enough, isn't it?"

"Weally, Bwooke—"

"It's a ruined old house, all that's left of what belonged to the family," said Brooke, in the same bitter, deliberate tone. "I live here with my people, on what we have left, and we keep one maid—only one—who works for half-wages, because she doesn't want to leave us. Queer taste, isn't it? We are as poor as church mice, and, as you see, some of the windows are broken, and we can't afford to have them mended. Is there anything else I can tell you, while you are in search of information? I shouldn't care to let you go unsatisfied, after you've taken all the trouble to come heré and find out things."

"Bai Jove!"

"You are mistaken, Brooke," Tom Merry said quietly. "We didn't come here to find out things—and I'm sorry enough we came, now. We found that Levison and his friends were coming here to rag you, and we came to stop him."

"Oh!" said Brooke, his expression changing.

"We couldn't get up with them before they got here—then they wouldn't go—and we went for them," said Tom Merry. "That's all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Brooke flushed red.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I—I didn't know. It was kind of you—very kind indeed! I ought to have known you better than to think you would come here out of curiosity. I'm sorry for what I said."

"It's all wight, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "It's all sewene. An apology is quite suffish. fwm one gentleman to another."

Croke and Levison, and Gane and Swayder had risen now. They were standing in a sullen group, scowling at the chums of the School House. Dick Brooke turned towards them with gleaming eyes.

"Are you satisfied now?" he asked. "If you are, the sooner you take yourselves off, the better."

"We'll go when we choose," growled Levison.

"You won't; you'll go when I choose," said Brooke.

"You are a set of cads, or you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't have come one at a time, either. Get off!"

"I won't, for one, unless I choose," said Swayder.

Brooke walked straight up to him.

"Put up your hands, then," he said. "Tom Merry will see fair play. I know you would start four to one if we were alone here."

Swayder put up his hands. He was lying on his back the next moment, looking up at the blue sky.

"And now you, Levison—"

Levison burst into an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, we don't want to stay," he said. "Our coming here was only a jape, anyway. We may as well get back, you fellows."

The others followed Levison, Swayder holding his hand to his nose. Brooke watched them till they were out of sight in the wood. Then he looked at Tom Merry & Co. The latter were feeling considerably uncomfortable.

"Will you fellows come in?" Brooke asked.

They hesitated.

"I weally think we ought to be gettin' back," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It will be neah callin' ovah."

"I—I think so," said Tom Merry.

Brooke smiled.

He knew, of course, that the juniors felt a delicacy about entering the place after what had been said. And they

did not know how poor the Brookes might be, and whether such a raid might put a strain upon their household resources.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Dick. "Calling-over is a good time off yet. You've time to come in for some tea. My father isn't here, but the mater will be glad to see you. Now, come in; I really want you to."

"If you put it like that, deah boy—"

"Well, I do!"

"Then I shall be vewy pleased to accept your kind invitation, deah boy," said the swell of St. Jim's gracefully.

"Come on, then!"

Brooke walked to the gate; the juniors of St. Jim's followed him in. They entered the old stone porch, cool and shady from the glare of the sun.

"This way," said Dick.

It was a pleasant room the juniors were shown into—spacious, barely furnished—but what furnishing there was, was in the best of taste. Big windows opened on the garden, and they were wide open, letting in the cool breeze and the scent of the lilac. Mrs. Brooke received the boys kindly and graciously; Amy a little shyly.

The peculiar circumstances of their visit made the boys a little awkward at first; but Brooke's mother soon put them at their ease, and they were soon chatting away quite cheerfully over the tea-table, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy seemed to be unable to take his monocle from Amy, when the girl was pouring out the tea. She looked so pretty and graceful.

"Would you chaps care to come up and see my room?"

Brooke asked, after tea was over.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"It's where I work," Dick explained. "You know that I work, I suppose—and I can show you some of the stuff. Of course, I don't want you to jaw about it at the school; but I know you won't do that."

"Of course not," said Tom Merry. "But—"

"Come on, then!"

They followed him up the stairs to his room. Brooke opened the door, and they passed in.

The juniors looked round them with interest.

The bench, the cardboard and rolls of paper, the colour-box, and the pencils, interested them very much. D'Arcy turned his eyeglass to and fro with keen interest. Work half-done lay on the bench, and the juniors gathered round it to look on.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, scanning the old English letters, in which the text was being painted. "Do you do that, deah boy?"

Brooke smiled.

"Yes; that's my work."

"The Lord loveth a cheerful giver!" Monty Lowther read out, following the dotted pencil letters, which were to be inked and illuminated afterwards. "Is that a text?"

"Yes."

"What's it for?"

"To hang up in the Ebenezer Meeting-house in Wayland."

"Oh, I see! A sort of reminder at collection times, I suppose?" said Lowther. "And what is this?"

It was a huge sheet of paper, with a pencilled outline upon it of a man putting on a pair of boots. The man's face was inked in, but the rest of him was still only outlined in pencil.

Brooke smiled.

"That's a poster," he said. "If you go along Wayland High Street next week you'll see it up outside Jones, the bootmaker's. It's supposed to represent a chap who's made happy for life by wearing Jones's boots. That smile on the face is supposed to indicate the happiness. See?"

"Bai Jove! That's jollay clevah!"

"I didn't know you painted, Brooke," said Manners.

Brooke laughed.

"I don't," he said. "My father paints, and I've inherited enough of it, I suppose, for this sort of thing. Dad paints ripping pictures when—he's fit." Brooke coloured a little. "But I dare say you know that art is a drug in the market. He sometimes gets ten guineas for a picture, but oftener he has to let two or three go for a pound or thirty shillings. And I shall get a pound for this daub, which doesn't take me a quarter of the time. I suppose England is a commercial country, and not an artistic one, which is rather lucky for me in some ways, too."

"Bai Jove, you know, it's awflay clevah of a chap to be able to earn money, you know!" said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "I don't believe I could do these things, you know. I've sometimes felt that I could be a great genewal, or a Pwime Ministah, or somethin' of that sort, but I don't think I could evah do anythin' useful. I feel beastly envious about you, Bwooke. It's weally worth the countwy's while to find you in food and clothes, while if all us chaps died to-morrow the countwy would be bettah off instead of worse

off, as it would mean so many idle mouths not to be fed any more. That's wathah a wotten wellection for us chaps."

"Then don't make it, you blessed Job's comforter!" said Monty Lowther. "We're ornamental, anyway, if we're not useful—at least, I am. You, of course—Ahem!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

There was a step on the stair. Brooke started, and changed colour.

"I—I think that's my father," he said.

"Bai Jove! I shall be awflay pleased to make the acquaintance of your patah, Bwooke, old boy."

The door opened, and John Brooke came in. Early in the evening as it was, he came in with an unsteady step and a flushed face. There was a new expression upon his face, too, that showed that something unusual had happened.

He did not notice the juniors. They drew back as they saw his condition, feeling keenly for Brooke. They began to understand, then, one of his most powerful reasons for not asking fellows home.

"Dicky, my lad, it's all up!"

"Yes, father."

"Esperance came in seventh—seventh, after all that Banks had told me. I sha'n't get the ninety."

Brooke smiled sadly.

"I never expected you to, dad. It's all right."

"But he wants his nine."

"Well, he shall have it. Don't talk of it now, dad."

"Why not?" said John Brooke. "It's got to be settled."

He held on to the bench with one hand and stared stupidly at the half-done poster for the bootmaker. "What is this, Dick?"

"It's for Mr. Jones, in Wayland, dad."

"And that's what I've brought you to, Dick," said John Brooke mutteringly. "That's what I've brought my son to, and you have the best blood in England in your veins, Dick. We were the Brookes of Sussex when the ancestors of all the modern dukes were behind their counters in the City or driving their ploughs, Dick."

"I know we were, dad, but it can't be helped. Don't talk about it."

"But—but the money, Dick. A debt of honour, you know—"

"It's all right, dad. I—I say, I've got some visitors here—fellows from the school, you know," stammered Dick.

John Brooke looked vacantly at the juniors. Strange it was to see how the dignity of old descent struggled in him with the influence of the liquor that was numbing his limbs and confusing his brain. He held on to the bench while he made a bow to the silent juniors.

"I'm glad to meet any friends of my son's," he said. "A few years ago I could have received you in a manner suitable to my station, but the Brookes have had a fall in the world since then. The old families are going to the dogs, sir, and England will go to the dogs with them, I'm afraid."

And Mr. Brooke made a lurch, and let go the bench, and would certainly have gone to the floor, if not to the dogs, if his son had not caught him in time.

Brooke helped his father to the chair, and sat him down, and the poor old gentleman went off comfortably to sleep. The juniors left the work-room quietly.

They took their leave a few minutes later of Mrs. Brooke and Amy. Dick walked with them as far as the wood, and then he turned back.

Tom Merry & Co. were very silent for some time as they walked homeward through the darkening woods. They were thinking of the home they had left—of the father fallen to ruin—a fine and brave character destroyed by faults which, in his case, were little more than the amiable weaknesses of a kindly heart—of the patient, calm mother and the little sister, grave beyond her years—and of Dick, the lad who was fighting his way against such endless difficulties.

"Jollay good chap!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at last. "And—and I wathah like the old gentleman, too. I should say he's been a fine chap."

And the others agreed.

## CHAPTER 14.

### A Debt of Honour.

THE lamp was burning low.

Dick Brooke laid down his brush. The gentleman on the poster, putting on a pair of Jones's famous boots, which were a pleasure to wear, and a bargain at any price, but sold at the amazing figure of twelve-and-six, was finished. Dick pegged it out with drawing-pins, and left it to dry. Then he looked round at his father.

He had made John Brooke as comfortable as he could. His head was propped on pillows as he lay back in his chair, and even in the sleep of intoxication John Brooke never lost the handsome dignity that distinguished him.

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The well-outlined face, with its delicate and finely-modelled features, seemed a tempting subject for an artist as it looked out of the shadows at the end of the dimly-lighted room. Dick looked at his father, and affection and sadness were mingled in his look.

"Dad!"

John Brooke's eyes opened. He liked to come and sit in Dick's work-room—he had some vague idea that he was helping the lad with his work. He tried to rise, and sat down in the chair again.

"Well, Dick, lad, finished?"

"Yes, father."

"What's the time?"

"Half-past ten."

"You're leaving off?"

"Yes."

John Brooke nodded approvingly.

"Quite right, Dicky. I told you all along you were over-doing it—you should never have worked so late. It worried your mother."

"I've promised mother to go to bed at half-past ten every night now, father."

"Quite right. Always do as your mother tells you," said John Brooke, wagging an uncertain finger at his son—"always. She's a good woman, Dick. By the way, I did tell you about Esperance?"

"Yes, dad."

"He's lost."

"I know."

"He came in seventh," said Mr. Brooke. "Extraordinary, wasn't it? Now, you know, I could have sworn that that horse would romp home."

Dick was silent. He had never known a horse selected by his father to romp home. John Brooke was not only the most inveterate of gamblers, but he was also one of the most unlucky. Ill fortune dogged his steps, whether it was upon the racecourse, or at cards, or at a gambling casino on the Continent, for in his palmy days John Brooke had succeeded in getting rid of a very considerable portion of his patrimony at Monte Carlo and in the casinos of the Riviera.

"The worst of it is we have to meet Banks's claim," said John Brooke. "I lose the ninety I expected, and I have to pay that fellow nine. I must pay him—it would be impossible to ask a favour of a man of that class."

"Yes, dad."

"I'm going to paint some more pictures next week, Dick. I feel as if I shall turn out something really good, and probably raise twenty pounds or so. Unfortunately, Banks has to be paid at once. How's it to be done?"

"Oh, father!"

"I hope you're not going to complain, Dick," said Mr. Brooke peevishly. "I did it for the good of the family. If I could have got in that ninety I should have used it as capital, and I could have gone over to Amsterdam and played roulette with it. I've thought out a system that's simply bound to smash the bank. And think of my coming home with gold pieces bursting out of every pocket, Dick—think of that!"

Dick smiled miserably. He was never likely to see his father return in that way, he thought. Gambling casinos were not run for the benefit of the public, but for that of the proprietors. But John Brooke was like a boy in his hopes—he looked upon the brighter side of everything, and he always nourished an inner confidence that by some big coup—exactly what was not certain—he would restore the fallen fortunes of the family.

"I'm not going to complain, dad," said Dick slowly; "but—"

"Haven't you the money, Dick?"

"Not nearly so much as that, dad. Mother's money goes all the time in household expenses—you know she never has any left."

"I trust I should never fall so low as to touch your mother's money, Dick," said John Brooke, with great dignity. "It's little enough, goodness knows!"

Dick nodded.

"Then you can't help me, Dick?"

"I've got the money for my fees at St. Jim's," said Brooke, in a low voice.

"The fees?"

"Yes. You can have that, father."

"Good!" said John Brooke, in great relief. "That's all right, Dick. You can have what I get for my picture next week, and that will come to the same thing, so far as the fees are concerned, won't it?"

"Yes, dad, if you get it."

"I shall make a special effort, Dick. What would happen if you couldn't pay the fees?"

"I couldn't go back to St. Jim's after this term if I couldn't pay, dad. The Head might let it run on, but I couldn't ask him."

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"Quite right, Dick. It does not become a Brooke to ask favours of anyone," said his father approvingly. "But it's all right. I shall make a special effort next week, and the money will come in."

"Dad, I suppose you couldn't let Mr. Banks wait a bit?"

"Dick!"

"Well, dad, there's a lot at stake," said the boy desperately. "I sha'n't be able to stay at the school if I can't pay, and the Head is letting me pay at the end of the term instead of the beginning, as it is. Dad, it would be rotten for me if I couldn't go back to St. Jim's."

"I should not think you would allow even that to make you fail to pay a debt of honour, and if I don't pay it the disgrace is as much yours as mine," said John Brooke. "But do as you like, Dick; I'm not the man to ask favours, even of a son."

"You shall have the money, dad."

"That's all right, Dick, and I will return it to you next week. If anything should happen about the picture, I have some more money coming in."

"Where from, dad?"

"It's on the races, of course," said his father a little hesitatingly. "But this time it's really a dead cert., Dick—really! It's only a small sum; but I must get in eight pounds at least on the Fimore race—really."

Dick did not reply. His heart was too heavy for words.

The debt of honour, as his father called it, was the finishing blow. Dick would not ask the Head to let him owe his fees—he was late with them as it was. It meant that he had to leave St. Jim's.

The lad had felt it coming for a long time. Sooner or later it must have come. So long as there was any money, the unfortunate spendthrift was certain to spend it—it was in John Brooke's blood, and he could not help it. And he always had a Micawber-like faith in something turning up. Next week, or the week after, he was always going to paint a picture which would sell for a large price; next week, or next week but one, some dead cert. on the races was to come off.

Dick knew too well that, whatever happened, the money would not come.

If the last of his little store went he had to leave St. Jim's, and as he knew it had been certain to come sooner or later he tried to take it cheerfully.

But, in spite of himself, his heart was heavy, and he hardly prevented the tears from welling into his eyes.

Perhaps it was better. Young as he was, he was old enough to work. It might be better for his family if he left school, with his education half finished, to begin the world. But—

The boy almost choked as he bade his father good-night. John Brooke was quite cheerful. Frequently as he was intoxicated, it never had a bad effect upon his temper; he was seldom otherwise than good-humoured. Just now he was feeling particularly cheerful. His prospects seemed quite good; he would be able to pay his debt of honour to the respectable Mr. Banks—and next week money was to come in from somewhere.

Dick Brooke went to bed. But it was long before he slept.

## CHAPTER 15.

### Accused!

DR. HOLMES, the Head of St. Jim's, looked troubled. Mr. Latham, the master of the Fourth, was in his study. The little Form-master was looking quite distressed, and he blinked over his glasses at the doctor in a worried and excited manner.

"Are you sure?" said Dr. Holmes. "Are you sure, Mr. Latham?"

"I can only tell you as much as I know, sir," said the master of the Fourth. "I thought it my duty to bring the matter to your knowledge, and let you decide what was to be done."

"Quite so—quite so!"

"This is how it happened: As I came into the Form-room Levison was speaking to Mellish. He was speaking quite loudly, and it was impossible for me to help hearing. I might almost have fancied that he intended me to hear, but I do not see why that should be the case. He was speaking of having seen Brooke leave the Green Man in the evening, and of having, on another occasion, seen him in the company of a man who was under the influence of drink. Having heard that as I entered the room, I deemed it my duty to question Levison. Levison, I am sorry to say, is not what I should call a very truthful boy. However, when I questioned him he stated that it was true, and that Brooke himself had admitted it when taxed by the other boys on the subject. He asked me, if I questioned Brooke, to leave his name out

of it, as the other boys might accuse him of sneaking; while, of course, he was bound to answer my questions, I should not have allowed him to decline to answer me."

"Quite so, Mr. Lathom."

"My view, therefore, was, sir, that you should see Brooke when he came back for afternoon lessons to-day and ascertain what truth there is in the matter. If Brooke denies the charge, Levison may be questioned for proofs. If Brooke admits that it is true, Levison may be left out of the matter."

"Well, pray send the boy to me as soon as he arrives," said Dr. Holmes. "I will examine him closely on this subject."

"Very well, sir."

And Mr. Lathom quitted the study. The little Form-master wore a very worried look. He had some regard for Dick Brooke, and he was sorry to see that the family failings were coming to light in the lad who had always been supposed to be quiet, sedate, and studious. But Mr. Lathom had little doubt upon the subject. And if Dick Brooke, at his early age, was addicted to the habits that had ruined his family, St. Jim's was no place for him.

The master of the Fourth paused in the hall to speak to several juniors who were chatting there while they waited for the bell to ring for afternoon classes. Outside, the old quad, was a blaze of sunshine, and the old stone hall of the School House was delightfully cool and shady.

"Merry! Blake! When Brooke comes will you look for him and tell him that Dr. Holmes desires to see him in his study?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Thank you!"

Mr. Lathom rustled away. And the juniors looked at one another. Levison, who was leaning against the door, gave a low whistle.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That means trouble."

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry. "Has Brooke been in any row in the Form-room—anything to be sent up for?"

"No," said Blake.

"Sure?"

"Quite sure. He never gets caned, and hardly ever gets lines. He's a model pupil, so far as that goes—rather a swot, you know," said Blake disparagingly.

"Then what does the Head want to see him for?"

"I wonder."

"I guess I have it," said Jerold Lumley-Lumley quietly. "That story of the Green Man has reached the Head somehow, and he's going to ask Brooke about it."

"My hat!"

"By Jove! I wathah think you're wight, Lumlay-Lumlay, old man. Some uttahly wotten sneak has wreported it to the Head!"

The juniors all looked at Levison. The cad of the Fourth returned their looks defiantly, and strolled away with his hands in his pockets.

"That's the cad, as safe as houses!" said Jack Blake.

"I guess so."

"Bai Jove, we ought to wag him, deah boys!"

"Oh, we've no proof!" said Tom Merry. "If we asked him he wouldn't own up. Besides, one of the prefects may have heard some of the fellows chattering about it; and if a prefect got hold of the story I suppose it would be his duty to report it to the Head."

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"I hope the Head won't be rough on old Brooke," said Tom Merry uneasily. "The worst of it is he was really at the Green Man and can't explain why he was there. But—my hat!"

"Well, what are you thinking of?"

"His father!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Asses we were, not to think of it!" said Tom Merry. "Poor old Brooke! But—Hallo! Here he is! Brooke, old man!"

Dick Brooke entered the School House, red and warm after his walk in the blazing sunshine. He took off his straw hat and fanned himself.

"The Head wants to see you, Brooke!"

"Does he?"

"I'm afraid he's heard that Green Man story, Brooke. You'll have to explain to him," said Tom Merry anxiously. Brooke smiled oddly.

"I don't think there will be any need to explain," he said.

"I'm leaving St. Jim's."

There was a general exclaiming.

"Leaving St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"Bai Jove! What for, deah boy?"

"Oh, I've stuck it out as long as I could!" said Brooke. "I can't stick it out any longer, that's all. I'd better go in to the Head, I suppose."

He went down the flagged passage.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "That's wotten! I wondah what's the mattah?"

"Money, of course," said Lowther.

"Oh, it's wotten! Poor old Bwooke!"

And the others echoed "Poor old Brooke!"

## CHAPTER 16.

### All Serene!

DICK BROOKE tapped at the door of the Head's study. The lad's face was a little pale, but firmly set, and his lips were tight. He could not wholly keep out of his face the trouble that was in his heart, but he did his best.

"Come in!"

Brooke entered.

The Head was sitting at his desk. He raised his eyes as Dick Brooke entered and looked at the junior.

"Ah, it is you, Brooke! Close the door, please. I have something to say to you."

"Yes, sir."

"It has come to Mr. Lathom's knowledge, Brooke, that you have visited the Green Man public-house in Rylcombe—that you were seen leaving the place. Also, that on another occasion you were seen in company with an intoxicated man, evidently on friendly terms with him."

Brooke paled a little more.

"If these statements are not accurate, kindly tell me so, and the author of them will be questioned, Brooke."

"They are true, sir."

"You have visited the Green Man public-house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Although you knew that it was out of bounds—has been specially placed out of bounds by me, on account of the bad reputation it bears."

Brooke winced.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a low voice.

Dr. Holmes knitted his brows.

"And you have been seen in the streets in company with a man under the influence of liquor, Brooke?"

"I did not know I was seen, sir."

"But you do not deny the fact?"

"No, sir."

"Who was this man?"

Brooke was silent.

"Did you hear me, Brooke?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then why do you not answer?"

The lad's lips moved, but he did not speak.

The expression grew harder and sterner upon the doctor's brow.

"Do you refuse to answer, Brooke?"

"Oh! No, sir! But—but—"

"But what?"

"But I'd prefer not to answer, sir," said Dick Brooke miserably. "If—if you knew how it was, sir, you wouldn't want me to speak. But—but it's all one, sir. You want me to leave the school, I suppose?"

"If you cannot deny these charges, Brooke, of course you must leave the school. There is no question of that. But I am perfectly willing to listen to any explanation you can give."

"I cannot give any, sir."

"You refuse to explain why you visited the public-house?"

Brooke was silent.

"You will not tell me who the man was you were with, who was under the influence of liquor, or how you came to know him?"

"I would rather not, sir."

The Head compressed his lips.

"Very well," he said—"very well. You can please yourself about it, of course, Brooke; but if you cannot explain satisfactorily, you will have to leave St. Jim's. I shall not expel you; I shall be satisfied if you cease to come to the school."

"Very good, sir. I—I—it must have happened, anyway," said Dick miserably. "I can't afford to come any longer, sir. I should have had to go at the end of the term, anyway. But—but I'm sorry you think badly of me, sir. I—I should have liked to leave you with a good opinion of me."

Dr. Holmes's face softened a little.

"I have always had a good opinion of you, Brooke," he said. "I know you have had a harder struggle than most boys of your age—even than most boys born in poverty. You have had a hard fight, and you have fought it well—so far as my knowledge extends. But I cannot pretend not to know the reputation of your family—I should say, of the male members of your family, for reckless-living. If you are following in their footsteps, you must know that this school

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is not a suitable place for you. If you are not, will you explain the suspicious circumstances in your conduct?"

"I cannot, sir."

"Then you must go!"

Dick turned blindly to the door. There was a tap at the door; it opened, and Tom Merry looked in, with a flushed face. The Head glanced at him severely.

"Merry, what do you want?"

"I—I want to speak to you, sir—about Brooke," said Tom Merry eagerly. "I—I've talked it over with the other chaps, sir, and they agree I ought to tell you."

"What! You have come here to give evidence against Brooke!" exclaimed the Head, in surprise.

"Against him, sir!" echoed Tom Merry. "Oh, no! For him, sir."

The Head's brow cleared.

"Ah, I see! You think you can explain the charge made against Brooke."

"Yes, sir—if it's the one I think it is. Would you mind telling me, sir, what it is?" asked Tom Merry diffidently.

"I—I hope you don't think it's cheek on my part coming here, sir; but—"

"It is very right of you to wish to see justice done, Merry. Brooke admits having visited the Green Man public-house, and having been out in the company of a man under the influence of drink. I really do not see how these things are to be explained away; and Brooke has declined to explain. Under the circumstances, I have no choice but to compel him to leave St. Jim's. If you can offer any explanation, however, I shall be glad to listen to it."

"It's his beastly family pride, that's all, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Look here, Brooke, why don't you explain?"

"I shall have to go, anyway," said Brooke quietly. "And—and I have no explanation to give."

"Then I'll give one for you," said Tom Merry bluntly.

"Tom Merry!"

"I know perfectly well what you went to the Green Man for, and what you were doing with a chap who'd been drinking," said Tom Merry. "Dr. Holmes isn't likely to visit the sins of the father on the son. Why can't you tell him?"

The Head started.

"His father!" he exclaimed.

Brooke flushed crimson, and gave Tom Merry a reproachful glance.

"Brooke, is that the case?"

"Yes, sir," said Brooke, in a low voice. "My father is—very unfortunate, sir. He's the best fellow in the world—a chap never had a better father," said Brooke proudly. "Only—he can't help that, sir. When I was seen the other night, I was helping him home, sir; and—and when I went to the Green Man, it was in answer to a message from him—he wanted something, and I took it to him."

The doctor nodded. He understood very well that it was a message for money that Dick Brooke had answered.

"And this is all, Brooke?"

"That's all."

"You have never drunk anything at the Green Man, or played cards there?"

"Never, sir."

"We all know he hasn't, sir," said Tom Merry eagerly.

"Brooke is one of the most decent chaps at St. Jim's."

There was a long silence.

"I am very, very glad to hear this," said Dr. Holmes at last. "It clears you, Brooke, and it shows that you are a more unfortunate lad than I had dreamed. I did not know that your father was—was like that."

Brooke flushed miserably.

"We keep it as quiet as possible, sir."

"Yes, I suppose so. It is very, very unfortunate," said the Head.

"I knew your father in his younger days, Brooke, when he was in a different position, and I respected him very much; and I am sure that this—this unfortunate state of affairs is due to weakness and good-nature, and nothing worse."

"Thank you, sir—thank you!"

"It is not for me to visit the sins of the parents on the children, or their weaknesses, either," said the Head. "Now that the matter is explained, Brooke, the subject is dropped. I am very sorry for you, and certainly I shall do nothing to make the battle of life harder for you. You will remain at St. Jim's."

Brooke shook his head.

"Thank you very much, sir. But I can't."

Tom Merry quietly left the study. What he had come there to do was done, and he did not wish to listen to Brooke's private affairs. The day-boy's face was white and strained.

"What do you mean, Brooke?" asked the Head quietly.

"I can't pay the fees any longer, sir," said Brooke.

"Ah!"

"I—I suppose there's no harm in your knowing about it, sir," said Brooke, colouring. "I suppose you must know,

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anyway, pretty much how matters are with me, since my father was ruined. My mother has a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and that's all the money there is for all of us, excepting what I earn myself, and what my father gets for his pictures. And—and there are ways the money goes—all sorts of ways—"

"I understand, Brooke."

"My father's the best chap in the world, sir, only—he doesn't understand money. He's used to being rich, I suppose, and he can never seem to realise that there isn't any money to come from anywhere. And—and—"

"It is natural enough, Brooke; only it must be very awkward for you, under the circumstances."

"I shall have to go at the end of the term, sir. And—and you've been very kind to me, sir, and I thank you from my heart."

Brooke made a movement to the door. The Head spoke, in quiet, gentle tones.

"Brooke, stay!"

"Yes, sir."

"You say that you cannot pay the fees any longer?"

"No, sir."

"But that is perhaps not necessary."

Brooke flushed scarlet.

"Oh, sir, you—you don't think I was asking for charity, do you, sir?" he cried. "I—I'd rather sweep a crossing—a thousand times rather."

The Head smiled.

"Gently, my lad—gently. Do you not know that St. Jim's is an old and a rich foundation, and especially well-off in scholarships, exhibitions, and prizes? Have you not thought on that subject?"

"No—no, sir," said Brooke slowly.

"There is especially the Sir Everard Jevons' Scholarship, restricted to poor students, whose parents have an income of not more than four pounds a week," said Dr. Holmes. "There are two of them to be competed for this term, Brooke, and there is still time to enter. There are very few boys at St. Jim's whose circumstances are such as to render them eligible. You are one—and if you can obtain the minimum number of marks, I have not the slightest doubt that you will obtain the scholarship."

"Oh, sir!"

"There are two vacant, and as yet only one candidate—you will be the second," said the Head. "If you take my advice, you will enter. Unless you fail to get the minimum marks, you will win the scholarship—specially founded for lads in your peculiar circumstances. What do you say?"

"Oh, sir!"

The tears ran down Dick's cheeks. "Oh, sir! What can I say, except—except that I shall jump at the chance, sir, and—and I thank you from the bottom of my heart, sir. I—I only hope I shall have a chance some day, sir, of showing you how grateful I am for your kindness to me."

"Then I shall put your name down, Brooke."

"Oh, yes, please, sir!"

"And I certainly think you will not be leaving at the end of the term, Brooke," said the Head, with a smile.

And he shook hands with the junior, and Dick Brooke quitted the study.

There were a good many juniors in the passage waiting to see him. Levison was there, hoping to see him come forth with hanging head, and Tom Merry & Co. were there, waiting with anxious hopes to see him emerge unpunished. Dick Brooke came out as if he were walking on air, his face flushed, his eyes sparkling.

Levison gave him a look of savage astonishment, and walked away. It was very clear that Levison's poisoned arrow had missed its mark. Brooke did not even notice him. He came up to Tom Merry & Co.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed.

"You're not going?"

"No! I'm going in for the Sir Everard Jevons' Scholarship instead. The Head's putting my name down, and he thinks I shall get it. Oh!"

"Bai Jove! How wippin'! I should have advised you to do that wery thing myself, deah boy, if you had asked me, only—"

"Only you think I sha'n't get it?"

"Oh, not at all—not a bit! Only I nevah knew anythin' about it, you see," D'Arcy explained.

Brooke laughed.

"I think it will turn out all right," he said. "I feel merry as a cricket, and as happy as a king. Hurrah!"

And Tom Merry & Co. cordially joined in.

"Hurrah!"

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of the Chums of St. Jim's next week, entitled "HIS PAST AGAINST HIM," by Martin Clifford; also the opening chapters of a grand new serial story "DEEP SEA GOLD," by Reginald Wray. Order your copy of THE GEM Library to-day. Price 1d.)

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**A Brief Resume of the Previous Instalments.**

Three friends—Bob Hardy, Ralph Chesterton, and Tom Manton—meet accidentally in Cairo, and are despatched by an eccentric millionaire to the small South American State of Tecsaguay on an errand of mercy. This consists of putting a stop to the slaughter which the Venebia, Tecsaguay's one modern battleship, is inflicting upon the unprotected inhabitants of Argendor, a hostile State.

Arrived in Elvasgo, the capital of Tecsaguay, the three friends interview the President, and learn that the Venebia is about to start upon another expedition of slaughter. On returning from the palace, Tom Manton overhears the landlord at the hotel talking about them, and this puts a plan of action into his head. He announces that, to frustrate the Venebia's expedition, it is necessary for them to be again invited to the palace on the following Wednesday night, and he proceeds to explain how they can obtain the required invitation.

(Read on from here.)

**The Comrades Come to a Decision.**

"I've got an idea," Tom Manton went on—"an idea by which we can all get that invitation. It's a bit risky, but that'll be all the better."

Bob Harding smiled.  
"I'm not so sure of that, Tom; but let's have the idea. I've been worrying myself about that point ever since you've been out."

"Jose says that the President goes to the garrison every evening. Well, wouldn't it be possible for one of us to dress up as a cowboy—revolver and all, you know—and meet him at some lonely spot, and threaten to kill him?"

"But what the dickens for?" asked Ralph. "What good would that do?"

"A lot. Suppose Bob did the cowboy act, you and I, Ralph, could appear on the scene just as the President was about to be shot. We should send the cowboy off helter-skelter, and make old Carlos think we had rescued him from certain death."

The other two looked at one another.  
"It's rather drastic," said Bob thoughtfully, "but it's not half a bad idea, Tom. I can see what you're driving at well enough. You think that after the President has been rescued by you two it will be quite an easy matter to gain admittance to the palace?"

"That's it. I see no reason at all why it shouldn't work. It's only a game of bluff, you know, but Don Castello can't help being deceived. Do you think you could do the cowboy trick, though?" Tom added, turning to the engineer.

"There's not much in that," said Bob, "and the outfit ought to be easy to secure. I think, Tom, you've just solved the difficulty. All we have to do now is to get to know when the President will be out."

"Suppose there's somebody with him?"  
"That will have to be chanced. Besides, I could hold two up just as well as one. I'd rather meet Don Carlos alone, for another person might have pluck enough to make a pot shot at me. I can take care of myself, though."

"It's settled, then?" asked Tom, pleased with himself.  
"Yes; unless something better crops up. I suggest we get up early and explore the road to the garrison before breakfast. Then we shall know exactly what we're doing. It's no good leaving things to chance when we can make certain of them."

While Tom and Ralph were getting undressed they still discussed the plan. In the excitement of this they quite forgot to tell Bob of the incident near the docks, so the latter heard nothing of their suspicions with regard to Halil Ahmed.

Being in the best of health, the comrades had not the slightest difficulty in getting to sleep. They had had a strenuous day, and were all thoroughly tired out. In the morning, however, soon after dawn, they awoke thoroughly refreshed.

The landlord was somewhat surprised to see them down, and was more so when he learnt their intention of going for a long walk before breakfast. The morning was a beautiful one, the sun shining from a cloudless sky, and a gentle breeze blowing at just sufficient strength to cool the air. Being early, the atmosphere was cool and refreshing.

Having got well clear of the town, they found that the track which led to the garrison was a decidedly rough mountain path; before the war, in fact, the route had not been used once in three months. Now, however, the path was getting into quite a busy thoroughfare—busy in the sense that soldiers at certain times marched to and from Elvasgo over its surface.

At some places it was nothing more nor less than a ledge, with a sheer cliff on one hand; but, being fairly broad, there was no danger of making a false step.

"The very place!" exclaimed Bob, as he surveyed it with a critical eye. "I'll warrant his Excellency will not show much of a fight if I encounter him somewhere about here. He is only a small man, and would realise his helplessness in a moment."

So the comrades walked back to breakfast satisfied with their early morning's reconnoitre. It was something accomplished, and that was better than wasting their time at the hotel.

At about ten o'clock a swarthy individual, looking rather like a country cattle-rearer, presented himself at the comrades' apartment, and announced himself to be the embassy promised by the President. He certainly did not look very much like a minister of state.

He was polite to a degree, but as he could not speak very much English, the visitors to Elvasgo found him rather more trouble than he was worth. They could not say this, however, but followed him round the town, as though they were very much interested in everything he pointed out.

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To Tom especially the whole proceeding was decidedly a bore, and he was heartily glad when the time came for them to return to the hotel.

The streets showed some vestige of business now, but nothing could alter that appearance of dinginess which characterised the whole town.

As the chums walked down the main street, under the blaze of the glaring sun above them, they could not help comparing this place to Rio, and laughing secretly at the comparison. At that moment there was no vehicular traffic whatever, and only a few pedestrians walked the street.

In plain words, Elvasgo was deadly slow. This, in combination with the present war, made the place more uninviting than ever. Suddenly there was a clatter of horse's hoofs, and the little party glanced round.

A man on horseback was galloping down the street, creating clouds of dust as he proceeded. It was a cowboy, and he was hot and perspiring with rapid riding. His horse, too, one of those hardy South American beasts, was foaming a little at the mouth.

At the sound of his approach numerous people emerged into the roadway, and he pulled up and leapt to the ground, to be instantly surrounded by a crowd of shouting Tecaguayans.

"News!" shouted the cowboy in Spanish. "There has been a great victory, citizens! Hark what I have to say!"

Tom listened attentively, and the inhabitants crowded round, shouting and gesticulating, excited in a moment.

"At dawn the marshal's army bore down upon the village of Tornero, and succeeded in wiping out every soul, numbering two hundred in all. The village is now burning fiercely, and before many hours have passed will be nothing but ruins."

A shout went up, and the news was quickly transferred to those inhabitants who had not been on the spot. To them it was something to get excited about, but Bob, Tom, and Ralph felt only disgust.

"The cowards!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "Don't they know what fair fighting is? Just fancy bearing down on an unsuspecting village and killing everybody, including men, women, and children!"

"We've got to stop it somehow," said Bob quietly. "These skunks seem to have no feelings whatever, and their only thought is to kill everybody they can. Instead of taking a town and holding its inhabitants prisoners, their policy is to wipe everybody out. It makes me sick!"

Ralph kicked a stone which lay in his path with savage force.

"This invasion, too," he said. "Can't we do something to prevent that? We're going to sink the battleship, and so prevent her doing any more damage, but couldn't we warn the Argendorians of the coming invasion?"

"We can," replied Bob, "and we will. They must know at all costs what to be prepared for. I have had an idea of blowing up the magazine at the garrison. Mr. Fortescue didn't tell us to do that, but it will have to be done somehow or other."

"It'll be a tough job."

"All the better," declared the civil engineer. "The difficulty will be in causing no loss of life. However, we've got other things to think about at present."

The minister had left them at the moment when the cowboy rode up, and they were now opposite their hotel. They entered, and walked straight through, until they were sitting on the verandah.

"Well," exclaimed Bob, after a moment, "that tedious business is finished with. Now, look here; we've got to set about doing some real work. The President must go through his ordeal to-night, and certain preparations must be made."

"Of course!"

"Well, for once we will divide forces, and each do something. It will save time, and be better in every way. You, Tom, can take a walk down to the docks, and then continue to the bay itself. Observe everything you can, so that when it comes to the actual climax we shall know just what to do."

"You can trust me to get all the information possible," drawled Tom. "I'm not exactly a Sherlock Holmes, but I can use my eyes as well as any other fellow, and chance it!"

"You, Ralph, had better go round and elicit by some means or other the information in regard to the President. We must know exactly what time he starts for the stronghold in the mountains. It ought not to be such a difficult job, for there is no secret about it. I should advise you to pay a visit to one or two of the English establishments."

"That's all right, then," said the Army officer. "I don't know much Spanish, so it would be no good sending me to talk to any of these bloodthirsty heathens. What will you do, Bob?"

"I'm afraid I've given myself the lightest task of all," laughed the engineer. "It must be done, however"

"What is it?"

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DON'T MISS **INKY, MINOR.** The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story appearing in this week's number of the **"MAGNET" LIBRARY** Now on Sale.

"Merely to procure a cowboy's outfit—secondhand, if possible. I shall have to be careful how I go, for it would look rather peculiar if it were generally known that I had purchased such a rig-out, especially when the news gets round that the President has been held up."

So it was arranged. There was still ample time before luncheon, so the Alliance of Three set out on their different missions. They were not in Elvasgo for pleasure, and by working separately it meant a great saving of time. Two hours later they met again, and sat down to a well-earned lunch.

"Now," said Tom, "we'll each make our reports. To start with, I've had the very deuce of a time at those confounded docks. In the heat of the day the various odours were intensified about a hundred times. I tell you I got away as soon as possible."

"And what have you found out?"

"Nothing particular, but I could lead you right down to the water's edge with my eyes closed. And look here, there's something there which seems as much out of place in Elvasgo as we do."

"And what's that?" asked Bob.

"A motor-launch, and a little beauty she is, too. I'll warrant it doesn't belong to any of these Tecaguayan johnnies. If she's still there on the night we do the business she'll come in jolly handy."

"You're right, Tom. There'll be nothing wrong in borrowing the boat for a short time. Anything is justifiable at such a time as this. I have secured a secondhand suit of clothing from one of the British stores, and there's no danger of the fact getting about the town. The manager there is a hard-headed Scotsman, and he's as dead against this war as we are."

"You didn't tell him what we are really here for?"

"Rather not!" returned Bob. "He's under the impression that there's a practical joke of some sort on. But I'm anxious to hear how you got on, Ralph."

"Well, I've secured the information, and that's the main thing. It was quite an easy matter, for it is known throughout the town that Don Castello pays a nightly visit to the garrison. From what I can learn, all the thinking work is done by Marshal Perlado, and the President gets all the credit."

"That is not in the least surprising. But what time does he set out?"

"There is no exact time, but it is never before six o'clock and never later than seven. Don Castello prefers to go to the stronghold himself, because he is of an extremely suspicious character, and likes to keep an eye on his men constantly."

"That makes our work all the easier," exclaimed Bob Harding thoughtfully. "Well, chaps, there's nothing further to be done until to-night, so I vote we stay indoors during the heat of the afternoon."

"Personally," remarked Tom, "I should prefer to have a swim, but in this wretched place that's impossible. By Jimmy, though, we could find the owner of that motor-launch and hire her for a while!"

The chums looked at one another.

"Besides," went on Tom, "we could do some work at the same time. There's the battleship, remember, and we could cruise round her, and find out exactly where the accommodation ladder is, etc."

"It's not a bad notion, Tom," said Bob Harding, "and I'm half inclined to do as you say. It would be just lovely in the bay this afternoon."

Tom jammed his panama on his head.

"Good!" he cried. "Then it's a go!"

### Don Castello Receives a Fright, and is Rescued from an Awkward Position.

"Good-bye, and don't forget to appear on the scene at the right moment!"

It was Bob Harding who uttered the words. The time was a little after six, and the three comrades were standing together behind some bushes which grew at the side of the track which led to the stronghold. Bob was attired as a cowboy, and his face had been disguised with considerable skill. Being dark, there was practically no fear of his being recognised.

"We'll wait for the President, and follow as closely behind as possible," replied Ralph. "He may be along at any minute now."

"Right! I'll be going."

Bob turned, and hurried up the rough path. Overhead the stars shone brilliantly, and although there was no moon, it was by no means dark. The track could be plainly distinguished.



Tom and Ralph crouched behind the bushes quite out of view, and they intended remaining there until Don Castello had passed. They were both attired in flannels and panamas, having changed into these before setting out on their boating trip.

The latter had come off satisfactorily. The owner of the launch proved to be none other than the Scotsman Bob had been talking to in the morning. He willingly let them have the use of it for the afternoon, and would accept no money for the hire of it, so Bob insisted on paying for the tanks to be filled with petrol and oil.

They had thoroughly enjoyed their trip, and had taken a searching look round the Venebia, which proved to be a good ship very badly handled.

Tom was absolutely disgusted when he saw her at close quarters, for her decks, brasswork, etc., were in a filthy condition, while the crew lounged about, smoking their cigarettes, doing absolutely no work. There was no semblance of discipline, and Tom, who was a member of His Majesty's Navy, could find no words to express his feelings.

He even referred to the matter as they stood behind the bush waiting for the President to appear, and Ralph could not help laughing as he heard Tom scolding disjunctedly to himself.

"Where were the officers?" he murmured. "That's what I can't make out. There seemed to be nobody in charge at all. I felt just like getting aboard and ordering them all—"

"S-s-sh!" whispered Ralph suddenly. "Lower your voice a little. There's somebody coming."

"What's that? Oh, somebody coming!" exclaimed Tom, suddenly realising where he was. He crouched down lower and gazed down the track. It was the President himself. He was quite alone, and walked somewhat hurriedly over the uneven path.

One of his special brand of cigars was between his teeth, and he muttered to himself as he walked. The chums had thought it best to carry out their plan while the President was on the way to the garrison. There was no knowing at what time he would return, and there was a chance he would have somebody with him on his way back.

He walked on, totally unconscious of the two pairs of eyes which watched him. He had no fear of molestation, for everybody in Tecaguay was loyal to him, and no sign of treachery had even been displayed. He loved ostentation as a rule, but these visits to his commander-in-chief were absolutely necessary.

Don Castello was of rather a nervous temperament, and he never liked negotiating that portion of the roadway which ran alongside the precipice. Here he usually hurried, and this occasion was no exception to the rule.

At the very moment when he was passing the most dangerous part, however, he suddenly received a nasty shock. A man suddenly appeared from behind a huge boulder, and fired his revolver into the air with startling abruptness.

So abrupt was it, in fact, that the President crouched back, shaking and trembling. He carried a firearm himself, but it never entered his head to use it. For the moment he was terrorized. Certainly, Bob Harding gave him good cause to be.

"Hands up, yer skunk!" he said threateningly, in a hoarse, Yankee accent. "Guess yew're ther President of this hyar one-horse country, ain't yer?"

Don Castello stood there with protruding eyes.

"Speak up, 'less yer want ter be made ter dance!" said Bob, flourishing the revolver in front of the Spaniard's face. "Air yew Castello? Guess yew'd better answer good'n slick, 'cos this yere gun o' mine hez got a habit of goin' off. Guns're made that way, I reckon!"

"I am the President," faltered the little man nervously. "What do you want, you scoundrel? You are taking a liberty—"

"Sure!" agreed the "robber," quite at his ease in the presence of this coward. "I gen'rally find that a man with a gun afore him hez an advantage over skunks like yerself! Guess yewr purse 'ud be a sight safer in my pocket. I'd be mighty obliged if yew'd hand it over!"

"You villain!" cried the President, plucking up a little courage as he realised that he was in danger of losing his valuables. He carried several thousand pounds in his pocket-book, and the thought of giving it up was hardly pleasant.

"Names don't hurt!" exclaimed Bob calmly. "An see hyar, yew skulkin' worm, I've got somethin' else ter say! I ain't no inhabitant o' this gold-darned republic, an' yew're a sight too underhand fer my likin'! I've got yer here now, an' I don't reckon yew'll see Elvasgo agen! Dawgs like yew ain't fit ter live!"

The President started back.

"You mean to kill me?" he gasped, thoroughly terrorized now. "You will be caught and shot without mercy if you do! Here is the pocket-book! Take it and allow me to go—"

"Shet that blubberin'," growled the other, "an' jest prepare yewrself fer a quiet sleep! If yew think I'm goin' ter let yer go, yew're makin' a mistook!"

"Have mercy on me!" whimpered Don Castello, shivering with fright. "I will pay you anything you like to name! Have mercy—"

"Mercy be darned! Yew've hed a mighty lot o' mercy fer them poor Argendor folk, ain't yer? It's yewr turn now, Mister President, an' I calculate I'm doing good by shootin' yer down. When thet's done I'll borry the pocket-book, an'—"

"You really intend to murder me?" shrieked the Spaniard. "Help—help!"

He sank to his knees, and Bob gazed down upon him in loathing. The man's cowardice was amazing. The cowboy raised his revolver and fired point-blank at the President's breast. The latter screamed as he felt the scorching smoke on his face, and thought he had been really shot.

The cartridges with which the pistol was filled, however, were blank. Imagination did the rest, and the President lay on the hard stones, moaning loudly. He was absolutely unhurt, but too frightened to realise it.

But that report had been the signal, and a moment later a quick rush of feet was heard. Don Castello heard them immediately, lying as he was near the ground. He started up, and looked wildly down the track.

Two figures in white flannels were rapidly approaching. They burst upon the scene with a rush. The President uttered a cry of thankfulness as he saw that the new-comers were Tom and Ralph.

"What's the trouble?" cried the former.

"Thet's the trouble, yew interferin' skunk!" snarled Bob, twirling round and firing at his chum's head.

Tom ducked and grasped the President round the arms-pits.

"Missed!" yelled the cowboy. "Yer don't think yew can git over me like thet, though—"

"Put that revolver down!" interrupted Ralph sternly. "I've got you covered, and at the least sign of treachery you'll find a bullet through you! Do you hear?"

Bob snarled out some muttered words, and stuck his revolver in its holster. Then, with a last look round of fury, he turned on his heel and ran up the track. Ralph pulled the trigger, and a loud report sounded. The next second Bob yelled out in assumed agony, and fell forward on his face.

"Catch him!" cried the President. "Take him alive at all costs!"

His rescuers started running up the path, but Bob turned and fired his revolver again. Then, pulling himself together, he dashed away. Tom and Ralph returned to Don Castello's side.

"It's hopeless trying to catch him, sire," said the latter. "We do not know the road, and should only run into unnecessary danger. I hope you are not hurt?"

The President pulled himself together, and tried to conceal his shaky condition. He was angry now, and furious at his assailant having escaped. He saw, however, that it was useless making a fuss. Besides that, he was truly grateful for the service which had been rendered him. He was under the impression that his life had been saved.

"There is not much to say, my lords," he murmured.

"But I thank you from the bottom of my heart for having saved me from certain death. Had you come a moment later you would have found nothing but my robbed and lifeless body, and Tecaguay would have lost its most honoured inhabitant."

### Don Castello's Invitation.

Don Carlos Castello quickly recovered his equanimity in the presence of his two rescuers. Nevertheless, he still shivered a trifle under the stress of the shock he had just received. He glanced up and down the rough track apprehensively.

"He's gone now, sire!" exclaimed Ralph gravely. "Do you intend continuing your journey? Because if so—"

"No," cried the President—"no, I certainly do not mean to visit the garrison to-night, with that scoundrel ahead! I may be murdered as I walk, so I shall return to Elvasgo without delay. If you will accompany me I should be greatly pleased."

"Certainly, sire," said Tom, with a wink at one of the neighbouring bushes. "We will see that no one else attacks you. I wonder who the fellow could have been?"

"I will have him arrested and shot!" exclaimed Don Castello viciously. "No man shall take such a liberty with

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me without paying the extreme penalty. Had it not been for you, my lords, I should assuredly have been murdered. I can never thank you enough—never show my gratitude sufficiently."

The two Britishers felt a little disgusted at the President's tone, but it was evident that their scheme had been very successful. They were confident that they had but to make a suggestion to be invited to the palace.

"But where is your friend?" asked the Spaniard, as they walked towards the capital.

"Oh," replied Ralph, carelessly, "we cannot say exactly. We left him in Elvasgo some time ago. Shall we accompany you to the palace, sire?"

"Certainly—certainly, by all means do so! Come in and have a drink before you leave for your hotel. The whole of Elvasgo shall know of your courageous action. Everyone will be talking about it."

"Excuse me, sire," put in Ralph, "but if it does not offend you, we would much prefer that nothing of this incident is made public." It was trivial, in any case—at least, the part we played was; and while we are in your excellent country we wish to be as unobtrusive as possible."

The President looked at them in surprise, for being a coward and a vain man himself, he could not possibly understand why they took up this attitude. He turned to Tom.

"And you?" he queried. "Are you of the same opinion?"

"Why, certainly!" replied Tom heartily. "There's not the least necessity for a fuss. You would oblige us, sire, by doing as my friend has suggested."

"Very well. It is against my wishes to displease you, so nothing shall be said. I cannot understand, however, why you should wish your gallantry to remain in obscurity. The next time I visit the stronghold I shall go accompanied by half-a-dozen armed men. This is the first time I have been molested, and, by Bacchus, it shall be the last!"

They continued their walk to the palace, and when they arrived there they entered, the President escorting them, not to the State apartment where they had seen him previously, but to his own library. This was a most luxuriously-appointed apartment, furnished throughout with a gorgeous extravagance which, in England, would have appeared absurd.

Don Castello treated them very differently on this occasion. His whole attitude was one of deference and oiliness. It was very plain to see that he held his British friends in the highest esteem, and now that they had saved his life—as he thought—he made no attempt to conceal his extreme friendliness.

Tom and Ralph, of course, loathed the sight of the flint-hearted scoundrel, but it was their policy to appear to desire his friendship. So before they left, they pretended to be really delighted when he gave them an invitation.

"Come to-morrow evening," he cried, as he shook hands. "I will have dinner prepared for the three of you, and we will have a quiet, pleasant evening together—just us four alone. You will honour me?"

"The honour is on our side, sire," replied Ralph gravely. "We shall be more than pleased to accept your invitation, and will be here at any time you like to name."

"Good! Then come at seven o'clock. Dinner will be served at half-past, so there will be ample time for me to drink your health before the meal commences."

"Always thinking about drink!" exclaimed Ralph, as he and the Naval officer walked away. "By Jove, this thing has panned out rippingly!"

"Couldn't have been better," declared Tom, lighting a cigarette. "It was a fine idea of Bob's, but I hardly expected it would be so successful. We've got the very invitation we wished for. I wonder where on earth he is now? He did that Yankee business first-rate, didn't he? He looked the brigand to the life."

"Rather!" agreed the other, with a laugh. "If the worst comes to the worst, he could easily earn a decent living on the stage."

Arriving at the hotel, they went straight to their rooms, and were somewhat surprised to find Bob Harding there, attired in flannels, coolly reading and smoking. He looked up as they entered, and laid his paper down.

"By Jimmy," exclaimed Tom, "you haven't lost much time, old chap! But you did it fine—really fine, and frightened that pig of a President clean out of his wits!"

"Yes," agreed Bob, "I think I succeeded in my object right enough. But there wasn't anything in it to crow about. Don Castello would be frightened at the sight of a popgun. I took the cowboy's kit with me, and changed 'em behind a bush; so it was quite an easy matter to slip my flannels on again and stroll back. But what's the result?"

"Just what we wanted, Bob. As you anticipated, the fellow was all over us, and heaped gratitude on our heads."

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DON'T MISS "INKY, MINOR." The Splendid, Long, Complete School Story appearing in this week's number of the

as though we had allowed ourselves to be half killed for his sake. I tell you it was disgusting. But we've got the invitation!"

"You have? That's fine!"

"Yes. He wants all three of us to go there to-morrow night to dinner—"

"To dinner!" exclaimed Bob delightedly. "By Jove, chaps, the identical thing I hoped for! It looks as if we are going to succeed right away!"

"But what's your plan, Bob?" interjected Tom curiously. "How do you mean to set to work? You seem to be pretty full of ideas, so why not share them with us? Three heads are better than one, you know."

"That's just what I am going to do. I want your opinions and advice, so if you'll come out on the verandah, we can talk it over while we have a quiet smoke."

They passed outside, and for the next half hour or so were engaged in conversing together in low tones. Finally Tom Manton rose to his feet and slapped his thigh. His merry eyes were twinkling with excitement.

"Ripping!" he cried. "The idea's absolutely great, Bob! How you thought of it is more than I can imagine, but it'll be as easy as winking to carry out!"

"Not so easy as you seem to imagine, Tom," put in the civil engineer, his eyes still thoughtful and serious. "There may be many obstacles in the way, and, anyhow, there are certain to be big risks."

"All the better!" cried the impetuous Tom. "A fight's just what I'm hankering after, and I shall be deucedly disappointed if we don't get one! But what's the next move—I mean what shall we do now? I want to be in action; I want to get at something, and not hang about here slacking."

"There'll be plenty of action by to-morrow night, Tom, so you needn't worry. There's the motor-launch, remember, so we can go for a spin to-morrow, and have another searching look at the Venecia. You mustn't be impatient, Tom, and if you ask me, we've been mighty quick over this business. It's no light task, and there's not the slightest sense in going into a thing ram-headedly."

"That, I suppose," smiled Tom, "is a dig at me. No that I care, because I know perfectly well that I am ram-headed. It's a good job for me, Bob, that you're here. I should have got myself locked up after I'd been in the country two hours but for you. I feel all the time as though I want to shoot everybody I pass, and blow up every building in the place. I'm not bloodthirsty, as a rule, but the yarns I have heard about these people are quite good enough excuse for what I've said and what I feel!"

"Unless you lower your voice a trifle, Tom, you'll be overheard," warned Bob. "Once the people get a breath of suspicion that we're enemies we should be knifed in a second. Calm yourself until to-morrow night. You'll find plenty of excitement and danger then, I'll warrant."

### The Fateful Telegraph Message.

"Everything in readiness?"

"Yes, as far as I know. You seem fixed up all right, Bob. It's nearly seven o'clock, so we'll be shifting. Don't go and get yourself damaged."

"Trust me for that."

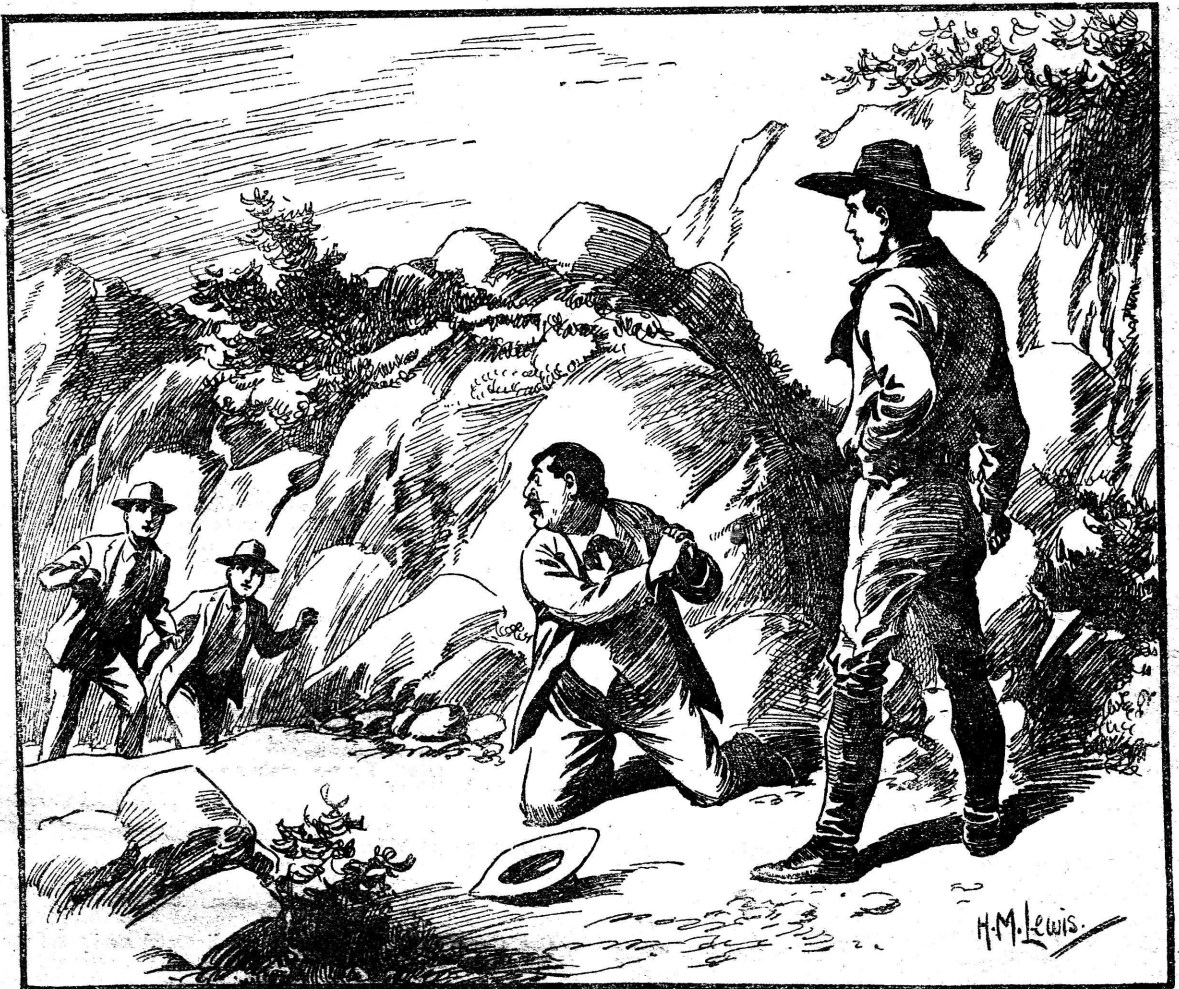
The three comrades were standing in their sitting-room at a quarter to seven on the following night. Apparently, however, only two of them were going to take advantage of the President's invitation, for Bob Harding was attired in his ordinary lounge-suit, and carried a leather camera-case over his shoulder. The other two were dressed in evening-clothes, and looked really smart.

They shook hands heartily, warmly, as though there was a chance they would not meet again, and while Tom and Ralph turned in the direction of the palace, the civil engineer made off in quite another direction. He was smoking unconcernedly, and was quite cool and collected.

The day had been an extremely hot one, and the air was close and humid. Overhead the sky was dull, and there was every indication that before long a heavy thunderstorm would burst forth. Indeed, as the two chums walked along the ill-paved road the air quivered a trifle now and again, as though in warning.

"Seven o'clock exactly!" exclaimed Tom, glancing at his watch as they paused for a moment outside the palace entrance. "Well, Don Castello can't say we're late. You lead the way in and do the explaining. If I start talking I shall let myself go."

Ralph laughed as he ascended the steps. Two minutes later they were in the presence of Don Castello, President of Teccauguay. He was geniality itself, and shook hands with great heartiness. Yet all the while there was a certain something about his manner which told them that his



"You intend to harm me?" shrieked the President. "Help! Help!" He sank on his knees in an access of terror just as two figures in white flannels came on the scene with a rush. (See page 23.)

friendship was hollow—that, should he learn even a breath of suspicion against them, he would turn round and be their bitterest enemy. He knew they were rich Britishers—or he thought so—and that was quite enough to cause him to show a friendly spirit. Had they been poor he would never have deigned to give them a glance.

"Come into my library!" he cried, turning and leading the way. Then suddenly he paused. "But you have come without your friend again. The invitation was for all three of you."

"We were aware of that, sire," replied Ralph Chesterton, "but we grieve to say that Mr. Harding cannot possibly attend, much as he would like to. He is unused to this climate, and so it is not surprising that a touch of fever should attack him."

The President thought he understood.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Harding is ill? That is bad. Tell him from me when you return that he has my sympathy. I hope he will soon recover his health."

And no further remark was made about Bob during the evening. The President did not seem in the least concerned because of the engineer's supposed illness. Arriving at the library, he waved his two visitors to a couple of easy-chairs, and passed them cigars. They both refused the whisky he offered them, although he himself took a liberal dose.

"I always find it gives me an appetite," he explained, in his oily tones. "Well, I suppose you are greatly interested in what is going on in this country?"

"Greatly," answered Ralph, stretching himself out comfortably. "Everything seems to be going favourably for you, sire. You think, then, the end is drawing near?"

"The end is within sight!" cried Don Castello, bringing his fist with a thump to the table. "Only yesterday a battalion of my men marched into the enemy's country and

seized several tons of dynamite, ammunition, and arms. These, on Friday, will be used by our men, and there's no doubt whatever that we shall completely demoralise the Argendorian forces. In addition, the Venebia will bombard many of the coast towns. Yes, I can confidently state that the end of the war is within sight."

"I am jolly pleased to hear that, sire!" exclaimed Tom, though his meaning was not identical with the President's. "And so you have now practically a double store of ammunition?"

"Exactly."

"Surely such a large amount is difficult to guard?"

"Not at all, my lords," said the President, who would persist in addressing them as though they were indeed lords. "The magazine at the garrison is as strong as any in the world, and needs practically no guards to watch it. Marshal Perlado knows what he is about, you can take my word for it."

Tom and Ralph passed a meaning glance between them as the President looked away for a moment. Shortly afterwards a gorgeously-attired funkay put in an appearance, and announced that dinner was served.

Don Castello rose to his feet immediately and moved towards the door. His visitors followed behind with an air of deference and respect which pleased their host to a very great extent, but which, nevertheless, the chums—especially Tom—found very difficult to affect.

"I will lead the way," exclaimed the President. "After dinner I have some rare pictures I wish to show you in my picture-gallery. There is the museum, too. I feel sure you'll be greatly interested."

"We shall," replied Tom heartily; then, under his breath: "Though not in museums and pictures. Before dinner is through that telegram ought to arrive."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 183.

NEXT WEEK. "HIS PAST AGAINST HIM,"

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

and "DEEP SEA GOLD,"

BY REGINALD WRAY.

ORDER EARLY!

They passed into the dining-room, and found there another apartment furnished in the same extravagant manner. Evidently there was no lack of money in the Presidential quarters of Elvasgo. Don Castello, of course, had very few visitors from the neighbouring republics during this time of war, and, being a man who loved elegance and display, he grasped this opportunity to show himself in all his magnificence with both hands.

The dinner which was served proved to be a really excellent one in its way, but it was, of course, nothing to be compared to a good old English repast. The wine was as good as any the chums had ever tasted, but they partook of very little. This could not be said of their host, for he filled his glass again and again, and every time he became more and more light-hearted.

And then, in the middle of the last course, the blow came—the blow which effectually sobered the President. He was in the middle of a rambling narrative concerning a certain battle when the whole house shook and rocked in its foundations. Simultaneously a dull, booming roar made itself heard, and the glasses and plates clattered against one another on the table.

"By Bacchus!" gasped Don Castello. "What can that be?"

He glanced round fearfully, but everything was silent now. Bob and Ralph had made no sign whatever, but the satisfaction they felt at that roar was considerable, although, at the same time, they were not without a little apprehension for their comrade's safety.

"What on earth could it have been?" exclaimed Tom innocently. "Sounded like an earthquake!"

"Earthquake!" cried the President, starting to his feet excited. "Do you mean—"

"Pray calm yourself, sire," put in Ralph hastily; "it was only my friend's joke. The noise we heard was in all probability, an extra heavy thunderclap."

The President sat down again, looking relieved, and not a little flustered, for he knew he had exhibited signs of cowardice.

"Ah, yes," he exclaimed, "perhaps you are right! These sudden shocks are very trying to my nerves, I must tell you. But that roar hardly sounded like a thunderclap."

The door burst open unceremoniously, and one of the servants appeared. In his hand was a slip of paper, and his face was excited and terror-stricken. He paused for a moment, and tried to speak, but for a moment was too frightened.

"Well," snapped the President, "what is it? Don't stand there like that, man! And who gave you permission to rush in here as though you own the place?"

"Your Excellency," gasped the man in Spanish, "read this! It has just come through on your private instrument, and is from the commander-in-chief. It is terrible, your Excellency—terrible! We are lost!"

His Excellency swore violently, and snatched the piece of paper from the other's grasp. On it, scrawled hastily as they had been transmitted, were a few words, and the President's eyes started from his head as their meaning became clear to him.

"The Argendorian are here; they have procured arms and ammunition by some means, and 20,000 of the enemy are menacing us at present. The magazine has been blown up, our ammunition has gone, and unless help arrives, the garrison will be lost. My men are being mown down like grass, and all will be lost unless you send every available man in Elvasgo. Do not forget the Venebia. Three men will be enough to guard her while the others are away. Send every man possible, and immediately." PERLADO."

The President rose to his feet violently, and the chair he had been sitting on crashed to the floor. He waved the paper in the air, and Tom and Ralph could see that his face was almost pale.

"Quick!" he cried. "The enemy are upon us! They have blown up the magazine and are cutting my soldiers down by the dozen! By heavens, this may mean the loss of everything! But it can't! If the enemy overcome the garrison, they will descend on the city and take me prisoner—perhaps they will kill me!"

Don Castello collapsed into a chair and stared terror-struck at the paper in his hands. Ralph, inwardly joyful, rapidly poured out a glassful of brandy and passed it to his host.

"Have this, sire," he said quickly. "It will pull you together. But hark! I can hear firing! Had you better not give orders that—"

The Spaniard gulped the liquor down, and rose to his feet.

"Yes," he exclaimed hoarsely, "every man shall go—every man shall go! On no account must the enemy be allowed to capture Elvasgo! I must have time to escape—I must have time to get clear away."

He hurried out of the room, muttering to himself. He was THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 183:

absolutely frightened, and was scarcely able to give his orders. Meanwhile, his guests in the dining-room were acting rather strangely. They had been left quite alone.

"Jove, Tom," whispered Ralph, his face glowing, "Bob seems to have been doing everything exactly as he planned. That roar was undoubtedly the magazine going off. That wire, too, is plain proof that he passed through it all right. And old Carlos takes it for absolute gospel that it came from the commander-in-chief."

The two laughed silently, while Ralph took from his waist-coat pocket a tiny phial. He rapidly withdrew the cork.

"Do you think it's safe?" whispered Tom, glancing at the door.

"Safe as eggs. Everybody's rushing round after the President. Pour out a stiff glass of brandy, will you?"

Tom did so, and handed it to his companion. In half a second the contents of the little bottle were intermixed with the brandy, and the two laughed silently to themselves. The President had behaved in precisely the manner they had anticipated.

"When he comes back, he'll gulp down that brandy like water," chuckled Tom. "It'll be plain sailing then, Ralph, for he'll do exactly as the message states with regard to the Venebia."

"Sure to."

They waited there for at least another five minutes before their host returned. Outside they could hear shouting and the stamping of many feet. A horse occasionally dashed past, and it was quite plain to realise that the whole town was in a state of uproar and commotion.

"By heavens, what a terrible blow!" exclaimed Don Castello, as he came in. "I fear it will mean the loss of half my men! Think of it, my lords—think what a terrible disaster it is to me! But I have the ship, and will destroy every building within my power for this! Those dogs shall pay for their presumption, and pay dearly! And to think that they should have invaded us so abruptly. I had not the slightest idea they had gained possession of a further supply of arms and ammunition."

The President sat down and relapsed into a string of Spanish expletives. He was plainly demoralised, and hardly knew what he was doing. The shock, coming as it did when he thought Tecagunay was absolutely secure, was overwhelming. Ralph picked up the glass of brandy, and crossed over to the President.

"Drink this, sire," he said quietly. "It will pull you together."

"Ah, yes, the very thing I need! Thank you—thank you!"

Don Castello put the glass to his lips and swallowed the spirit almost at one gulp. Then he placed the glass on the table, and commenced a long tale of his woes. He explained how the garrison was situated, and how impregnable it was thought to be. He could not understand how it was that his own soldiers had been overcome.

"I thought perhaps you might have gone yourself," said Ralph, departing a little from the truth, for he did not really think anything of the kind. He knew his host's character too well for that.

"I?" echoed the President, his voice sounding a little dull. "What use should I be at a time such as this? My place is at the head, to command—to give orders. But I am mystified. Somehow I cannot keep my eyes open. Yet I do not feel sleepy!"

"It must be the excitement," murmured Tom. "Doubtless you will be better—Hold him, Ralph!"

Tom uttered the last sentence as Don Castello suddenly swayed for a moment in his chair, then slipped to the floor. The Army officer caught him just as he was going.

"What is the matter?" mumbled the Spaniard. "I—I—"

"He's gone," said Ralph quickly, looking up a moment later. "Where shall we leave him?"

"Here."

"Do you think it will be safe?"

"There's nobody in the palace now and if there is it won't matter. Half a minute. What's that cupboard over there?"

Tom crossed the room rapidly, and examined the large cupboard which formed the base of a mahogany sideboard. The thing was of huge dimensions, and quite large enough to accommodate the small figure of the unconscious man. They bundled him in unceremoniously.

"Now," exclaimed Tom, his eyes blazing, "to business! Carlos is settled with for the time being. It's just on the time we arranged, and I expect Bob will be waiting for us when we arrive on the quay."

"Half a minute," said Ralph, as Tom hurried towards the door. "There's the motor-car to prepare!"

"By Jimmy, so there is! We'd better be slick and do it!"

And Tom and Ralph hurried from the room and made their way into the courtyard at the back.

### The Capture of the Venebia.

The Presidential motor-car proved to be a fairly large one, and needed very little preparing to get it ready for the road. Tom understood motor-cars fairly well, and after two or three minutes' tinkering, announced that the car was in going order.

"Then we'll run down to the docks on her!" exclaimed Ralph quickly. "Then, when we have finished our work, we can all three step aboard the car, and make tracks for Rio. It will save heaps of time."

"Right-ho!" agreed Tom. "Leave the driving to me until we meet Bob. Great Scott, we haven't been long," he added, as they turned into the main road, which was deserted and silent, with the exception of one or two women and children. They looked after the car wonderingly, but they had no idea as to who was in it or where it was bound for.

The night was fairly dark, so Tom drove as cautiously as his impetuous nature would let him. There were no lamps on the motor, this making his work doubly hard. They reached the docks safely, and just as they hopped from the step, a figure emerged from behind a pile of cases near the quay.

"That you, boys?"

"It's Bob," murmured Tom, starting forward a pace. "We knew you'd be here, old chap. By Jove, we've had plenty of evidence of what you've been doing—everything's gone off as smoothly as clockwork."

"Good!" exclaimed Bob Harding, shaking them by the hands heartily. "I'll just tell you how I've got on, then we must slip across to the Venebia. I've got the launch all ready for the journey across the bay."

"Why not save time, and exchange yarns while we're on the water," put in Ralph. "Those scoundrels won't be long in returning when they find the whole thing's a hoax."

The idea was voted to be a good one, and three minutes later the powerful little motor launch was cutting its way across the bay with its nose pointed straight for the battleship, which could be seen, silent and still, three-quarters of a mile distant.

"I can't tell you everything in full," commenced Bob—"that will have to wait until we've got more time—at our disposal. I reached the stronghold without meeting a soul, and found the place very much as I expected. There was no proper guard kept, and nearly all the entrances to the garrison were deserted. The sentries, I suppose, were playing cards, or something equally as bad."

"Well," whispered Tom, "how did you find the magazine?"

"Quite easily. I could tell it in a moment by the fact that it stood about three hundred yards from the main building. I expected to find at least one man on guard, but I was wrong. There was a man there, but he was certainly not on guard."

"Asleep?"

"Drunk!" replied Bob, in a disgusted tone. "He was lying beside the door, with an empty bottle beside him, so I knew immediately that I shouldn't have much trouble. In any case, had the fellow been wide awake, I could very easily have dealt with him. I found the keys on him, and walked into the magazine as easily as if it had been our own hotel. Upon my soul, chaps, I can hardly realise how these heathens can imagine they're serious. Why, they're simply playing at war—nothing else! Any day the Argendrians could swoop down on the stronghold and wipe it up before the enemy were half awake. The magazine is nearest Elvasgo, and this side of the stronghold, so they imagined that it was quite safe."

"You blew it all up?"

"Every ounce. There was a good deal of ammunition there, and plenty of rifles, and it didn't take me five minutes to get one of the fuses out of my camera-case, and lay it ready. It was timed for ten minutes, so I had plenty of time to grab the drunken sentry, and get away with him. I dropped him after I had gone two hundred yards, then crouched down and waited."

"We heard the roar," exclaimed Tom, with a chuckle. "By Jimmy, it shook the whole town. I reckon the garrison must be a heap of ruins."

"Hardly, Tom. The shock wasn't so bad as might have been expected. The ammunition was, for the most part, dynamite, so the explosion struck downwards. The whole building was wrecked, of course, and before I left was a blazing mass, but the garrison itself had merely suffered to the extent of several cracks in the walls and roof, and the total loss of all its chimneys."

"Then you wired?"

"When the explosion came I was already fixing the instru-

ment," replied the engineer quietly. "The wire was quite easy to despatch, and, judging by after events, I presume it had the desired effect?"

"The President nearly went mad with fear and excitement, and sent every man in Elvasgo off. But won't they be back too soon?"

"No. We've got heaps of time in which to perform our work. After I had cut the telegraph-wire, I hurried along the track to the spot where it runs beside a sheer precipice. As you know, at this point there's a sharp corner, and at the far side of this I placed one of my bombs down, and blew away a gap in the path about twenty feet across. Then I turned the corner, and repeated the move this side."

"So that the soldiers from the garrison won't be able to turn the corner from their end, and the Elvasgo inhabitants will find their side similarly impassable? By Jove, it's a great idea!"

"They will have to take an extremely rough road six miles round to reach the stronghold," went on Bob complacently. "So we have plenty of time, although, mind you, none to waste."

By this time they had nearly reached the Venebia, and they looked at the battleship curiously as they slid alongside. A man was standing at the top of the accommodation ladder as they stepped out of the launch, and he looked down at them with some surprise. In the darkness he could not distinguish who they were, and even if he had done so he would have had no suspicion of danger.

"Go for him bald-headed," murmured Tom to the others, "and don't let him utter a sound. There are two others aboard somewhere, remember."

They reached the top, and the man stood aside for them to pass. Then, before he could quite realise what was happening, he was grasped on both sides. He struggled desperately, but it was useless. A hand was clapped over his mouth, to be transferred to his wind-pipe for a second, as a large, thick handkerchief was bound over his mouth and nostrils.

"He's settled with," murmured Bob, breathing a little hard after his exertions.

"The others are probably below, keeping guard in the manner customary to this country."

Bob's words proved to be true, for as the three walked along the deck they saw a bright light shining upwards from a skylight. They peered into the room below, and saw two of the Venebia's officers seated at a small table playing cards. They saw no reason why they should remain on deck doing nothing.

"We'll soon deal with these beauties," muttered Bob Harding softly. "You, Ralph, keep one of them at bay with a

revolver, while Tom and I tackle the other. We'll use the chloroform this time; it's quick and sure."

Silently and stealthily the three comrades crept down the companion. It was quite an easy matter to locate the cabin in which the officers were playing. They could hear them talking as they paused for a moment outside the door.

"Now!" murmured Bob tensely.

They burst in unceremoniously, and the Teesaguayans rose to their feet in alarm as they saw the revolver shining in Ralph Chesterton's hand. What followed need scarcely be described, for the men crumpled up before their assailants. In three minutes they were both lying on the floor drugged and unconscious.

"We'll haul them on deck, and put the three of them in a little boat," said Bob quickly. "The tide's going in, I think, so they'll slowly drift ashore. Even if they don't, they can use the oars when they recover consciousness."

This scheme was carried out to the letter, and in a very short space of time the invaders had the ship to themselves—had complete possession of it. Tom was for rushing below immediately, and firing the magazine; but Bob, being more thoughtful, shook his head.

"Before we do that," he said, "we had better examine the ship, and see that no one else is aboard. If we create a row on deck it ought to bring them up; by some—"

"Look out, Bob!" cried Tom suddenly, in a warning shout. "Great guns, you'll be killed if you don't move!"

The engineer turned abruptly, and saw, standing before him with upraised arm, the dark figure of Halil Ahmed, the Arab. And in his hand could be seen the glittering blade of a dagger. It was upraised ready to strike, and Bob Harding had not a second to put up his hand to save himself.

(Another instalment of this thrilling story in next Thursday's "GEM" Library, which will also contain the opening chapters of "Deep Sea Gold," an enthralling new serial of breathless adventure beneath the waves. Order your "GEM" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 133.

**NEXT WEEK: "HIS PAST AGAINST HIM,"**

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

and **"DEEP SEA GOLD,"**

By REGINALD WRAY.

**ORDER EARLY!**

## OUR NEW WEEKLY FEATURE

**A Great Success.**

I am very pleased to find that our new feature—this page—has been greeted by Gemites with the greatest enthusiasm, as letters and postcards from every quarter of the British Isles amply testify. When my many Colonial readers have had time to send me their opinions, I shall know exactly how great the measure of our latest success is, and I am looking forward to the overseas postbag with unusual eagerness.

**For Next Week.****"HIS PAST AGAINST HIM."**

Our next Thursday's long, complete St. Jim's story is one that cannot fail to grip the interest of everyone who reads it. It is an enthralling word-picture of the game struggles of a junior at the old school against his past—his unhappy, blemished past. The story of his splendid fight against his terrible handicap is interspersed with plenty of schoolboy fun, and I dare wager when you have read it, you will vote "His Past Against Him" one of Martin Clifford's best efforts.

**A Real Treat.**

And now I have a very important announcement to make, a piece of good news for all my readers. I have obtained exclusively for the GEM Library what I consider to be the most enthralling, breathless adventure tale ever written, and I am going to start it "right away," as our American cousins say.

**"DEEP SEA GOLD"**

is the title of this masterpiece, and the author of it is the famous Reginald Wray, than whom no living author has a more vivid and fertile imagination, or a more gifted and facile pen. When I tell you that "Deep Sea Gold," his latest work, is considered by the author himself to be far and away the finest story he has ever written, I have said something which I know will make you look forward to next Thursday's GEM even more eagerly than usual. I will say nothing more in praise of this wonderful story, but will leave my readers and friends to judge for themselves next week, confident as I am that my high opinion of Reginald Wray's supreme masterpiece will be enthusiastically endorsed from all sides.

**A Word of Warning.**

But just one word of warning. Of late I have been in receipt of an unpleasantly large number of letters from readers grumbling that they have been unable to get their copies of the GEM Library on Thursdays, and some actually complain that they had had to go without altogether, "as every news-agent seems to be sold out." Now the reason of this is not far to seek. Our grand little paper is increasing in popularity by leaps and bounds, and the rush to get it sometimes even takes me by surprise, with the consequence that there are not enough copies available to meet the demand. Obviously, therefore, it is to my readers' advantage to give their news-agents a standing order to supply them with their copies of the GEM and "Magnet" Libraries (for the same remarks apply to our companion paper) regularly every week. In addition, it is a great help to me in calculating the number of copies which it is advisable to print each week. Take a word of advice, then, my readers and friends, and

**Order Your Copy of the GEM Library in Advance.****Camping Out.****No. 4.—WHAT TO TAKE.**

As nine out of ten of those who intend to camp out will doubtless choose a boat as a means of locomotion, it will be best to begin with some advice upon boating essentials. In the first place, do not forget an extra pair of oars or sculls. Oars may get broken, and then, if at a distance from a town, you are far worse stranded than a cyclist with a bad puncture. Extra rowlocks or thole-pins should also be taken.

Be sure not to forget a tow-rope. It is always handy, and is essential for rivers like the Herefordshire Wye, which has rapids. Carry an extra painter, and, though some authorities say it is not worth while for an inland river, yet the writer considers a mast and sail merit the space they take up by the work they save. No oarsman needs to be reminded to

**carry a boat-hook.**

Accidents must be guarded against. One never knows when a leak may be sprung, and so a few tools—hammer, bradawl, nails, screws—and a few strips of wood should be stored somewhere in safety. For stopping a small leak temporarily a lump of ordinary soap is as good as anything. Remember, also, a pot of vaseline for lubricating creaking oars and for blistered palms.

This is an uncertain climate at any time, and the camper must consider the question of protection against rain. A good tent is the very first essential of comfortable camping.

Quite the best tent is that known as the ridge tent, of which an illustration has been given which explains it better than words. It has two uprights and a ridge pole, is very easily packed, is not too heavy, and splendidly watertight, besides giving plenty of head-room in the centre. A tent of this kind for three people will weigh under sixty pounds, and will comfortably sleep three people. It costs, complete, about three pounds fifteen shillings. An outer fly can be had for a small extra payment. Another useful and cheaper tent is the French shelter tent, which can be had as cheaply as thirty shillings. Its chief objection is its low roof, but it is an excellent sleeping tent. These prices are, of course, for new tents. It is easy to pick up secondhand tents far more cheaply. Or, if desired, a tent may be hired at a low rate for any desired time. But it comes cheaper in the long run to buy.

Almost, if not quite, as important as the tent is the waterproof ground-sheet. You can get one big enough for three to lie on for from ten to fifteen shillings. The green waterproof cloth known as Willesden cloth is a little dearer, but lasts longer.

As a rule the less furniture one takes when camping the better. Tables are an unnecessary luxury, but as sitting on the ground sometimes becomes tiresome, especially if rain keeps one in the tent all day, it is as well to carry a couple of camp-stools.

For sleeping purposes each man should provide himself with a couple of stout, brown Army blankets. They are very warm, and not too heavy, and cost eight shillings a pair, or less if you could get them from a contractor.

The matter of dress is most important. Wear an old suit of flannels, but don't forget a complete change, as well as a sleeping suit.

A couple of flannel shirts, two changes of underclothes, brush, comb, toothbrush, a pocket looking-glass, socks, handkerchiefs,

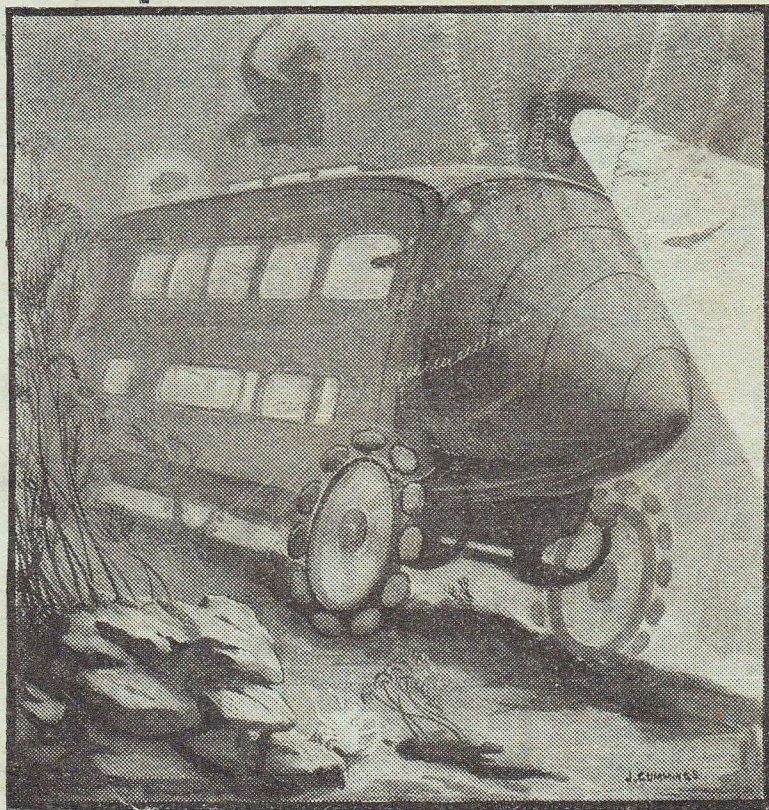
**a pair of old slippers,**

and other small toilet necessaries can all be packed in a small waterproof hold-all. This article will serve as a pillow at night.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned that a belt is preferable to braces, and that a good clasp-knife is a most essential article. The best form of hat is a wide-brimmed felt.

(Next week we will consider other very necessary details in connection with camping-out.)

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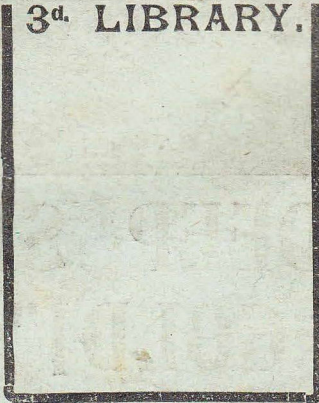
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