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THE PATH OF DISHONOUR!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



"The Toff! By gum!" A man was leaning on the stile, smoking a big black cigar, and he had glanced up carelessly at the sound of footsteps. But as his eyes lighted on Talbot's face he gave a start of astonishment.
(See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 1.

Merely a Misunderstanding.

STUDY No. 6, in the School House of St. Jim's, was growing crowded.

That famous apartment was often crowded, on the occasion of a feed, or of a meeting of the junior sports committee. But on this occasion, though it was tea-time, there was no sign of a feed, neither was a meeting arranged for that special evening.

But the crowd was growing.

Blake and Herries and Digby, who shared that study with D'Arcy of the Fourth, had been there when the crowd began to arrive. D'Arcy was conspicuous by his absence. But Blake and Herries and Dig were there, and they were busy. They were discussing an important question—how far two sardines would go among four fellows, and to what extent that limited supply of provisions could be augmented by obtaining the best possible value for fourpence-halfpenny at the school shop,

Next Wednesday:

"FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE!" AND "OFFICER AND TROOPER!"

They were a little surprised when the crowd began to arrive. The Terrible Three of the Shell came first—Tom Merry and Manners and Bowther. They came in with polite and expectant smiles.

They looked a little surprised at the sight of the two sardines. Blake & Co. looked surprised at the sight of them—the Shell fellows, not the sardines.

"Hallo!" said Blake.

"Hallo," said Tom Merry. "It's six."

Blake looked at his watch.

"Just six," he agreed.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Weren't you expecting us?" demanded the captain of the Shell, a little indignantly.

"Not exactly," said Blake. "But you're welcome—as welcome as the flowers in May. Did you scent the sardines from the passage?"

"What about tea?" asked Manners.

"Just what we are debating," replied Blake affably. "Two sardines don't seem a lot for four chaps, and fourpence-halfpenny isn't what you'd call a terrific financial resource. Lend us the help of your mighty brains to plan it out, and you can stay to tea if you like. I guarantee you won't overeat yourselves."

"But we thought—" began Monty Lowther.

"You thought by the scent there were lots of sardines?" asked Blake. "I thought myself they were a little bit so-so. They have been overlooked in the cupboard for some time. I suppose the niff gave you the impression that we had nearly a study full of them. But there's only two."

"Do you mean to say that Gussy asked us here to help you wolf two sardines?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Oh, Gussy asked you, did he?" said Blake. "Well, we back up the invitation. Study No. 6 is celebrated for its hospitality. Do stay!"

"Do!" said Herries and Dig persuasively.

Before the Terrible Three could reply three Fourth-Formers entered the study. They were Piggins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House. They nodded agreeably to the School House fellows.

"Just in time," said Piggins cheerfully.

"You haven't started yet," said Fatty Wynn.

"Just turned six," remarked Kerr.

"Trot right in!" said Jack Blake heartily. "I suppose Gussy asked you. He asked those Shell-fish."

"Yes," said Piggins; "D'Arcy told us in the quad to turn up at six sharp."

Fatty Wynn looked inquiringly round the study.

"Can I help?" he asked. "Is there any cooking to do?"

Blake shook his head.

"There isn't any cooking," he said. "The sardines are cooked."

"The what?"

"The sardines—both of them."

Piggins & Co. stared at Blake. Blake was perfectly serious and perfectly affable, and Digby and Herries were smiling hospitable smiles. Evidently the chums of Study No. 6 were prepared to "whack out" those two sardines with any number of guests. Hospitality could go no further.

"You—you don't mean to say that you've got nothing but two sardines?" stuttered Fatty Wynn in dismay.

"Oh, yes; there's half a loaf—"

"Half a loaf!" said Fatty Wynn faintly.

"The proverb says that 'half a loaf is better than no bread,' you know. Besides, we've got cash resources," said Blake.

"Oh, good!" said Fatty Wynn, brightening up.

"Fourpence-halfpenny," added Blake, and Fatty's plump face fell again.

"Is this a jape?" inquired Piggins.

Blake waved his hand airily.

"Don't ask me," he replied; "I'm not responsible for Gussy's actions. I think sometimes he's not responsible for them himself. All we can do, as D'Arcy's chums, is to back up his invitations. We're doing that."

"We are!" said Herries.

"We is!" said Digby.

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The guests in Study No. 6 looked at Blake & Co., and looked at one another. Just then Kangaroo and Glyn of the Shell came in, followed by Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. They had cheery smiles on their faces.

"Minute or two late," said Kangaroo, otherwise Harry Noble. "D'Arcy said six sharp, but I see you haven't started."

"I guess we'll lead you a hand, if you like!" said Lumley-Lumley.

"Gussy said six sharp, did he?" said Blake. "Just like Gussy! Did he say it was a feed?"

"Well, he didn't say so, but we concluded it was, as it's tea-time," said Kangaroo, puzzled.

"Did he mention that we had only two sardines in the study?"

"My hat! No."

"Ah, that's just like Gussy. If he'd mentioned that you'd have been here a bit earlier."

"Look here—"

"Hallo, here are some of 'em!" said Blake cheerfully, as Gore and Skimpole of the Shell came in. "Did Gussy ask you chaps?"

"Yes," said Gore; "he said six sharp. Isn't it ready?"

"Isn't what ready?"

"The feed, of course," said Gore, with a stare.

"Did Gussy say it was a feed?"

"He asked us very particularly to turn up at six sharp," said Gore, "and as that's tea-time, we naturally thought—"

"Naturally," assented Blake. "If you're hungry, old chap, begin at once."

"Begin on what?" asked Gore, staring round the study, apparently in search of something to begin on.

Blake pointed to the sardines.

"Why, you silly ass—" began Gore.

A tramp of feet interrupted him. Reilly and Kerruish of the Fourth and Clifton Dane of the Shell came in. "There wasn't much room to come in by this time; Study No. 6 was large for a junior study, but it had its limits. However, they got in."

"Sure, we're five minutes late," said Reilly. "But you haven't started, I see. Where's Gussy?"

"Wandering about somewhere," said Blake; "wandering in his mind probably. Would you fellows mind standing close? I can see that Gussy has asked everybody in both Houses to tea, and I shouldn't be surprised if the Grammar School chaps come as well. There seems to be a rush on those sardines."

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "If Gussy is being funny—"

"Is he ever anything else?" said Monty Lowther. "If there is not going to be a feed, I vote we look for him, and scrag him."

"Not going to be a feed!" roared Gore. Gore's temper never was reliable. "Why, the silly ass, what has he called us here for, then?"

"Let a cove come in," said a voice at the door, and Hammond of the Fourth squeezed in. "My word, what a party! Gussy is doing it in style this time. Where is he?"

It was growing quite warm, as well as crowded, in Study No. 6. Everybody was jamming everybody else with his elbows. Blake politely opened the window to let in the cool, spring breeze. Some of the fellows were getting a little excited.

"There was still no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. If he did not come soon, it was doubtful whether he would be able to squeeze into his own study."

"Why, I'll scalp the howling ass!" shouted Gore. "I understand—"

"Sure, I thought intirely—"

"The blithering duffer—"

"If this is a jape—"

"Here comes another," grumbled Monty Lowther, as the footsteps came along the passage. "Talbot, perhaps. I hope he's not going to lose his whack in the sardines."

But it was not Talbot of the Shell who appeared in the doorway. It was the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's.

The crowd in the study glared at him, but he did not seem to observe that. He turned his celebrated monocle upon them with a smile of satisfaction.

"All heah, deah boys?" he remarked. "Pway excuse me for keepin' you waitin'. I have been lookin' for Talbot—"

"Isn't Talbot comin'?" asked Blake, in a disappointed tone. "That's a pity—a great pity. What's left of these sardines will be wasted."

"They won't keep over to-morrow," said Dig solemnly. "The boundah seems to have gone out," said D'Arcy, unheeding. "However, we can speak to him afterwards. Pway give me woom to shut the door, deah boys."

Arthur Augustus managed to get the door shut. The innumerable guests in Study No. 6 gave him basilisk looks. Only one thought held them back—it was possible that D'Arcy had received a sudden big remittance, and there was to be a feed, after all. But if it turned out otherwise—

It was teatime, and the juniors were hungry. Indeed, they were looking now as if they would eat Arthur Augustus.

"Well!" said Gore, in a sulphurous tone.

"Well, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

"We're all heah exceptin' Talbot. So we can pwoceed."

"Where's the feed?" demanded Fatty Wynn indignantly.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the fat Fourth-Former.

"The what?" he inquired.

"The feed!" roared a dozen voices.

"What feed?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently.

Then there was a roar.

"You silly ass!"

"You burbling cuckoo! So you're pulling our leg?"

"My hat! If there isn't a feed—"

"Sure, we'll lynch him!"

"I guess we'll scrag the silly burbler!"

"Bai Jove! I weally fail to undahstand you fellows," said Arthur Augustus, perplexed. "I asked you to turn up heah at six sharp for a vevy important meetin'—not a feed. I have somethin' to say to you all."

"And that's all?" bellowed Gore.

"Yaas, that's all, Goah."

"Serag him!"

"Bai Jove! I pwotest! Hands off! It is weally vevy important! Gweat Scott! Oh, my hat! It's quite a misundahstāndin'! Oh ewiker!"

Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared. The hungry and enraged guests rolled over like the waves of the sea. From beneath a heap of excited juniors came a muffled voice in tones of anguish.

CHAPTER 2.

Very Important Information.

WESCUE! Oh, cwumbs! This is howwid! You awful wottahs! Oh, deah!"

"Bump him!"

"Squash him!"

"Rub his chivvy on the carpet!"

"Rag him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was scarcely room to bump the unfortunate Arthur Augustus—the hapless victim of so unfortunate a misunderstanding. But the juniors did their best. There was no doubt that the swell of St. Jim's was thoroughly ragged.

Blake and Herries and Digby looked on with cheerful smiles. They did not take a hand, but they did not feel justified in interfering. If ever anybody had asked for it, it was Arthur Augustus. And, if ever anybody had got it, too, he had got it.

The most disreputable tramp that could have been found in the Sussex lanes would have looked more respectable than Arthur Augustus when at last he was released by the his exasperated guests.

He sat up in a dazed condition, groping for his eyeglass, with his jacket split, his collar and tie gone, his waistcoat buttonless, and his hair like a mop.

"Oh, cwumbs!"

"Sure, and if ye want to play another little joke on us at teatime, Gussy, don't mind us," said Reilly. "We're always willin' to treat you in the same way."

"Wow! It wasn't a joke."

"Not for you, as it turns out," remarked Kerruish.

"I guess there's such a thing as being too funny," remarked Lumley-Lumley. "Good-bye!"

"Gwooh!"

Lumley-Lumley and Kerruish and Reilly left the study. Arthur Augustus struggled to recover his breath.

"You uttah wottahs!"

"There's some more where that came from next time you feel so jolly humorous," said Clifton Dane.

"Good-bye!"

"Bai Jove! Don't go, you wottahs!"

"Do you want some more?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Wow! No; it is all a feahful mistake. I wasn't askin' you boundahs heah to tea— Wew-ow!"

"Rot!" said Fatty Wynn. "You said it was important for us to get here at six sharp."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, you chaps!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'm fearfully hungry. And pommelling that idiot has made me hungrier."

Figgins & Co. departed, chuckling. Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. The sight of him made the juniors shriek with laughter. Seldom or never had the most elegant fellow at St. Jim's presented such a shocking spectacle.

"Pway don't go!" exclaimed D'Arcy breathlessly. "Undah the cires, as it was a misapprehension, I excuse your wncally-conduct, though I have a gweat mind to give you a thwashin' all wround!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Run for your lives!" yelled Bernard Glyn. And he dodged out of the study and fed.

Kangaroo followed him, chuckling.

"Don't go, you asses!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It is a vevy important mattah."

"Not quite so important as tea at teatime," said Kangaroo as he disappeared.

"You thundering ass!" said Gore, as he went to the doorway. "You haven't had half enough, asking a chap to a feed when he's stony, when there isn't a feed."

"Pway don't go, Goah."

"Oh, rats!"

"It concerns you particularly, Goah."

"What does?" asked the bully of the Shell, pausing.

"What I am goin' to tell you fellows. It is weally vevy important, or I should not have called a meetin'. It concerns Goah more than anybody else."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at," growled Gore. But he stayed.

The Terrible Three had been making for the door, too, but they paused. The crowded meeting had now all melted away, save the Terrible Three and Gore and Hammond, and the owners of Study No. 6 themselves.

"Concerns us, too?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, back up and get it over. It's teatime."

"Wats!" Arthur Augustus brushed his hair breathlessly. "What does teatime mattah? I had forgotten all about tea."

"We're reminded you," grinned Gore.

"But what's on, Gussy?" asked Hammond of the Fourth.

"It's aw'ly important."

"Well, pile in!" said Blake. "I'm not going to wait much longer before I begin on those sardines."

"I wogard you as a beast, Blake, for not helpin' me when those wottahs were waggin' me!"

Blake chuckled.

"You asked for it," he said. "If you invite a gang of hungry fags here at teatime, and there isn't any tea, what do you expect?"

"Not so much of your fags, you Fourth-Form boulder!" said Tom Merry.

"Bow-wow!" replied Blake politely.

"Look here, we're not going to wait all night," said Manners. "We're hungry, and the tuckshop will be closing soon."

"Pway be patient, deah boys! How can I speak when I am in this dustay condish?" said Arthur Augustus distressfully.

"Want us to wait while you change your clothes?"

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asked Gore sarcastically. "Well, I'm not waiting, for one."

"Pway wait a minute," said Arthur Augustus. "Where's my collar?" I will proceed to the point at once."

"Ear, ear!" said Hammond.

"The fact is, deah boys, it's a vewy important mattah, and all those fellows ought to have been heah to heah about it. I called them all togethah because it is so vewy important. I want you all to back me up in dealin' with that scoundwel."

"Eh! What scoundrel?" asked Tom Merry in astonishment.

"That wascally sharpah!"

"What sharper?" yelled Blake.

"That wascally and disreputable sharpah, Tickey Tapp."

Gore gave a start.

"Tickey Tapp!" he exclaimed.

"Yas."

"What do you know about him?" exclaimed the Shell fellow gruffly.

Arthur Augustus, having found his monocle, jammed it into his eye. He was still collarless. It was evident that his impatient audience would not wait till he had put on a new collar.

"You fellows wemembah," said D'Arcy—"you remember a wascal named Tickey Tapp who used to hang about heah? You remember he started a gamblin' place in a lonely buildin' on the moor, and got St. Jim's chaps to go there?"

"I remember," said Tom Merry. "We raided his place and kicked him out, and he cleared off."

"Yas. He persuaded that ass Goah to gamble with him—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Gore.

"Pway don't be watty, Goah, deah boy. I am not alludin' to those unpleasant circs for the sake of woundin' your feelin's. But you know vewy well that the wottah got you gambin', and you were in a frightful fix, and we smashed up that wascal's place as a lesson to him. He cleared off because he was afraid we would put the police on to him. Well, he has come back."

"I suppose he can't be kept away from Rylcombe if he chooses to live there, can he?" said Gore surlily.

"That is not the point, deah boy. He has been hangin' round the school."

"How do you know?" demanded Lowther.

"I have seen him, deah boy. I saw him this aftahnnoon. He was waitin' near the school, and lookin' at his watch, and it was cleah to me that he was waitin' to see somebody come out."

"Did—did you see somebody come out to him?" asked Gore hurriedly.

"No, deah boy. I came in to think it ovah, and aftah reflection I decided to call a meetin' to considah what should be done."

"Oh!" said Manners. "So that was it?"

"Yas, wathah! I was not thinkin' about tea," said Arthur Augustus disdainfully. "Now, you know how that wottah swindled Goah, and made him play the giddy ox—"

"Leave me out of it!" growled Gore.

"It is quite cleah to me that he is up to his old twicks again," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Pway don't think that I suspect you of havin' any dealin' with him now, Goah. I should certainly not think you were such a wottah."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"That is hardly a polite remark, Goah. I was thinkin' that you, havin' suffahed from that wuffian's wascality yourself, would be vewy glad to lend a hand in dealin' with him."

"Well, I shouldn't!" grunted Gore. "Why can't you mind your own business, and let the man alone?"

"It is our business if he's hanging round this school," said Tom Merry warmly. "Gussy's quite right. If the ass had explained all that before we wouldn't have pumped him."

"Wearly, Tom Mewwy—"

"We'll jolly well see that he doesn't hang about here, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 376.

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and get some St. Jim's chap into a scrape again, that's a cert," said Blake. "Dash it all, Gore; you know you jolly near got the sack that time. You ought to be glad of a chance of keeping any other fellow out of his clutches."

"Yas, wathah!"

"Well, I'd rather mind my own business," said Gore.

"Wats! It is our business. I called the meetin' to considah the mattah. My idah is that we should make an agreement to look for that scoundwel, and give him a fearful waggin', and duck him in the wivah, as a warnin' not to come wound this school any more."

"Hear, hear!"

"You fellows will all back me up, I am suah—"

"I won't, for one," said Gore. "I think you're a meddlin', silly ass, and you can leave me out." And Gore stamped out of the study, and closed the door after him with a slam that rang along the Fourth-Form passage from end to end.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "This is wathah surpwisin'. I thought Goah would be kecnah than anybody about waggin' that wottah. What has Goah got his wag out ovah, I wondah?"

"Oh, you ass!" said Blake, with a grin.

"I weseuse to be called an ass, Blake, and I see no reason for that remark."

"It's pretty clear what Gore's got his rag out for," said Blake. "He's the chap Tickey Tapp came to see this aftahnnoon, I should say."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that. But Goah promised—"

"Some promises are like pie-crusts," remarked Monty Lowther. "Now the rotter is in this neighbourhood again it looks as if Gore made it up with him."

"But he swindled Goah, you know."

"Well, I don't see what Gore was ratty about, if that isn't the reason," said Tom Merry. "I'm jolly glad we're on to it. If Gore's asking for the sack it would be only decent to chip in and save him from making a silly ass of himself. If that beast Tapp is after any St. Jim's chap he's got to be stopped. I suppose he thought it was all blown over, and it was safe to come back. We'll show him otherwise."

"That was my ideah, deah boy. I wanted to get a whole crowd into it, so that we could fairly win him down, you know, and make an example of him. I suppose Goah won't help us now."

"Ha, ha! I suppose he won't. But we can manage without Gore. Talbot will chip in, and Kangy and Reilly and the rest. We'll give the rotter a regular high old time if he comes near St. Jim's again."

"Bet you he won't, if it's Gore he comes to see," grinned Monty Lowther. "Gussy having given Gore the tip, Gore will pass it on to Tickey Tapp, and meet him somewhere else after this."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "You see, I nevah suspected Goah, as he had made a promise. But Pewpaws if isn't Goah. It might be Cutts of the Fifth, or St. Leger, or Levison—"

"Possible!" agreed Tom Merry. "Anyway, we'll keep a sharp look-out for Tickey Tapp, and if we find him we'll make an example of him. You fellows had better come to our study for tea, unless you're awfully keen on those sardines."

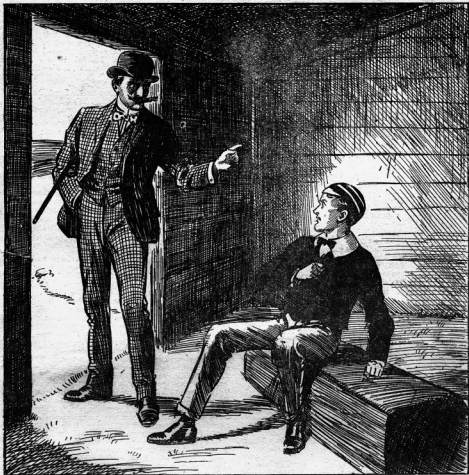
"Ha, ha! We'll come."

"Pway put it off half an hour, Tom Mewwy, while I change my clobber."

"We'll allow you half a minute," grinned Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps!"

The chums of the School House proceeded to Tom Merry's study to tea, and a quarter of an hour later Arthur Augustus rejoined them there, looking newly swept and garnished, so to speak, and as elegant as ever. And over tea in Tom Merry's study the juniors discussed with great kecnness various schemes for making things warm for the rascally Tickey Tapp, if he should venture near St. Jim's again.

ANSWERS



"Don't you say as I'm advising you to steal," said Tickey Tapp, savagely. "I repeats, I don't want to 'ave nothing to do with you. You're not honourable. All I says is this, that if I don't handle my fifteen quid on Saturday afternoon, I'm calling on your 'ead-master Saturday evening to ask him for the money. I've got your own 'and to show 'im, fair and square. 'Nuff said.'" Tickey Tapp strode out of the hut. (See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER 3, Old Acquaintances.

"**B**Y gum, it's the Toff!"

Talbot of the Shell stopped abruptly.

The handsome, sturdy Shell fellow of St. Jim's was coming along the lane towards the school, with his active, springy stride. There was a healthy glow in his cheeks, and Talbot looked very handsome and very happy at that moment.

"The Toff! By gum!"

A man was leaning on the stile, smoking a big black cigar, and he had glanced up carelessly at the sound of footsteps.

Talbot looked at him. The man was dressed in somewhat "loud" checks, with a curly-brimmed bowler hat worn rakishly on one side of his head. He had strongly-marked features, a prominent nose, and a black moustache. It was a face that, once seen, was not likely to be forgotten, and Talbot of the Shell knew that face.

"Tickey Tapp!" he exclaimed.

The sharper grinned.

"Fancy meetin' you!" he exclaimed.

Talbot paused. A cloud came over his face as he looked at the shifty, overdressed, dingy-looking black-guard.

"What are you doing here, Toff?" asked Tickey Tapp.

"I am going home."

"Home!" repeated Tickey Tapp.

"Back to school, I mean. That is my home."

Tickey Tapp stared at him.

"School!" he repeated. "School! You! Are you pulling my leg?"

"I am not," said Talbot quietly. "There's been a change since I knew you, long ago, Tickey. A big change. And—excuse me—if you are still on the old lay I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"Well, that's plain English, that is," said Tickey Tapp.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, Tickey," said

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Talbot. "But I mean it. I've chucked it all up long ago, and unless you've done the same we can't speak."

"You've chucked it up?"

"Yes."

"Gammon!" said Tickey Tapp.

Talbot gave a shrug, and turned to go. He did not want to enter into an altercation with the dingy rascal.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tickey Tapp. "Can't you spare one minute for an old pal? You wasn't so dashed stand-offish in Angel Alley, Toff, when we used to meet at the rookery, with the Professor and Hookey Walker and the rest. I been away for some time. I haven't seen anything of the old gang. How are they going on?"

"They're not going on at all," said Talbot quietly. "The old gang has been broken up."

"The beaks?" said Tickey Tapp.

"No. They've done as I've done, most of them."

"And that's—"

"Turned over a new leaf," said Talbot.

Tickey Tapp burst into a roar of laughter. He evidently regarded Talbot's statement as a first-class joke. Talbot did not smile. He looked steadily at the sharper.

"You don't believe that?" he asked.

"Well, it is rather rich, isn't it?" said Tickey Tapp, wiping his eyes. "But I don't mind a joke, Toff. Only you can't pull my leg, of course. Tickey Tapp is an old bird—a downy old bird. What are you doing here, Toff? You look as if you're in clover. In Etoms, too! What's the game?"

"I'm a schoolboy."

"Oh, draw it mild, Toff!" said Tickey Tapp.

"You can believe me or not as you like," said Talbot contemptuously, and he turned away.

"Just a minute, Toff!" exclaimed Tickey Tapp, in great astonishment. "Don't 'urry away from an old pal."

"You were never a pal of mine," said Talbot, with a curl of the lip. "I met you half a dozen times at the rookery, that is all, when you came there to see the Professor. I hardly knew you."

"But I knew you," grinned Tickey Tapp. "The Toff—the prince of cracksmen—the kid cracksmen who could beat anything in that line on either side of the Atlantic! You was a magician, Toff. There wasn't a safe you couldn't open—"

"I'm trying to forget those times," said Talbot, his handsome face clouding again. "I tell you, that is all over."

"Honest Injun, Toff, you've chucked it?" asked Tickey Tapp, in wonder.

"Yes."

"Well, that beats me! I 'card as old Captain Crow was dead, but I thought his son was still in the same line—cracking cribs."

"Well, he isn't," said Talbot shortly. "It's all over, I tell you. The Toff is dead and done with, and will never come to life again. It makes me sick to think of that time in my life."

"I—I suppose you mean it," said Tickey Tapp, in wonder. "Where's the Professor now—John Rivers?"

"In Kitchener's Army, fighting the Germans in Flanders."

"My eye! Genuine?"

"Yes."

"And Hookey Walker?"

"Gone abroad with his wife and child—an honest man now."

"Oh, by gum!" said Tickey Tapp. "And—and you, Toff? 'Ow did it come about? Give me the griffin, like an old pal, and p'r'aps I may go the same way—wot?" And Tickey Tapp chuckled.

Talbot paused.

"I don't mind telling you, Tickey," he said. "I hope you'll go the same way; it's the best way. I came to the school—St. Jim's—"

Tickey Tapp started.

"St. Jim's—yonder?"

"Yes."

"I've got friends there," grinned Tickey Tapp. "But go on."

"I came there to play the old game. As you said, I was the prince of cracksmen, and I never thought of anything else in those days," said Talbot, with a sigh. "I was brought up to it; and I think I can truly say that I knew no better. But when I was at St. Jim's I changed. I made friends there—good fellows all—and somehow it changed me. I chucked the old gang. And when it all came out—as, of course, it did—the Head befriended me, and I cleared off."

"With the beaks arter you?"

"Yes. But I was in luck after that. I got the King's pardon, and I went back to St. Jim's. I was given a Founder's Scholarship. I've had some ups and downs since then, but it's turned out all right."

"Rolling in money—what?"

"I have my scholarship allowance, which is enough for my needs."

"And a tidy bit tucked away from the old days?" suggested Tickey Tapp.

The Toff's brow grew stern.

"Not a penny!" he said. "What I had was all handed back."

"My word!" said Tickey Tapp. "You mean to say that you, with a 'and that's like magic on a safe—you that could crack any crib in the three kingdoms with your eyes shut—you've give it all up, to become a scholarship kid in a school? What do you get out of that?"

Talbot smiled slightly.

"Honesty and self-respect," he said.

"You had thousands. You might have had a big fortune—"

"Of other people's money," said Talbot. "Well, I made my choice, and it was the right one. I am happier now than I have ever been in my life before. When I leave school I shall work for my living."

"You—work! I suppose you mean it," said Tickey Tapp, regarding him closely. "Well, it beats me, Toff! It beats me 'ollow. And you don't want to see any old acquaintance from Angel Alley—what?"

"No," said Talbot bluntly.

Tickey Tapp laughed.

"Always straight out with your answer, you was," he said. "But—but suppose an old pal should turn up, Toff, and give away your little game at the school?"

"There's nothing to give away. My whole story is known there." Talbot laughed scornfully. "There's no chance of blackmail, Tickey. I've got no secrets to keep. You can go to the Head if you like, and tell him all you know of my past, and you will be able to tell him less than he knows already."

"Oh!" said Tickey Tapp, evidently discomfited.

"You can try, if you like; you needn't take my word for it," said Talbot. "My advice to you, Tickey, if you want it, is to chuck up card-sharpping, gambling, and swindling, and find something better to do. You're not too old to join Kitchener's Army."

"Ha, ha!" roared Tickey Tapp. "You was always a humorous cuss, Toff!"

"Well, good-bye!" said Talbot. He paused again.

"One word more, Tickey. You said just now that you had friends at St. Jim's."

"Old pals," agreed Tickey Tapp. "Once upon a time I ran a secret roulette bank in a place near here, and some of the young gents came to play. I had to clear off. Some of the young 'ounds came and wrecked my place, and, of course, I could do nothin'. The police would 'ave collared me if they'd known about it. A young 'ound named Tom Merry was the worst of them."

"Tom Merry is my best chum," said Talbot quietly; "and he did quite right. What I was going to say is this: I know you and your sort are not wanted about the school."

"But your sort—cracksmen—they are?" sneered Tickey Tapp.

Talbot flushed.

"Do as I've done—turn decent, and I've nothing to say," he replied. "I'd give you a helping hand, for that matter, if you wanted to find honest work."

"Keep it," said Tickey Tapp.

"Very well! I know your old game—getting young

fools to play cards with you, getting them to owe you money, and that kind of thing. And I tell you," said Talbot, with a flash in his eyes, "that I won't have any of it at St. Jim's. It will help to make up for the past a bit if I keep some young duffer out of your clutches."

"You mean you're going to queer my game?" said Tickey Tapp, with a dangerous look.

"Yes, if you play it at St. Jim's."

There was a long pause. Tickey Tapp's deeply-set eyes were burning. For some moments he looked as if he would spring upon the Toff. But he checked himself. The sturdy Shell fellow of St. Jim's could have handled the fat, unfit waster easily enough, though he was but a boy against a man. Tickey Tapp blew out a cloud of thick smoke from his cigar, and burst into a laugh.

"No need for us to quarrel, Toff," he said. "You keep your game, and I'll keep mine. I was only jokin' about knowing fellows at the school."

"You were not joking," said Talbot quietly. "But as you said what you did before I told you—before you understood how things are with me now—I feel that I can't make use of what you said. I shall say nothing about it, and I shall not interfere with you. But I warn you that, after this, I shall keep my eyes open, and if I find you about the school, I shall do my best to find out what you are after, and if it is your old game—" He paused.

"Well?" sneered Tickey Tapp.

"Well, then, I shall stop you, and at once."

"And 'ow'll you stop me, Mister Magnificent Cracksmen?" asked Tickey Tapp jeeringly.

"I might give you a hiding," said Talbot coolly. "But there is a better way. You seem to forget that, while I have the King's pardon for the past, you have nothing of the sort. I know enough about you to send you to prison for a good many years, if I chose to open my mouth."

Tickey Tapp drew a deep, hissing breath.

"You'd do that—you'd give me away? You'd give an old pal away to the beaks?"

"You never were a pal of mine. I hardly knew you, as I said," replied Talbot. "Even in those days, when I was not particular, I despised you. If I was a cracksmen, that was not so base as a sly, sneaking swindler such as you! I remember you robbed me once, in the rookery. You could not be honest even to your own set. I remember a good many things. I don't want to rake them up. But if I find that you have some silly young blackguard in your clutches, and are ruining him, I will have no mercy on you—none at all. I mean that!"

"You young 'ound—"

"That will do!"

Talbot turned on his heel. The sharper, his eyes blazing, swung up his stick, and sprang after him, striking out savagely. The bitter and contemptuous words of the one-time Toff had goaded him almost to frenzy.

But the Toff had not lost his old alertness, in his school-boy life at St. Jim's. He swung round at the hurried step of the ruffian. He dodged the descending stick, which would have stretched him senseless in the road if it had struck him. His right fist came out like lightning, and caught Tickey Tapp on the point of the chin.

It was a terrible blow. It hurled the sharper to the ground as if he had been felled by an axe. Tickey Tapp rolled in the dust, panting.

Talbot of the Shell looked down on him with blazing eyes.

"Will you have some more?" he said.

"Ow!" groaned Tickey Tapp, clapping his chin with both hands. "Ow! Oh!"

"Remember my warning," said Talbot.

And, without another word or a look, the Shell fellow strode away towards St. Jim's.

Tickey Tapp sat up in the dust, and blinked after him, muttering curses.

CHAPTER 4.

Skimpole is Too Good.

TALBOT of the Shell strode on to the school.

There was a cloud on his handsome face now.

Every reminder of his old life—of those black old days when he had been known as the Toff, the prince of cracksmen—touched him on the raw.

The change in the Toff had gone deep. Little proof of that was needed. For the prince of cracksmen had not lost his old skill, and there was wealth at his command if he had chosen to go back to the old ways. But he did not choose.

He was happy now—a happiness he had never known in the old days, wild and exciting as they were. Many a shadow had crossed his path since he had steadily turned his face from evil—the Professor had sought to win him back, Hookey Walker had threatened his life. But the shadows had lifted. The Professor, repentant, was doing his duty for King and country; Hookey Walker was far away, leading a new life, saved from evil by the influence of his wife and child. The Professor's daughter, Marie Rivers, was at St. Jim's, a nurse in the sanatorium, and Talbot's best pal. The clouds had rolled away from the life of the Toff.

Tickey Tapp had reminded him of much he had sought to forget, that was all. The man could not harm him. He could tell nothing that was not already known. It was only that evil reminder that troubled Talbot now.

But he shook the depressing thought from him; his brow cleared as he came in sight of the school gates. Here was his home, here were his friends; the past was dead, and could not revive. He knew that he had nothing to fear from Tickey Tapp, much as that rascal would have liked to injure him.

Talbot nodded pleasantly to Gore of the Shell as the latter passed him in the lane. Gore had just come out of gates.

"Hud tea?" said Talbot, pausing.

"Yes," said Gore; "you hadn't come in."

Gore was Talbot's study-mate in the Shell, along with Skimpole.

"I was late in Wayland," said Talbot. "Anything the matter, Gore?"

"No," said Gore, with a start. "Why?"

"You are looking down in the mouth," said Talbot, with a smile. "Haven't the gee-gees come in to time?"

Gore's predilections for "gee-gees" were no secret in the Shell.

"I've had rotten luck!" growled Gore.

"What the deuce do you expect? Why not chuck it?" said Talbot, good-naturedly.

He was not very chummy with Gore, but he was his study mate, and he had found good qualities in the bully of the Shell which the other fellows had never seemed to notice. And he was a little concerned about the obstinate fellow. Gore would sometimes keep quite straight for a long time, but he was bound to break out again sooner or later, and the risk of his proceedings was very great. If the Head knew that Gore was acquainted with the sporting set at the Green Man in Rylcombe, Gore would not have honoured St. Jim's with his presence much longer.

"Well, I did chuck it," said Gore, who was always more patient with Talbot than with anybody else, for some reason. "But—a fellow wants a little excitement, you know. I suppose I'm an ass!"

"Not much supposing about it," said Talbot. "You're not going down to the Green Man, surely, Gore?"

"Not in the daytime," grinned Gore. "I've got an appointment. You'll find your grub in the study cupboard, if Skimpole hasn't given it away to a tramp. Ta-ta!"

He nodded to Talbot and walked on, and Talbot went in at the gates. He was frowning again now. Certainly it was no business of his, personally, if Gore chose to make a fool of himself, but it was not pleasant to see his study-mate going to the dogs.

Talbot was hungry after his long walk, and he hurried up to his study in the Shell passage. From the next study, which belonged to Tom Merry, there came the sound of clinking teacups and cheery voices. Talbot

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found Skimpole in his study. The genius of the Shell blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"You were not in to tea, my dear Talbot," remarked Skimpole, in his solemn way.

"No; I'm ready for it now," said Talbot.

"Dear me! I am sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about that I can see," said Talbot, going to the study cupboard. "There's plenty of grub—Hallo! Where's the Tommy?"

"My dear Talbot, you know my philanthropic proclivities," said Skimpole, blinking at him. "A tramp came to the gate—"

"Eh!"

"Taggles would have turned him empty away," said Skimpole sorrowfully. "Taggles is a very hard-hearted man. The poor fellow had been wounded in the war, too, he told me so, and had the Victoria Cross, only he had lost it. So I gave him the chicken—"

"My hut!"

"And the rest of the things," said Skimpole. "He was so hungry that he could hardly stand upright. He had a strong smell resembling spirits about him, but he told me that he was a teetotaler, so Taggles must have been mistaken in thinking him intoxicated."

"Oh, you ass!" said Talbot.

"My dear Talbot, as a sincere philanthropist, I really had to assist the poor fellow. He could hardly stand; he actually swooned while I was talking to him."

"Oh, you fathead!"

The cupboard was as bare as Mother Hubbard's. Gore would have rubbed Skimpole's head in the cinders; he sometimes did on similar occasions, for Skimpole was very philanthropic, and his generosity knew no bounds. But Talbot took Skimpole good-naturedly.

"What am I going to do for tea?" he demanded. "It's too late for tea in Hall."

Skimpole rubbed his bony forehead thoughtfully.

"I must confess that, for the moment, I allowed that consideration to escape me," he admitted. "I trust you are not very hungry."

"I am as hungry as a hunter," growled Talbot.

"That is very unfortunate," remarked Skimpole commiseratingly. "Believe me, you have my sincere sympathy."

"I'd rather have that cold chicken!" growled Talbot.

"But that unfortunate man, Talbot; you would not have had me turn him empty away," said Skimpole reproachfully.

"Oh, rats!"

"Hallo, here you are!" exclaimed a cherry voice in the doorway, as Tom Merry looked into the study. "I thought I heard you come in. Had your tea, Talbot?"

Talbot laughed.

"No; one of Skimpole's pet tramps has had my tea."

"Ha, ha, ha! Come along, then; we've got a feed going, and distinguished company," said Tom Merry. "And we've got something to tell you."

"Come in Egypt," said Talbot, and he followed Tom cheerfully into the next study.

The Shell study was pretty full, and presented a festive scene. The four chums of No. 6 Study and Harry Hammond of the Fourth were there, as well as the Terrible Three. Tea was nearly over, but Monty Lowther immediately jammed the kettle upon the fire, and Manners sliced a loaf for toast, and Tom Merry dropped three eggs into the little saucepan, and stuck it beside the kettle.

"Welcome, little stwanghai!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Where have you been, you bounder! You've missed the meetin'. I was lookin' for you everywhah."

"Meeting?" said Talbot.

"Gussy called a meeting in our den," explained Blake, with a chuckle. "He asked nearly everybody in Spax to turn up there at six sharp, and they came expecting a feed. It turned out to be a jaw-meeting. It developed into an indignation meeting. You should have seen Gussy afterwards. Skimpole's pet tramps would have looked dandies beside him."

"I was treated with gross disrespect, owing to an absurd misunderstanding. I am suah Talbot would not have misundahstood me in that ridiculous way. How—"

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ovah, dry up while I tell Talbot. It's rather important, Talbot, old chap."

"Go ahead!" said Talbot.

"It's about Tickey Tapp— Bai Jove, what's the maffah with you, Talbot?"

Arthur Augustus broke off in astonishment. All the fellows in the study stared at Talbot very curiously. For the look that came over his face as the name of Tickey Tapp was uttered was startling. The Shell fellow had sat down at the table; he half-rose again, his brows knitting darkly.

"What—what name did you say?"

"Tickey Tapp."

Talbot sat down again. He felt the glances curiously upon his face, and his cheeks burned. There was silence in the study.

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Mistake.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY put down his teacup, extracted his monocle, and jammed it into his eye. He turned it upon Talbot with a fixed stare, as if he would burn a hole in him. There was a serene, a very serene expression upon Arthur Augustus's noble countenance. It was a serene moment.

"Talbot, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus's dulcet tones broke the silence. Tom Merry was turning out the eggs. Manners, who had ceased to make toast, started again, and there was a smell of burning.

"I am sowwy to see this, Talbot."

"Eh?" said Talbot confusedly.

"I may say that I am howwinded."

"What's the matter?"

"Shut up, Gussy!" murmured Blake.

"I wofuse to shut up, Blake! I am goin' to speak a word in season to Talbot. It is only too cleah that he requires it."

"Dror it mild, Gussy!" murmured Harry Hammond, with his peculiar accent, that would have made the fellows smile at any other time. But they did not smile now. They were all feeling startled and disturbed.

"I decline to draw it mild, Hammond! Pway dwy up! Talbot, I repeat that I am sowwy to see this. We have worked it out that that wrotch, Tickey Tapp, knew somebody in the school, and was playin' his wotten games heah again. It was suspected that it was that ass Goah. But, undah the cires—"

"Gore!" said Talbot, with a start.

"Under the cires," repeated Arthur Augustus, unheeding. "I can have no doubt that you are the party."

"I!" said Talbot.

"Yass. If I have drawn a w'ong impression from your verry remarkable behaviour, I shall be glad to be cowwected," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

"Fathead!" said Tom Merry. "Here's the egglete, Talbot!"

"And here's the toast," said Manners.

"And here's the tea," said Monty Lowther.

Talbot smiled. The Terrible Three were all chipping in to save him from an awkward situation. But Arthur Augustus was not to be denied.

"I am surprisid and shocked, Talbot," he continued. "It is weally attahly weckless of you to have anythin' to do with a chawwatah like that!"

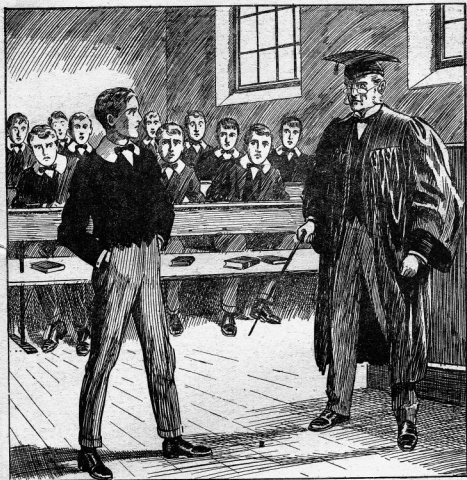
"Dror it mild!" murmured Hammond again.

"Pway don't intewwupt me, Hammond. I wofuse to see Talbot goin' on in this weckless way without speakin' a word of warnin'. When a chap sees a chap on the downward path, bai Jove, it's a chap's duty to speak a word in season! Talbot, deah boy, my I ask you if you have woflected? Have you thought of what this will probably lead to? Have you considered—"

Talbot burst into a laugh.

Tom Merry & Co. laughed too. For a moment they had felt a chilling uneasiness, so strange had been Talbot's look at the mention of Tickey Tapp. But the sound of that frank, hearty laugh relieved them.

Not that they were inclined to doubt their chum. They had doubted him once, and had repented of that doubt remorsefully. They were not likely to doubt him again.



Gore scowled, and kept his hands in his pockets. Mr. Linton regarded him with more astonishment than anger. "Take your hands out of your pockets, Gore!" "I'm not going to be canned!" said Gore. There was a buzz from the Shell fellows. (See chapter 8.)

Their faith in the one-time Toff was founded as upon a rock.

"This is no laughin' mattah, Talbot!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Isn't it!" said Talbot.

"Certainly not!"

"My mistake—I thought it was!"

"Weally, Talbot—"

Talbot started on the toast and eggs with a good appetite. He was hungry.

"I am speakin' to you for your own good. I do not suspect you, Talbot, of any vicious pwoclivities."

"Thanks, awfully!"

"I simply regard you as a weckless youngstah!" said Arthur Augustus, in his most fatherly way. "You have allowed that uttah wottah to scwape an acquaintance with you. Fewwaps you do not fully realise his chawactah. When I tell you that he once had a secwet gamblin' den near the school, where they played a weassally game called woulette, the same as at Monte

Carlo, I twust you will see how sewious the mattah is. He got Goah and othah fellahs to go there, and Goah was vewy neahly wuined. So I twust you will take what I say sewiously."

"I'll try," said Talbot cheerfully. "It's not easy to take you seriously, Gussy. But I'll do my best."

"Pway, don't talk wot, Talbot! I am goin' to ask a question. I twust you will answah it, because it is a vewy sewious mattah. Are you acquainted with this weassally bad chawactah Tickey Tapp?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "If you had any sense, Gussy, you'd know he wasn't. If I were Talbot, I'd dot you in your silly eye!"

"I should wufuse to be dotted in my silla eye—I mean my eye. Talbot has not answahed my question yet. Will you weply, Talbot?"

"Oh, I don't mind!"

"Vewy well! Are you acquainted with Tickey Tapp?"

"Yes!"

"Eh?" said Tom Merry, in astainishment.

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE!"

"My 'at!" said Hammond.
 "He's only pulling Gussy's leg," said Blake. "Gussy was specially sent into the world for that purpose, to cheer fellows up when they're feeling down."

"Weally, Blake—"
 "It's a fact," said Talbot calmly. "May I ask you to pass the salt, Gussy, before you go on with the sermon?"

"Have you known that wottah long, Talbot?"
 "Yes. Where's the salt?"

"Wats! Blow the salt! Pass the salt to the duffah, somebody! Now, Talbot, I am goin' to ask you a vewy serious question."

"Pile in."
 "Have you evah played cards with that wottah?"

Tom Merry rose to his feet.
 "Do you prefer going out of this study on your feet or on your neck, D'Arcy?" he asked.

"I regard that as a ridiculous question, Tom Mewwy, and I uttaly refuse to leave this staday till this mattah has been thrashed out!"

"Oh, let him run on," said Talbot, beginning on his second egg. "I don't mind in the least. Gussy means well, and he was born an ass!"

"And he hasn't changed since," agreed Digby.

"Have you played cards with that wottah?" repeated Arthur Augustus, unbedding.

"Yes."
 "Bai Jove!"

Talbot's reply electrified the study. The juniors stared at him in blank amazement. Even Arthur Augustus looked startled.

"He's a-pulling of your leg, Gussy," murmured Hammond.

"Not at all," said Talbot.

"You have played cards with him?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, considerably staggered by this result of his cross-examination.

"Certainly! May I have another lump of sugar?"
 "For—for money?" gasped D'Arcy.

Talbot smiled genially.

"Does Tickey Tapp look like a fellow to play for love?" he asked.

"Wathah not!"
 "Well, then, you can draw your own conclusions."
 "D-d-did you play for much money?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes—banker at half-a-quad a time."
 "Gwent Scott!"

"Talbot," exclaimed Tom Merry, aghast, "what do you mean? I know you are only rotting; but—"

"He is not wottin'," said Arthur Augustus; "he is confessin' the dweadful twath. It is vewy fortunate that I have droppod on the mattah like this. You fellows see now how important it is to wag that wascal Tapp, and dwive him away. Talbot is on the woad to wuin, and we are goin' to wescue him."

"Thanks!" said Talbot. "Any more tea in the pot, Lowther?"

"Yes," stammered Lowther. "Here you are!"

"Right! One lump, please—go on, Gussy. You don't know how entertaining you are. Excuse my being a hardened sinner—perhaps I shall begin to show some signs of remorse presently."

"How often have you played with the wottah, Talbot?" Talbot reflected.

"Twice, so far as I remember."
 "I suppose you lost money?"

"The first time I lost seventy pounds."
 "Seventy what?" shrieked Arthur Augustus.

"Pounds!"
 "Bai Jove!"

"The second time I had spotted the way Tickey Tapp plays cards, and I chucked it after losing three or four quid."

"Then—then you owe him money?"
 "Not at all."

"But—but you haven't seventy pounds!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Your allowance from the scholarship is less than that."

"Quite so."
 "If you are pullin' my leg all this time, Talbot—"

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OUR COMPANION "THE BOYS' FRIEND," "THE MAGNET," "THE DREADNOUGHT," "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 10, PAPERS: Every Monday, Every Monday, Every Thursday, Every Friday, Every Saturday, 2

"Not at all. I'm confessing. 'Open confession is good for the soul,' you know. I lost the money and paid up in cash. Run on," said Talbot.

"Then you must have had a lot of weedy money, Talbot."

"Certainly, I had—about two hundred and fifty pounds, so near as I remember."

"And where did you get it?"
 "Stole it."

"What!"
 Talbot's bantering manner dropped from him; the colour came into his cheeks deeply. He rose from the table.

"You've asked me, D'Arcy, and I've answered you. Is there anything else you would like to know before I clear off?"

"But—but—but I can't believe you, Talbot. Where did you steal it?"

"From a safe."

"You—you mean you committed a wobbery?"

"Yes."

"If this is a joke, Talbot, I don't quite see it," said Tom Merry, whose face had become very pale.

"It isn't a joke," said Talbot.

"Bai Jove! This is blackah than I thought!" said Arthur Augustus, in deep distress. "I—I feel quite thrown into a fluttah. I appeal to you fellows—Tickey Tapp has done this, and we're goin' to stand by Talbot. When did this happen, Talbot?"

"About two years ago."

"What!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry drew a deep, deep breath of relief. He understood now. It was in the bad, black, old days of the "Toff" that Talbot had known Tickey Tapp and gambled with him.

"About two years," said Talbot calmly. "Good-evening!"

He turned to the door. Tom Merry grasped his arm and dragged him back.

"Don't go, you ass! D'Arcy is going to apologise before you go, or we'll scrag him till he won't be able to play the fool for a whole term."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, it is not necessary to put it like that," said Arthur Augustus, in deep distress. "It appears that I have wathah put my foot in it."

"Go hon!" murmured Blake.

"It doesn't matter," said Talbot, forcing a smile.

"I was going to explain to you chaps, after Tickey Tapp's name was mentioned, if D'Arcy had given me time."

"Bai Jove! I'm awfl' sorry—"

"It's all right," said Talbot. "Everybody here knows about me, I suppose? I knew Tickey Tapp slightly in the old days. He used to come sometimes to the rookery in Angel Alley. I used to gamble at that time. There was plenty of money about—easy come, easy go. I don't think I need tell you that I haven't done anything of the kind since I've been here."

"Of course you needn't," said Tom Merry. "As for that born idiot—"

"I refuse to be called a born idiot, Tom Mewwy! I was undah a misapprehension, and I must say that Talbot was pullin' my leg a little too. I certainly dwel the impression that he had seen Tickey Tapp quite lately. I admit my mistake—"

"But that wasn't a mistake," said Talbot. "I saw Tickey Tapp an hour ago."

"Gwent Scott!"

"You saw him!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yes. That was why I was so startled to hear his name mentioned here. I passed him in the lane, and he claimed acquaintance with me."

"My hat! And you—"

Talbot held up his right hand. The juniors could see that his knuckles were barked. There was a general grin.

"I left him nursing his chin," said Talbot. "Is there any other point I can satisfy you about, D'Arcy?"

Arthur Augustus was crimson.

"I can only apologise, deah boy. From one gentleman to another, an apology is quite suffiah, I hope."

"Quite," said Talbot.

"I weally meant vewy well, you know—"

"He always does when he does these things," said Blake. "Don't mind him. We have to stand it. It's like keeping a monkey in the study."

"Wats! I cannot sufficiently express my wegwet, Talbot—"

"It's all right."

"But it isn't quite all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "I have put my foot in it, pewceive that quite clearly."

"Hurrah!" said Blake.

"I apologise most profoundly—"

"I accept your apology most profoundly," said Talbot, laughing. "Don't say anything more about it. If you fellows will excuse me, I'll get off and do my prep."

Talbot quitted the study.

The rest of the company looked at Arthur Augustus as if they would eat him. The swell of St. Jim's had a genius for putting his foot in it. But he had really exceeded the limit this time. He looked, and felt, fearfully distressed.

"Bai Jove!" he said at last. "I feel as if I ought to be kicked, you know."

"What a coincidence!" said Blake. "I was just feeling the same. What do you fellows feel like?"

"Just the same!" chorused the juniors.

"Then pile in!"

"Bai Jove! Blake—Tom Mewwy—stoppit! Yawwooh! Lowthah, you best! Yaup! Mannahs—Dig—you awful wotahs! Yow-ow-ow!"

Arthur Augustus fled.

CHAPTER 6. A Little Gamble.

THE next day was a half-holiday at St. Jim's; and as there was no game on in the afternoon, Arthur Augustus proposed to devote it to Tickey Tapp. That the rascal was hanging about near St. Jim's was certain, since both Arthur Augustus and Talbot had seen him on the same day near the school. What his object was the juniors did not need telling. And from Gore's conduct in Study No. 6 they could guess that the sharper's victim was the obstinate, reckless Shell fellow—one of his victims, perhaps, for there might be others.

True, it was a free country, and Tickey Tapp had a right to walk up and down Rylcombe Lane if he liked. But Tom Merry & Co. intended to deprive him of those rights. It might have been a little high-handed; but they felt that the circumstances justified them.

They were not going to see a St. Jim's fellow disgraced and sacked, however big an ass he was, for the sake of that worthless sharper. If they found him near the school, they intended to take the law into their own hands, and chance any consequences there might be.

Quite a little army gathered for that afternoon out. Talbot could not come, as he was going somewhere with Miss Marie. But most of the fellows who had attended that meeting in Study No. 6, which had ended so disastrously for Arthur Augustus, agreed to come. Most of them had helped Tom Merry at the time when the chums of St. Jim's raided Tickey Tapp's secret gambling-den on the moor, and "cleared him out." They were quite keen to give the rascal another lesson.

They did not ask Gore to accompany them. Gore, as a matter of fact, went out immediately after dinner, and they did not see him.

George Gore had an engagement that afternoon. Apparently it was an engagement that required a supply of cash, for he borrowed a half-crown of Talbot, and a shilling of Skimpole, and ten shillings from Crooke, and several other little sums up and down the Shell. He asked Levison of the Fourth for a loan. Levison looked at him very queerly, but made no sign of acceding to the request.

"Hard up?" he asked.

"Not exactly," said Gore. "I want some ready, that's all. I'll settle. You know I always settle."

"You mayn't be able to," smiled Levison.

"I'm not your sort," growled Gore. "Still, if you're afraid of losing your measly half-crown, keep it in your pocket, and go and eat coke!"

"Thanks! I'll keep it in my pocket," said Levison; "and I advise you to keep your money in your pocket, too. You're not quite up to the form of Tickey Tapp, Gore."

George Gore gave a start.

"What do you mean, Levison, hang you? What do you know about Tickey Tapp?"

Levison laughed.

"I used to know a lot," he replied. "Didn't I go with you the time he had a gambling-den on the moor, and ran a swindling game same as they do at Monte Carlo? If he's beginning that again, you'll keep clear of him, if you take my tip."

"He isn't," growled Gore.

"Then you've seen him? I guessed as much. I've seen him hanging about, and I've given him a wide berth," said Levison. "My tip to you is to do the same."

"When I want your advice I'll ask you for it," grunted Gore; and he stalked away.

Levison grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

George Gore tramped away down the lane in a bad temper. He had not been able to raise a supply of cash such as he had hoped for. Gore had more than enough money for his needs, as a rule. But the fortune of a

Rothschild would not long stand the drain of gambling, and Gore was not a Rothschild. His gloomy brow was proof enough that his late ventures had not been a howling success. And the foolish fellow, like all who allow the folly of play to take possession of them, hoped that with further capital he would be able to win back his losses. He might reasonably have supposed that, having lost, he was likely to lose again. But sweet reasonableness is not a gift of the gambler. He hoped to win simply because he had lost. Any reasoning is good enough for a fellow who has thrown common-sense to the winds.

Gore started a little as he passed Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell. The sight of his Form-master gave him a guilty feeling. If Mr. Linton could have guessed where he was going—

The Form-master gave him a nod. Gore paused, and raised his cap. He had taken a sudden resolution.

"May I speak to you a moment, sir?"

"Certainly, Gore!"

"You—you won't mind, sir. The fact is, I want to get my new bat this afternoon—I'm taking up cricket a lot this term—and the money hasn't come for it. It's coming next week. If I had fifteen bob now I could have my bat at once. It's ready for me at Hanney's. Might I ask you, sir—"

Mr. Linton smiled.

"My dear boy, I am glad you are devoting yourself to cricket—a very healthy game, and a good occupation for your time. I have had to speak to you severely, Gore, for finding less honourable pursuits. I am glad to see them." Mr. Linton took out his purse. "You may get your bat once. Return me the fifteen shillings when you receive it."

"Thank you very much, sir."

"Not at all, my boy."

Mr. Linton continued his stately promenade, much pleased by that improvement in Gore, whom he had had to find fault with on a good many occasions. Gore stood with the money in his hand, his heart beating. He felt a pang of remorse. But the thought of the gleaming cards, the chink of money, banished his remorse and he started off again. After all, he would get the bat after keeping his appointment with Tickey Tapp; he would pay for it out of his winnings.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE!"

Gore tramped on across the fields, and followed a ratty lane to Wayland Moor. In the old, tumbledown shepherd's hut on the moor, a man was sitting on a fallen beam, and smoking a reeking, black cigar. He nodded familiarly to Gore.

"Here we are again," said Tickey Tapp cheerfully.

"I'm going to have my revenge this afternoon," said Gore, taking a seat on the beam, and extracting a cigarette from his pocket.

"'Course you are," said Tickey Tapp. "Luck must turn. You'd 'ave beaten me 'olow last evening, but you ran out of sponduicals just when the luck was turning for you. I could see it was on the turn."

"I've raised some more tin," said Gore.

He chinked his money in his pocket.

"My 'at! Rolling in wealth?" smiled Tickey Tapp, with a greedy look in his deep-set eyes. "You'll clean me out this time, old pal."

"I'm going to try," said Gore. "I've got three pounds. Blessed if I know how I shall settle up with the fellows if I don't win! Have to sell my bike, I suppose. I don't care. Let's get going."

"'Ear, 'ear!" said Tickey Tapp.

He drew a pack of greasy cards from his pocket. Gore flushed a little.

"I've brought some cards," he said hastily.

He produced a pack of new cards.

If Tickey Tapp had shown any objection to using the new cards Gore would probably have guessed how it was that his money had gone so fast the previous evening. But the sharper was too deep for that. It was pretty plain that Gore did not trust him, since he had taken the trouble to provide himself with a new pack of cards. And it was not the sharper's game to deepen his distrust. Tickey Tapp's eyes gleamed for a moment, but he nodded carelessly, and slipped his pack back into his pocket.

"Right you are," he said. "They're a bit newer than mine; mine 'ave seen service, I do say. What's the game?"

"Nap."

"Go ahead."

They began to play, using the beam between them as a card-table. Outside, the spring sunshine gleamed on the gorse of the moor, and a breeze rustled the grass. Little did the gamblers care for the call of Nature. Gore smoked cigarette after cigarette as he played, and the old hut was soon reeking with smoke. Tickey Tapp did not always make three pounds in an afternoon, so he was very contented, for he had not the slightest doubt that Gore's cash would shortly be transferred to his pocket. Gore was flushed and eager and excited.

Even if the wretched sharper had played fairly Gore would have had little chance against the coolness and experience of the hardened card-sharp. But Tickey Tapp did not mean to waste two or three hours when an hour was enough. The cards, when he started, were fair enough—a new pack Gore had newly bought. But by the time they had played for a quarter of an hour the cards were marked sufficiently for Mr. Tapp's honourable purpose. The excited, feverish boy was not likely to notice the little trick the rascal made with his thumbnail on the backs of the aces, or the slight twist he gave to the corners of the kings.

It was child's play to Tickey Tapp. Each time a court card came into his hand he marked it in a way that was invisible to Gore, but quite visible enough to help Tickey Tapp when he was dealing. And at dealing Tickey had great skill. Long practice enabled him to "stock" the cards as he pleased, once they were marked.

Gore's three pounds—most in silver—passed gradually over to Tickey Tapp, and Gore's face grew longer and gloomier.

The last coin went before an hour had elapsed.

Gore sat quite still, breathing hard. He had surrounded himself with a host of small debts in his Form, to raise the capital to try his luck again. He had tried his luck. His cigarette dropped from his lips.

"Tired?" asked Tickey Tapp.

"Stony!" said Gore.

"'Ard lines," said Tickey Tapp sympathetically.

"It's went the ready. I've 'nd a run of luck; it

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PAPERS!

Every Monday,

Every Monday.

Every Thursday.

Every Friday.

Every Saturday.

would be bound to change. Still, I'll give you your revenge any time you like, Master Gore." He yawned, and rose to his feet.

"Don't go," said Gore desperately. "Look here, Tickey, you've got all my money."

"Ain't I won it?" demanded Tickey Tapp, his brows lowering.

"Yes, yes; I know that. I'm not complaining. What I mean is, I—I'm expecting some more money soon, and—and, look here, Tickey, my word's good enough for you, I suppose?"

Tickey Tapp was looking at him keenly. He had fully expected this, and he had turned it over in his mind whether it was worth the time and the trouble to win Gore's paper. He had decided that it was, but he left the suggestion to come from Gore. It suited him to be in the position of a good-natured sportsman badgered into playing.

"Well, I wouldn't like to say no to a pal, Master Gore," said Tickey Tapp, seating himself again on the beam. "Don't run it too 'igh, though; I'm not going to land you with a debt you can't pay."

"Oh, I can pay it all right!"

"You're expecting some from 'ome, p'r'aps?"

"Yes," lied Gore. Lies cost the wretched lad little at that moment. He would have plied falsehood upon falsehood to obtain the means to go on playing.

"Werry well," said Tickey Tapp. "You make out a little paper, and I'll land you five quid on it. That suit you?"

"Oh, ripping!" exclaimed Gore.

He took out his pocket-book and a pencil.

"'Ere's a fountain-pen," said Tickey Tapp. It really looked as if Mr. Tapp had come provided for just that emergency.

George Gore took the fountain-pen, and with his pocket-book on his knees wrote out the required P O U, which Mr. Tapp carefully examined, and slipped into his pocket. Gore eagerly took the five pounds in dirty silver that Mr. Tapp pushed across to him.

The cards were soon going again. At Gore's suggestion they played for half-crown points. Gore was anxious to get clear quickly. Unfortunately, it did not work out like that. The five pounds travelled over to Mr. Tapp much more quickly than the first three. In half an hour Gore was penniless once more.

"Well, I must be goin'," yawned Mr. Tapp.

Gore panted.

"Look here, I—I've got some money in the bank," said he. "I—I'll draw it out as quick as I can, Tickey. It takes a couple of days."

"'Ow much 'ave you got there?" asked Mr. Tapp, with a curious smile.

"Ten pounds," said Gore desperately.

"That's a lot of money," remarked Tickey Tapp meditatively.

"My—my pater put it into the bank for me on my birthday," said Gore, quite surprising himself by his facility in lying.

"Good old sport," said Mr. Tapp. "But you've 'ad enough, Master Gore. You'll be sayin' arterwards that it was my fault, and—"

"I won't," said Gore. "Look here, play the game; take my I O U for ten quid, and if I lose it I won't ask you again."

"But you won't lose it," said Mr. Tapp discontentedly.

"You'll clean me out."

Gore's eyes sparkled at the mere thought.

"Well, be a sport," he said.

"Dash my buttons!" said Mr. Tapp. "I can't say no to you, Master Gore. You are a goer, I do say. A real sportsman, and no mistake. Well, if you've really got that three money lyin' in the bank—"

"Can't you take my word?"

"Certainly, certainly, Master Gore! Don't get ratty. If I win your paper—not that there's much chance of it—you'll pay up on Saturday. That'll give you plenty of time."

"Heaps," said Gore. He threw reflection to the wind. He would win this time—he would—he must!

"It's a go," said Tickey Tapp.

The fountain-pen and the pocket-book came into re-

quisition again, and Mr. Tapp pocketed a promise to pay ten pounds, dated and signed by George Gore. The thought of having to meet 'hat paper with money on Saturday turned Gore's very heart cold for a moment. But he gritted his teeth, and played. He would win—he must win—he would snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

If the wretched boy had been getting fair play he was not in a state to win. He was eager, feverish, excited—at one time wildly reckless, at another time over-careful. He played in large sums—for him. He desperately demanded sovereign points, went nap, and had to pay five pounds in a lump to Mr. Tapp. Gore had a stunted look then, but he went on mechanically with what he had left. It all went the same way. Mr. Tapp was getting tired of fleecing his foolish victim, and he no longer gave Gore the slightest run for his money.

Gore sprang to his feet, when his last coin was gone. He flung the cards upon the ground with a curse.

"Ad enough?" smiled Mr. Tapp.
 "If—if you'll give me another chance—"
 "I got to get 'ome," said Mr. Tapp. "I've got your paper for fifteen quid now, Master Gore. I'll expect to see you on Saturday, and give you another game then if you like. You'll come 'ere?" Mr. Tapp lighted a fresh cigar as he surveyed his victim.

Gore was pale and shaking now. He was feeling the reaction after the hot, unhealthy excitement of two hours.

"Here!" he repeated mechanically.
 "Yes, or where you like. Don't forget to draw that money out of the bank."

Gore groaned. He had no money in the bank. Fifteen pounds on Saturday! The mere thought of it made his head reel. He was not likely to have fifteenpence by Saturday, let alone fifteen pounds.

"Well, so long!" said Tickey Tapp.
 "Hold on a minute," muttered Gore hoarsely. "I—I shall have to ask you to wait a bit for that money, Tickey."

"Yes, I'm waitin' till Saturday," assented Mr. Tapp.
 "Later—later than Saturday I—I can't pay it then."
 "It don't take all that time to draw money out of the bank, Master Gore," said Tickey Tapp, in surprise.

"I—I—wait a week or two—a few weeks."
 "I'm leaving Rylecombe next week for the races, and I shall want it," said Mr. Tapp calmly. "You draw that money out of the bank, just as you agreed. You can't expect to keep money lying idle in the bank while you owe a debt of honour."

"I—I can't."
 "Why can't you?"
 "I—I haven't got any money in the bank!" groaned Gore.

Mr. Tapp did not really require that information; he knew it as well as Gore himself. But he towered over the wretched boy in righteous indignation.

"You ain't got any money in the bank!" said Mr. Tapp, in measured tones. "But you told me you 'ad, Master Gore, and I took your word."

Gore's chalky face crimsoned. He had fallen to this—that this low, dingy blackguard could twist him to his face with falsehood.

"And that five," went on Mr. Tapp, with increasing indignation, "that money you're expecting from 'ome. Pr'aps you'll tell me next that you ain't expecting nothing."

"Nothing," muttered Gore. "I—I— You see, I—"

Tickey Tapp laughed scornfully.
 "You thought you'd win my money, and then you wouldn't 'ave to back up your paper!" he sneered. "You young swindler, you!"

Gore started as if he had been stung. But he could not rebut that accusation. It was a swindle.

"Then it comes to this 'ere," said Tickey Tapp. "You've made me play—badgered me into playin', in a manner o' speakin'—and now you owns up that you've give me wastepaper, and you can't pay your honest debts. I'm surprised at you, Master Gore! I never did think sich a thing of you. I'm a good-natured cove—too good-natured—but I ain't standing that, and don't you think it. You're paying up on them bits of paper on Saturday."

"I can't!" muttered Gore.
 "Then all the worse for you!" said Tickey Tapp sententiously. And he turned to the doorway.

Gore made a step after him, his heart throbbing.
 "Tickey Tapp! What—what do you mean? What are you going to do?"

"Never you mind what I'm going to do!" said Tickey Tapp darkly. "That's my business! But I ain't going to be swindled, or I'll know the reason 'why!"

"You'll have to wait—"

"How long?" sneered Tickey Tapp. "Do you think I'd take your word arter this? No bloomin' fear! You'll pay up fifteen pounds on Saturday, or—"

"Or what?" panted Gore.
 "You'll see!" replied Tickey Tapp.

"You—you can't sue me for that money," said Gore, with a little more courage. "You can't sue for gambling debts. Besides, I'm a minor. My pater wouldn't pay."

"You know the whole bag o' tricks, I see!" sneered Tickey Tapp. "Blowed! If I knew you was such a young swindler, I wouldn't 'ave played with you. But there's ways and means, Master Gore. You'll pay up on Saturday. If you don't I'll see whether your 'admaster will allow an honest man to be swindled!"

Gore stared at him.
 "Dr. Holmes! Do you think he'd make me pay that? You're mad! He'd have you thrown out of the House if you went to him, and told him you'd gambled with me!"

"Would he?" said Tickey Tapp venomously. "I'd tell him a few things about his bright pupil afore I was thrown out! I'd give him my opinion of young gents as borrows money on I O U's and refuses to pay!"

"I—I tell you, you wouldn't get a cent," groaned Gore.
 "I should be sacked from the school, that's all. That wouldn't do you any good."

"I don't know. I should get my own back that way arter the way you've swindled me," said Tickey Tapp.
 "Me—an old 'and—took in and swindled by a kid like you! It makes me feel small! It's the first time I ever was took in. By thunder, if you don't pay me up on Saturday, Master Gore, I'll make you sorry for it! Me—took in and done!"

"I—I didn't mean to swindle you, Tickey!" moaned the wretched junior. "I—I'll pay—when—when I can. Don't go, Tickey! Give me some advice; tell me how I can get the money, then."

"Well, I've 'eard of young gents in want of money writing 'ome to their people," said Tickey, calming down a little from his righteous wrath. "I've 'eard of such things as sayin' money's wanted for a new bike, 'cause of an accident, or for new clobber, 'cause of tumblin' in a ditch, or for books and things."

"I—I couldn't cheat my own father!" said Gore, in a scared voice.

"You don't mind cheating me!" said Tickey Tapp sarcastically.

"I—I mean, my father wouldn't shell out. He's as hard as nails, as keen as a razor. And I've been in a scrape before."

"Then there's your friends in the school," said Tickey Tapp. "Why not borrow a little?"

"They wouldn't lend me pounds. And—and I've been borrowing all I could."

"Well, I knowed a sport once as borrowed without asking permission," said Tickey Tapp ruminatingly. "He was a young gent just like you—at a school where there was a lot of rich coveys. He was in a scrape, and he 'elped himself."

Gore turned white.
 "Steal!" he stammered, in horror.

"Don't you say as I'm advin' you to steal!" said Tickey Tapp savagely. "I repents, I don't want to 'ave nothing to do with you. You're not honourable! All I says is this—that if I don't 'andle my fifteen on Saturday arternoon, I'm calling on your 'admaster Saturday evening to ask him for the money! I've got your own 'and to show him, fair and square! 'Nuff said!"

Tickey Tapp strode out of the hut. Gore stared after him with glassy eyes, transfixed; then, with a deep groan, he sank on the beam, and covered his face with his hands.

CHAPTER 7.

Ragging a Rascal.

"HUWWAY!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chirruped out that exclamation in tones of triumph. A dozen Boy Scouts were tramping across the moor, and they came in sight of the old shepherd's hut just as Tickey Tapp stepped from the doorway.

"Hallo! What are you chirping about now?" asked Tom Merry.

"I was not chirpin', deah boy. Look, you duffahs!" Arthur Augustus raised his scout's staff and pointed.

"Tickey Tapp! By Jove!"

"Run to earth!" chuckled Kangaroo.

"Come on!" shouted Tom Merry.

The scouts of St. Jim's had been "beating" the whole neighbourhood all the afternoon. It was not an ordinary scout run; it was a hunt for Tickey Tapp. But they had not had any success so far till, as it drew near tea-time, they were tramping homeward across the moor, and then the man they sought stepped out of the old shepherd's hut fairly under their eyes.

With a rush they came up to the surprised Tickey Tapp, surrounding him in front of the hut. The sharper stared at them. Their intentions were evidently hostile, and Tickey Tapp looked and felt uneasy.

"Hallo!" he said. "Wot's had been the little game, gents?"

"You're the little game?" said Jack Blake cheerfully.

"Whom have you been swindling this afternoon, Tappy?"

"Look ere—"

"See if there's anybody in the hut," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyes into the doorway. He started at the sight of the cards scattered on the floor, the reek of smoke in the air, and a junior crouched on the fallen beam—with his face bowed in his hands.

"Goah! Is that you, Goah?"

"You! What do you want? Hang you! Let me alone!"

"I don't intend to bothak you, Goah," said Arthur Augustus quietly. "I can see what you've been through. It serves you wight for bein' such a wotah!"

"Mind your own business, you fool!"

Arthur Augustus's hands clenched for a moment, but he unclenched them again. That wretched, white-faced junior, with his nerves in a twitter, was not a fellow to quarrel with. It was only too evident that he had not enjoyed his game with Tickey Tapp. Arthur Augustus turned away without a word.

"It's Goah," he said. "They've been gamblin'. Let Gore alone. He doesn't look vevy happy. But this soundswel—"

Gore strode from the hut. Without a look at Tickey Tapp or the juniors, he stalked away across the moor, and disappeared among the gorse.

He did not care for the discovery of his blackguardism. The juniors were not likely to betray him. Indeed, at that moment of misery Gore would have cared little if they had.

Tom Merry & Co. did not speak to him. They closed round Tickey Tapp. The cardsharp had made a movement to slink away, but there was no room for him to pass. A dozen scouts, staves in hand, were round him. The rascal was not to get away so easily.

"You've been playing cards with Gore?" said Tom Merry sternly.

"Find out!" retorted Tickey Tapp.

"We've found out!" said Tom Merry.

"You've been seen hanging about the school before, Tickey Tapp. We guessed what you were after; now we know for certain. You're going to get out of this neighbourhood!"

"Who'll make me?" sneered Tickey Tapp.

"We shall!"

"You touch me, and I'll 'ave you up for assault!" said the sharper, though THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 376.

his face had grown paler, and his eyes had a hunted look.

Tickey Tapp was not likely to have anybody "up" for assault. Mr. Tapp was always anxious to keep a respectful distance from the minions of the law, and would never have dreamed of calling upon their services.

"We're jolly well going to touch you, though you're not fit to touch!" said Tom Merry. "You've got that shady fool under your thumb, and others, perhaps. Now you're going through it! And if one ragging won't make you clear out of this district, I warn you that you'll be handled again, and harder, wherever we find you!"

"Why, you—you 'ooligans!" exclaimed Mr. Tapp indignantly. "Ain't you never heard of such a thing as the law?"

"We are a law unto ourselves," said Monty Lowther solemnly. "We are judge, jury, and executioner. You are the chap that is going to be executed! Pile in!"

"And off!" roared Tickey Tapp. "I'll—I'll— Oh, my eye!"

Hands grasped the rascal on all sides. Tickey Tapp struck out savagely, but he was pinioned in a few seconds. "To the pond!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Huwway!"

Tickey Tapp, struggling furiously and cursing at the top of his voice, was rushed away to the pond, a couple of hundred yards away. On the verge of the pond he resisted again, with desperate energy, but he was lifted fairly off his feet, and swung to and fro in the air.

"One—two—three!" said Tom Merry. "Go!"

Tickey Tapp, with a spluttering gasp, went whirling through the air out over the shallow, muddy water. There was a terrific splash as he struck the surface and disappeared under it.

The pond was not more than two feet deep, and it seemed to consist of nearly as much mud as water. Tickey Tapp rose spluttering and blowing like a grampus, and his face was almost hidden by thick mud and creeping ooze. He stood in the pond, with the water swishing round his plump waist, and spluttered. The juniors regarded him with grins. They had no pity on the rascal.

"Groooooah!" said Tickey Tapp. "Oh, crumbs! I'll 'ave the law on yer! I'll—I'll smash yer! I'll come up to the school! I'll show yer!"

"Come up to the school, and welcome, and we'll give you some more," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gurrrrrg!"

Tickey Tapp came plunging and puffing towards the bank, his face red with rage under the thick mud. A dozen scouts' staves met him, and pushed him back. Tickey Tapp yelled with wrath.

"You young 'ounds, lemme come out! Ow! I shall ketch me death of cold! Oh!"

"Wouldn't be much loss!" said Blake cheerfully.

"Wathah not! Wathah the weverse!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you lemme gerrout?" screamed Tickey Tapp.

"Will you promise to clear off out of this district, and not come back?" asked Tom Merry, in his turn.

"No!" yelled Tickey Tapp.

"Then you can have some more mud."

Tom Merry thrust the end of his staff forcibly against Mr. Tapp's chest, and sent him reeling back. Tickey Tapp lost his footing in the pond, and disappeared once more with a mighty splash backwards.

"Bai Jove! That's wathah a cack-handed dive!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "That wotah will be done if he keeps on like this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Up came Tickey Tapp again, gasping and streaming. He gouged the water out of his eyes, and glared murderously

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The door opened, and Gore clutched up the notes hurriedly, desperately. Skimpole of the Shell blinked at him in mild astonishment through his big glasses. "My dear Gore—", "You spying hound!" yelled Gore, beside himself at the discovery. "You—you rotten spy—" (See Chapter 10.)

at the juniors. That the schoolboys should take the law into their own hands like this enraged him almost as much as the ducking. He remembered that they dealt with him quite as lawlessly once before, and his unfortunate inimical relations with the police had prevented him from trying to get what he regarded as justice. On that former occasion he had got what Tom Merry & Co. regarded as justice. Now he was getting some more of the same.

"Well?" said Tom Merry. "Have you had enough?"
Tickey Tapp spluttered out mud and water and oaths.
"Yow! Yes! Lemme gerrout!"

"Will you clear out of this neighbourhood at once?"
"Yes," groaned Tickey Tapp. He would have promised anything.

"We can't twust that wottah's word, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "It seems a howwid thing to say, but I believe him quite capable of bweakin' a promise."

"Go hon!" remarked Figgins.
"Weally, Figgins, there is nothin' to gwain at!"
"We can't trust him," said Tom Merry; "but we've

given him a lesson, and he knows what to expect, I wish we could send the brute to prison, but we can't do that. He can't be locked up for what he's done, I suppose. But if he comes back here, and we ever see him again, we'll make it hotter for him. You hear that, Tickey Tapp!"

"Lemme kummout!"
"Do you hear me?"
"Yow! Yes. I'll go; I'll do anything you like. Lemme come out of this 'ere hicy water!" groaned Tickey Tapp.

"You can come out."
Tickey Tapp crawled forth as the threatening staves were withdrawn, and the juniors allowed him to pass. He came squelching through the mud, and crawled into the grass, and sank down there in a pool of mud and water. He looked a pitiable object, but the juniors could feel no pity for him. The remembrance that he was there to inveigle their schoolfellows into vice, to cheat them and lead them perhaps to ruin, hardened the hearts of Tom Merry & Co.

Without giving the rascal another word, they tramped away in the direction of the school, satisfied with their afternoon's scouting and its result. Tickey Tapp sat up in the grass and watched them go. For fully five minutes he poured out bitter curses, and then he proceeded to clean himself as well as he could with handfuls of grass.

"Lemme catch some of 'em alone one dark night—me with a stick!" he muttered between his teeth. "Let me, that's all! I'll pay 'em out for this! This 'ere is the second time they've gone for me—and there ain't no law to putrect the likes of me." Tickey Tapp made that remark indignantly, as if it was a great oversight on the part of the law-makers to neglect providing for the due protection of criminals. "Let me catch 'em, that's all—a nice dark night and a thick stick!" Tickey Tapp ground his teeth. "And, anyway, I'll take it out of that young 'ound Gore! If I've got to clear out, I'll 'ave the satisfaction of getting one on 'em kicked outter the school, by gum!"

And Tickey Tapp tramped away muddily and surlily across the moor, feeling that he had fully earned Gore's three pounds that still reposed in his pocket. He was not in a mood now to be merciful to the black sheep of the Shell.

CHAPTER 8.

Trouble in the Form-room.

"MISS MAWIE, bai Jove!"
The juniors had reached the gates of St. Jim's when Miss Marie and Talbot came in sight from the direction of Rylcombe. The scouts raised their hats with sweet smiles to Miss Marie, who smiled cheerfully. "You have been scouting?" she asked, noting their costume.

"Yass, wathah! Wunnin' down a wascal, you know."

"We've made a catch," grinned Blake.

"The catch of the season!" chuckled Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Marie looked a little perplexed, and Tom Merry & Co. proceeded to tell of their enterprises. Talbot laughed a little grimly. He had warned Tickey Tapp to go, and the rascal had not taken his warning. It was probable, he thought, that the drastic measures adopted by Tom Merry & Co. would have more effect.

Miss Marie laughed a little.

"I hope he deserved it—I mean, I hope you did not make any mistake," she said.

"No fear! We caught him with a St. Jim's chap," said Tom Merry. "The silly duffer looked as white as a sheet, and there were cards and cigarettes—no doubt about the game. Tickey Tapp had cleaned him out of his money, I could see that. And he's not only a gambling rascal, but a cheat as well. Lumley-Lumley spotted him cheating when he was keeping a roulette bank in a lonely house near here once—didn't you, Lumley?"

"I guess I did," said Lumley-Lumley. "He used to bring up the numbers to suit his book, same as they do in the Continental casinos. He rooked Go—I mean, the chap we're speaking of, at that time. The chap must be a howling ass to have anything more to do with him."

"I wathah think he's got his lesson now," said Arthur Augustus, with satisfaction. "It was my ideah, Miss Mawie. I spotted the wothah hangin' about yestahday, and it flashed into my bwaain, you know."

"Lots of road for it," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Lowthah, I wegarad that remark as—"

"Good-bye!" said Miss Marie. They had reached the Head's house, and the girl went in. Figgins & Co. cut off to their own House, and the School House fellows strolled on to their own quarters.

"Who was the chap you found with Tickey Tapp?" asked Talbot abruptly. "You didn't want to mention him to Miss Marie—but you can tell me."

"Your precious study-mate," said Mannars.

"Gore?"

"Yes. It's his old game," said Tom Merry. "Playing the giddy goat. It's not our business to interfere with him, of course; but we mean to interfere with that second-rate Tickey Tapp. I fancy he'll clear off. Gore

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will have something to thank us for if he does—though he won't do it."

"Not likely," grinned Kangaroo.

Talbot looked very thoughtful when he left his chums and went to his study. Skimpole was there, but there was no sign of George Gore.

Gore did not come in till calling-over. He had spent some hours in tramping by himself across country, thinking out his position. He had not been able to think out any satisfactory solution, however. He had not the slightest chance of raising the money for Tickey Tapp by Saturday, and he knew it; and if the man went to the Head, Gore would be kicked out of St. Jim's—as he deserved.

And he would go. Whether in the hope of getting his money, in order to hush up the scandal in connection with the school, or merely to gratify his spite for not being paid, Gore had little doubt that Tickey Tapp would keep his word.

He had to be paid! Gore had no money, and he owed little sums on all sides; but at the best of times he could not have expected to borrow so considerable a sum as fifteen pounds.

How was he to get the money? Writing to his father he knew was useless. Mr. Gore was not a gentle or tender parent; but the tenderest parent would have wanted some explanation before he handed out such a sum as fifteen pounds. There was no hope in that quarter.

If there was hope at all, it was in the infamous suggestion the card-sharper had made—that Gore should "borrow" the money from his schoolfellows without asking their permission—in other words, become a thief to satisfy his creditor. Tickey Tapp did not care where the money came from. He was a believer in the Oriental proverb, that the smell of all money is sweet.

Gore had ground his teeth with indignation and rage at the bare thought. That was at first. Now he was getting more used to the idea.

It was that or the "sack."

Anything was better than being expelled from the school, the miserable, half-dazed lad told himself. Tickey Tapp must have his money.

When Talbot and Skimpole came up to the study to do their preparation Gore was not there. He did no preparation that evening. It meant trouble with Mr. Linton in the morning; but Gore could no more have "mugged" Latin that evening than he could have flows.

He tramped to and fro under the elms in the quadrangle till bedtime, his hands thrust deeply in his trousers-pockets, his brow contracted, his brain in a buzz. He was thinking—and his thoughts were terrible. There were several fellows at St. Jim's who had more money than was good for them, and Gore was thinking of their money. D'Arcy of the Fourth often had a frer, and he was careless with his money; Cutts of the Fifth had plenty; St. Leger of the Fifth was rich; Crooke of the Shell simply reeked with money. There were chancers enough, as Tickey Tapp had said. But the risk—for it had come to that now. From gambling to dishonesty is but a step. Gore was thinking by this time not of the crime, but of the risk.

The gleam of lights in the windows of the dormitories recalled Gore to the passage of time. He hurried into the house and ran up to the Shell dormitory. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was there to see lights out, and he frowned at Gore.

"Where the deuce have you been, Gore?" he exclaimed. "In the quad," muttered Gore. "I'm sorry, Kildare. I've got a fearful headache. I thought the fresh air would do it good."

Kildare looked at him, and his frown vanished as he noted the junior's pale, strained face.

"All serene," he said. "Tumble in."

Gore turned in.

Tom Merry & Co. had glanced at him rather curiously, but they did not speak. They had rather expected a "jaw" from Gore on the subject of chipping in as they had done on the moor that afternoon. They were quite prepared to give Gore as much "jaw" as he could possibly give them. But the burly Shell fellow seemed to have forgotten the matter completely.

"Good-night, Gore!" said Talbot quietly. Gore started.

"Oh, good-night!" he said.

Kildare put out the light and went away. There was the usual buzz of talk, but Gore did not speak. Even when Kangaroo alluded to the scene on the moor, and chuckled over it, Gore was not to be drawn. As a matter of fact, he was glad to hear that Tickey Tapp had been ragged. He would probably not have been sorry to hear that he had been drowned instead of ducked in the pond.

The Shell fellows dropped asleep at last, but it was long before George Gore slept.

He lay awake and cursed his folly silently.

What had made him such a fool? Very likely Tickey Tapp had been cheating him somehow all the time. He remembered that Lumley-Lumley heard that Tickey had cheated with the roulette wheel on that former occasion; and now, whether Tickey had won fairly or foully with the cards that afternoon, he held Gore's written promise to pay £15. Gore almost laughed aloud in bitterness in the silence of the dormitory. Fifteen pounds! It might as well have been fifteen thousand! What a fool he had been—after the lesson he had had before, too!

There was nobody who could help him—nobody who would help him if he could to pay a gambling debt. Talbot, perhaps, but he had no money. Talbot had been through such strange experiences. He had learned to be more tolerant to human weakness and wickedness than the other fellows. Where they would feel only disgust and contempt, Talbot could feel compassion as well, and a kind of comprehension. Gore knew that. He was not chummy with Talbot, but he had an instinctive feeling that Talbot would have come to his rescue if he had had any money. But Talbot was a scholarship boy; and Gore knew that he had sold his bicycle a few weeks before to raise five pounds, because he was badly in need of money. The one fellow who might have helped him out of the awful scrape, could not; those who could have, would not. He thought of Crooke—he was chummy with Crooke—but he pictured the cad of the Shell's cynical laugh and sneer if he asked for a loan of fifteen pounds—date of payment uncertain.

He dared not even attempt to borrow the money. For if there were thefts in the school, it must not be known that he, Gore, was in bitter need of cash. It would turn the finger of suspicion upon him at once.

He fell asleep at last.

He was sleeping heavily when the rising-bell clanged out in the morning.

He turned out with the rest, silent and morose. He dressed quickly and went down. He was anxious to be out of sight of the rest. When the bell rang for classes, Gore came into the Shell Form-room last, and Mr. Linton glanced at him, as he went to his place, a little severely. He was several minutes late.

Lessons that morning seemed like a drawn-out horror—Gore.

How could he put his attention into lessons with that fearful trouble upon his mind? And he dared not let his trouble be seen; he must do nothing that would draw possible suspicion upon him.

It did not take Mr. Linton long to discover that Gore had done no preparation the previous evening. Gore was called upon to construe, and he stammered over the page, and the Form-master cut him short angrily.

"You did not prepare this lesson, Gore?"

"No," growled Gore savagely. He was not in a mood to be baited by the master of the Shell.

"No, what?" thundered Mr. Linton.

"No, sir," said Gore sullenly.

"Why did you not prepare your lesson?"

"I was tired."

"Indeed!" Mr. Linton's eyes gleamed dangerously. He did not know the wretched trouble that was gnawing at Gore's heart; he only saw that the junior was morose and insolent. Mr. Linton was the very last master at St. Jim's to endure anything approaching insolence from one of his pupils. "You did not prepare your lesson because you were tired. You have the impression that you may prepare your lessons or not as you choose, apparently, Gore. Come here!"

The master of the Shell took a cane from his desk.

Gore lounged out before the class. He was in a mood of such bitterness and recklessness that he hardly cared what happened to him. Anything that happened could hardly be worse than what seemed inevitable—the alternative between becoming a thief and being turned out of St. Jim's. Indeed, the desperate thought had come into his mind that it would be better to be sacked at once for insolence to his master than wait till Saturday to be sacked for gambling. In that mood he approached Mr. Linton, who had him hold out his hand.

Gore growled, and kept his hands in his pockets. Mr. Linton regarded him with more astonishment than anger. "Take your hands out of your pockets, Gore."

"I'm not going to be cased!" said Gore.

There was a buzz from the Shell fellows. Mr. Linton almost fell down. He stared at Gore as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

"What!" he gasped. "Gore—this insolence—" He broke off. "You can either be cased by me or by the Head, Gore. What is the matter with you?" Mr. Linton really thought that something must be wrong with the junior to account for his extraordinary conduct.

"I don't care!" said Gore doggedly. "You can send me to the Head if you like!"

Mr. Linton breathed hard through his nose.

"I shall certainly do so, Gore. I shall request him to punish you severely for your insolence!"

Mr. Linton wrote a note on his desk, sealed it in an envelope, and handed it to Gore.

"Take that to Dr. Holmes at once!"

Gore was about to refuse sullenly, reckless of consequences, but the prospect of getting out of the Form-room, away from the grind of lessons that was driving him distracted, prevailed. He took the note without a word, and quitted the Form-room.

Mr. Linton turned to his class again, with a thunderous brow. The Shell were very much on their good behaviour after that. As a matter of fact, they sympathised with their Form-master. Gore's insolence had been inexcusable. If it had been Herr Schneider it would have been different. But Mr. Linton, though a severe master, was not a tyrant, and there was no excuse for Gore's conduct. But there was no doubt that Gore would pay very dearly for it when he delivered that note to the Head.

CHAPTER 9.

The Temptation.

GEORGE GORE tramped along the deserted passages with the note in his hand.

He stopped half-way to the Head's study.

He wanted to think.

All the fellows and the masters were in their classrooms; the great door stood open, and the thought came into his mind to take his cap and run.

It was better than being sacked. It was better than the other alternative—of becoming a thief.

He looked out into the sunny squad. The sunshine and fresh air seemed to call to him. He made a step and stopped again.

Run—where? In the clothes he stood in, without a penny in his pocket? Where was his next meal to come from? Home—that was the only place to run to. And he knew that his father would send him back instantly to the school, with a grim request that he should be punished with the utmost severity for his escapade. Gore could picture the look on his father's face when he presented himself at home and announced that he had run away from school. He smiled a bitter, sneering smile. His father would have to keep him if he was sacked. Served him right! He had been sacked before, and the Head had allowed him to return on promise of better conduct. This time there would be no forgiveness.

"Well, let them sack me," the wretched boy said desperately to himself. "Better than becoming a thief, and perhaps going to prison, too. It was easy enough; he had only to 'cheek' the Head as he had cheeked Mr. Linton—if his nerve did not fail him when he came face to face with Dr. Holmes."

He strode away again to the Head's study, his mind

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made up, and tapped at the door. There was no reply, and he opened the door. The study was empty.

Gore grunted with savage discontent as he went in to wait for the Head. He had screwed up his courage to the sticking-point, and now he had to wait while it oozed out at his finger-ends.

Dr. Holmes had evidently lately been in the study; probably he had stepped out to speak to one of the Form-masters. Several papers lay on his desk, and the door of the iron safe in the wall was ajar. The Head could not have expected to be absent more than a minute or two, or he would not have been so careless.

Gore glanced carelessly at the papers on the desk. He started a little as he saw that they were War Loan Bonds, with coupons for interest attached—five bonds, each for the nominal value of a hundred pounds. And the Head had left them lying on his desk. Gore scowled savagely. Five hundred pounds lying there before his eyes, and he was to be ruined for want of fifteen pounds. It was a shame—a shame. Not that he thought of taking the bonds, or one of them. They were no use as money. Dr. Holmes would miss one, if it was taken, immediately he returned to the study. Gore would not even be able to get out of the school with it and Tickey Tapp would scarcely take the risk of receiving such an article. Gore scowled at the bonds, and at the registered envelope that lay beside them, in which they had evidently arrived by the post. Dr. Holmes had apparently unlocked the safe to put them away in security when he was called away from the study.

Gore's eyes lingered on the safe. His eyes began to gleam. There was plenty of money there very likely. His heart beat thick and fast.

Plenty of money—plenty of money, and the doctor might not miss it for weeks—might not miss it at all. Plenty of money, and he needed fifteen pounds.

Why did not the doctor come in? It was a shame to put temptation in a fellow's way like this. Why didn't he come? Plenty of money—fifteen pounds—plenty of money! The words hammered in his feverish brain like a horrid chorus.

He felt his head swim. A mist swam before his eyes; his heart was beating like a hammer. Why didn't the doctor come in?

Almost unconsciously he found himself treading on tiptoe to the door. The passage was empty—deserted. No sign of the doctor. Something was keeping him away. With a deadly pale face Gore tiptoed back across the study; his hand touched the iron door of the safe.

He pulled the door open only a few inches. There was a little bundle on the shelf inside, fastened with a red elastic band. Currency notes—a bundle—ten or twelve or twenty. Another bundle beside it—red printed notes—ten—ten-shilling notes. More money than he wanted there—more than was sufficient to save him from ruin and disgrace.

He hardly knew what he was doing, but the two little bundles of notes dropped from his trembling hand into his pocket. He closed the door of the safe again as he had found it, barely ajar; he stepped back to the middle of the study.

His heart was contracted; he could scarcely breathe. He was saved, or plunged deeper into destruction. He hardly knew. He only knew that there was a footstep in the passage, and that it was too late to replace what he had taken.

The footstep passed the door. He detected the heavy breathing of Toby, the page; it died away. Silence again. Why did not the doctor come?

Gore stood still.

There was time, then—time to replace the notes he had taken, and he made a step towards the safe. He stepped back again. It was that or ruin. The unhappy boy was in no state to think it out calmly. The threats of the cardsharpener were ringing in his ears. He was not himself at that dreadful moment. He made a sudden run to the study door. Nobody could prove that he had been in the study, even if the money was missed, if he was not seen there. He stepped into the passage, and closed the door silently behind him. He tiptoed away, and still the doctor did not appear, and he walked down the Form-passage into the quadrangle.

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The cool breeze fanned his burning brow, and revived him. He felt his coolness return. A strange coolness and clearness came to him. The die was cast; now he had to play out the game to the end.

He came back to the Shell Form-room. Steadily, quietly, with a nerve that surprised himself, he entered the Form-room. He knew what to do.

Mr. Linton glanced at him sharply. He saw his note to the Head still in Gore's hand.

"You have been to the Head, Gore?" Mr. Linton's voice was like the rumble of thunder.

"No, sir! I—I've been in the quad. I—I'm sorry, sir. It was wrong to speak to you like that just now, and I apologise, sir. I hope you'll caine me instead of sendin' me to the Head."

Mr. Linton paused. "This is a late repentance, Gore," he snapped. "I don't know what made me speak like that, sir," said Gore submissively. "I—I don't feel well to-day, sir, and I've got an awful headache. I can't say how sorry I am, sir. I beg your pardon most humbly."

"Well, well, Gore," said Mr. Linton, considerably mollified, "as you seem to have come to a proper sense of your conduct, I will not insist upon sending you to the Head. I shall, however, cense you severely myself."

"Yes, sir," said Gore humbly. Mr. Linton kept his word. He gave four on each hand, and they were what the juniors called "regular swipes."

"You may now drop that note into the fire, Gore."

"Yes, sir!" Gore went back to the place. He was like a fellow in a dream. He hardly felt the pain in his hands, severe as it was. He was saved—saved from Tickey Tapp; saved from disgrace and ruin. And at what price? He did not dare to think of that.

When Mr. Linton addressed him, he answered vaguely, and the Form-master, realising that the boy was not quite himself, and putting it down to the headache Gore had complained of, let him alone for the rest of the morning.

It was ten minutes after Gore was in the Form-room that Dr. Holmes came back into his study. It was a mere chance that had caused Dr. Holmes to leave his study as he had done, the slightest of chances. He had stepped into the passage to speak to Mr. Carrington as he passed, not intending to leave the study at all. But Mr. Carrington, as it happened, had thought of a new light upon a certain obscure passage in *Æschylus*, which the two old gentlemen had been discussing the previous evening. The mere mention of the great tragic poet was enough to drive all mundane matters from the good old doctor's mind. He had entered eagerly into the discussion, and, as Mr. Carrington was on his way to the Sixth Form-room, the Head had walked with him down the passage, completely forgetting the registered letter he had opened a few minutes before. They had, in fact, barely turned a corner when Gore came along. Outside the Sixth Form-room they had paused, thrashing out that passage in *Æschylus*, whose obscure passages have caused brainstorms to many bold and learned old gentlemen besides the Head of St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes came back to his study with a smile of satisfaction upon his kind old face. For, though it had taken him twenty minutes to do it, he had completely convinced Mr. Carrington that his new rendering of that obscure passage was wrong, and the House-master had reluctantly yielded the point. The Head felt at that moment as Tom Merry felt after winning a particularly tough footer match.

The Head started, however, as his eyes rested on the bonds on his desk.

"Bless my soul," he exclaimed, horrified at his own carelessness—"bless my soul! I—I had completely—completely forgotten! Dear me! How fortunate that no one has come to the room during my absence! How shockingly careless of me!"

And the Head promptly bundled the bonds into the safe, and locked it.

CHUCKLES ^{JD.} ₂ THE CHAMPION COLOURED PAPER. EVERY SATURDAY.

CHAPTER 10.

The Burden of Guilt.

TALBOT joined Gore as the Shell came out of the Form-room, after being dismissed. Gore was hurrying away.

He had not had time to examine his plunder, and the stolen currency-notes seemed to be burning a hole in his pocket.

"Hold on a minute, old chap!" said Talbot. "Any hurry?"

"Yes—no." Gore stopped, almost furious, but trying to hide his agitation. "What is it? What do you want?"

Talbot looked at him in surprise. He could not understand Gore's excitement.

"I wanted to speak to you," he said. "Another time will do if you're in a hurry."

Gore was about to nod and hurry away, when he checked himself. He was desperately anxious to appear quite casual and ordinary, to do nothing that could cause remark or suspicion. If the notes were missed or inquired after, he did not want Talbot or anybody else to remember that he had been strange in his manner that morning.

"No; it's all right," said Gore, with an effort that was visible to the astonished Talbot. "I've got some lines to do before dinner, that's all. But there's no tremendous hurry. What had you to say?"

"I don't know whether you'd care for me to speak about it," said Talbot, after a glance to assure himself that no one was within hearing. The rest of the Form had poured out into the sunny quadrangle. "It's about that chap you met yesterday."

Gore was on his guard at once.

"What chap?" he said doggedly.

"Tickey Tapp, the card-sharper."

Gore sneered bitterly.

"I suppose those chaps are spreading it over the school," he said. "The Housemaster will get to hear of it next."

"They're not saying a word," said Talbot quietly. "I asked Tom Merry, and he told me, because he knows I shan't speak."

Gore shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you can all say what you like," he said. "I shall deny it—deny that there was anything wrong about it, I mean. It isn't my fault if a disreputable character speaks to me against my will."

"If it was like that—"

"What do you think it was like?" demanded Gore, truculently.

"I'm speaking to you as a friend, Gore," said Talbot very quietly. "I know—I've had jolly good reason to know—the harm that can be got from rotten acquaintances."

"I'm not quite in the same boat as you were," said Gore.

Talbot flushed.

"No, dash it all, I oughtn't to have said that!" said Gore repentantly. "I'm sorry, Talbot. But—but it's irritating, that a chap can't do as he likes without a lot of silly fools meddling in his business. Those fellows had no right to come there; it wasn't their business."

"From what I hear, that man Tapp had swindled you before."

"Well, Lumley-Lumley said so."

"And I know he's a scoundrel," said Talbot.

"What the dickens do you know about him?"

"I saw him several times in the old days," said Talbot. Gore softened a little. He knew what it cost the Toff to make any allusion to that miserable time in his life.

"Well, I don't say he's a bright specimen," said Gore, trying to speak humorously. "He's a precious rascal, I dare say. But because he happened to speak to me on the nicor yesterday, there's no reason to suppose I'm thick with him."

"I understood you played cards with him."

"Well, suppose we had a little game of nap?" grunted Gore.

"I fancy he didn't leave you with much money in your pockets, if you did," said Talbot.

Gore was silent.

"I know it isn't my business," added Talbot. "But,

knowing that that fellow is an utter rascal, I felt I ought to tell you. If you have any dealings with him, he will play you some rotten trick some time."

Gore's lip quivered. The rotten trick had been played. Talbot's warning came too late. Not that he would have listened to it if it had come earlier.

"He's going to be shifted out of this neighbourhood, too," said Talbot. "I know how that can be done. As I said, I don't want to chip into what doesn't concern me; but, as a sensible chap, Gore, I hope you'll keep clear of him."

"I shall never see him again," said Gore.

Talbot's face cleared.

"Then you're not thick with him?"

"No. I hate the sight of the low cad!"

"Oh, good!" said Talbot, much relieved. "Excuse my speaking, then. I only wanted to do you a good turn."

"I know you meant well," said Gore. "You're not so lofty as some of the precious Erics we have here. As for Tom Merry—"

"If you say anything against Tom Merry, Gore, we shall quarrel. I'd better get off."

"Oh, all right," said Gore; "I won't say a word. I don't want to row with you, Talbot. I dare say those chaps mean well, too, but I wish they'd mind their own business. It isn't pleasant to be watched and suspected. As you have taken the trouble to bother your head about me, I may as well tell you that Tickey Tapp told me he is going away from here next week, and I, for one, shall certainly never see him again. I wish I'd never set eyes on the cad."

And Gore walked on. Talbot rejoined his chums in the quadrangle, feeling relieved in his mind.

Gore hurried up to his study. He had got rid of Talbot without awakening his suspicions. The fact that he had lost money to Tickey Tapp the previous day was to be kept, of course, a dead secret. It would not do to allow any St. Jim's fellow to suspect that he had a debt to settle.

He hurried into his study and closed the door, and hastily turned the currency notes out of his pocket. His heart was beating hard. He knew that he had more than enough to settle his debt with Tickey Tapp. He could have wished that it had been exactly the right amount; it would have seemed less of a crime, then, somehow.

He counted the notes hastily.

There were twelve for one pound and twelve for ten shillings in the two little bundles; eighteen pounds in all.

He would be clear with Tickey Tapp on Saturday. As for the odd three pounds, he would send it to one of the war funds, and get rid of it. The thought of keeping it for his own use made him shudder.

If he did not keep any of it he would not be less a thief; but, somehow, he felt that he would be less a thief.

A thief!

The word haunted him; it rang in his brain. It had come to that! He was safe from expulsion now—safe! But was his last state better than his first? Suppose he had been expelled for gambling? He thought of his father's stern face, his grim wrath. He shivered. But—suppose this came out, and suppose he was expelled, not for gambling, but for theft?

He stared moodily, almost dazedly, at the notes on the table. Why had he done it? Suppose he went to the Head now?

He groaned aloud in bitterness of spirit. "Jacta est alea"—the die was cast. He had taken the plunge; there was no retreat now—the Rubicon was crossed!

When would the Head miss the notes? Perhaps at once, perhaps in a day or two, perhaps not for weeks. And when he missed them, he could not possibly connect Gore with their loss. No one knew that the Shell fellow had been in the study at all; that was certain.

He was safe—from all but the gnawing of his own conscience, from all but the bitter knowledge that he was a thief, and unfit to look a decent fellow in the face!

That was the price he had to pay for his "little gamble." And when he saw Tickey Tapp again on Saturday, the card-sharper would tempt him to play again. Would he play? He shook his head at the thought, with a bitter smile. He had had enough of that. Once his paper was safe in his hands again, he

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would not be mad enough to thrust his head into such a trap.

That was all over. He would start clear—start quite fresh—with only that one bitter memory to live down—if he could. Whom would they suspect, when the notes were missed? Not Gore. One of the servants, perhaps, or, perhaps, Talbot. Gore started as that thought came into his mind. Would they suspect that the "Toff" had broken out again?

It could not be helped, he told himself savagely. He had to take care of himself.

The question now was, where was he to hide the notes beyond the possibility of discovery, until the time came to hand them over to Tickey Tapp?

The door opened, and Gore clutched up the notes hurriedly, desperately. Skimpole of the Shell blinked at him in mild astonishment through his big glasses.

"My dear Gore—"

"You spying hound!" yelled Gore, beside himself at the discovery. "You—you rotten spy!"

Skimpole jumped.

"I assure you, my dear Gore— Dear me, what a lot of money! Surely, Gore, a fellow has a right to come into his own study without being accused of spying! Besides, what is there to spy upon, my dear Gore? I suppose that money is your own?"

Gore panted.

"You skinny fool, do you dare to hint—"

"My dear Gore—"

The bully of the Shell restrained himself, with a great effort. He could have struck Skimpole to the floor at that moment. He realised that he was betraying himself by his excitement and fury. But his nerves were in a twitter; he was not his own master. It was his first step in crime.

"I am sorry I disturbed you, my dear Gore," Skimpole went on, looking quite distressed. "I really see no cause for this rattiness. But what a lot of notes you have there, my dear Gore! My people never send me remittances like that," added Skimpole, with a sigh.

"Oh, shut up, you duffer!"

"If you care to be generous, Gore, now that you have so much money, I know of a very sad case in Rycombe—"

"You silly idiot!"

Gore was hammering his brains. Somehow, he must induce Skimpole to keep it secret that he had seen him with so much money. But how, without exciting Skimpole's own suspicions. The good Skimpole was not a suspicious fellow, certainly, or he would have suspected something already.

"Look here, Skimpole, I suppose you've heard about what happened yesterday—about the scouts, I mean—"

"No, my dear Gore."

"Tom Merry and the rest, you remember. They were jawing it in the dorm last night—"

"Oh, yes, about ducking some disreputable person—"

"Yes, yes! About me, too."

"They did not mention you in connection with him, Gore."

"Well, I—I was there," said Gore. "As a matter of fact, Skimmy, I'd been playing nap with Tickey Tapp, and—and won all his money."

"Goodness gracious!" said Skimpole.

"So I don't want you to jaw about having seen this cash," said Gore. "As—as I won it from Tickey Tapp, the fellows would be down on me for having it. You see that?"

Skimpole nodded.

"Yes, I quite see that, my dear Gore. I am shocked myself—surprised and shocked. If the Head knew—"

"He won't know, unless you go blabbing it out," growled Gore.

"I hope I am not a sneak, Gore," said Skimpole, with dignity. "I shall certainly not give you away to anyone in authority."

"Keep it dark from everybody" said Gore. "And—and, look here, I'll stand you ten bob for some of your precious tramps."

"Thank you! I should not care to use money obtained by gambling. Even in the cause of charity, I draw a line there."

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OUR COMPANION "THE BOYS' FRIEND," "THE MAGNET," "THE BREADBOUNT," "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 1D.

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somewhere. However, I shall say nothing. I shall probably forget all about it, too. I have more important matters to think about. Have you seen my book of entomology?"

"Your what?"

"My volume upon entomology. I fear that some practical joker has hidden it," said Skimpole. "Pray help me search the study for it, Gore."

Gore did not help Skimpole search the study for his valuable entomological volume. He hurried out and slammed the door, leaving Skimmy shaking his head solemnly. Skimpole had never really approved of George Gore; and now he approved of him less than ever. But Gore was not thinking of Skimpole's approval or disapproval. He was thinking of the notes that seemed to be burning through the lining of his pocket. Where was he to hide them?

CHAPTER 11.

Itaunted!

"WHAT luck, Gore?"

Levison of the Fourth met George Gore as he came out of the School House. He joined him in the quad, looking at him curiously.

Gore set his teeth with silent rage. Was he never to be let alone—never to have an opportunity of concealing his plunder in some safe corner? Every moment that the stolen currency notes remained in his pocket was a terror to him. He must get them away from his person, in case of discovery—in case of inquiry, suspicion, and search. He must find a hiding-place for them—a safe hiding-place. He could have struck Levison to the ground, as the Fourth-Former joined him. But he dared not show a sign of the rage and fear within him, and he contorted his face into a grin.

"What luck?" he repeated vaguely. "What do you mean, Levison?"

"I mean what I say," replied Levison, laughing.

"What luck? Have you collared the cash?"

Gore staggered back.

The question struck him like a bullet in the breast. The poor wretch was now in such a state of mind, that any chance remark might seem to have a bearing upon his wretched secret.

"What!" he panted. "Levison, you spying cad—you rotter—you hound—you—you have been watching me!"

Levison jumped, in utter amazement.

"That's a pretty list of names!" he exclaimed. "What the deuce do you mean, Gore? Are you dotty?"

"You—you—I—" Gore strove to recover himself, Levison's remark had seemed to him to mean that Levison had watched him in the Head's study. What else could it mean? Yet a moment's reflection would have told him that Levison had been in the Fourth Form-room all the morning, and could not have watched him.

He realised that Levison could know nothing.

But Levison was on the way to know something perhaps, owing to the Shell fellow's uncontrollable agitation.

"What do you mean?" stammered Gore. "I don't understand you—"

"Yes, you do," said Levison. "Do you think I don't know all about it?"

Gore's heart almost ceased to beat.

"Why, you as good as told me yourself!" said Levison, in surprise.

"I—I did!" stammered Gore.

"Yes, when you wanted to borrow money of me yesterday. You as good as admitted that you were going to see Tickey Tapp."

"Oh!"

"And I know you did see him," went on Levison. "You were out all the afternoon. You've been out of sight since. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"I—I—"

"You needn't tell me anything if you don't want to," said Levison. "Still, I don't see why you can't tell me whether you had luck yesterday. I was thinking of having a shot myself."

"You—you meant you—you were asking me whether I had won Tickey Tapp's money?" gasped Gore.

"What else did you think I meant?" asked Levison, in wonder. "I wasn't asking whether you had picked his pocket."

"Oh!" said Gore. He could have struck himself for his folly. What was the matter with his nerves? Of course, that was all that Levison had meant. What else could he have meant? But Gore's mind had been obsessed with the thought of the stolen money that was in his pocket at that moment.

"Well," said Levison, repeating his question, "have you collared the cash? Have you come home rolling in guilty gold, or did Tickey Tapp clean you out?"

"Oh," mumbled Gore, "yes—no! We—we had a little game, and I lost five shillings. That was all."

"What a plunge!" said Levison sarcastically. "You must have felt a regular plunger on that. Five bob! Oh, my hat!"

"Quite enough, too," said Gore. "And I don't want any of your rotten jaw about it, either, Levison. Go and eat coke!"

Gore swung away, leaving Levison considerably astonished. Gore was only anxious to be rid of him—to be rid of everybody. If he could only get away by himself for a time, out of sight of all St. Jim's!

The Shell fellow drove his hands deep into his pockets as he walked across the quadrangle. The stolen money haunted him. Worse than the remorse and shame that gnawed at his heart was the terror of discovery. And it was only Thursday, and he was not to see Tickey Tapp till Saturday. Suppose he took the risk of going to see the sharper at the low public-house where he lived in Rylcombe? He could pay him, and have done with it. It was worth the risk.

The dinner-bell interrupted his feverish thoughts. He went in to dinner, silent and gloomy, yet trying to adopt a natural manner. Crooke nudged him at the table.

"Had your letter?" he asked.

"Eh! My letter?" repeated Gore, coming to himself with a start.

"There's a letter for you in the rack."

"Oh! I didn't know! Thanks!"

"And I advise you not to leave it on view," Crooke whispered.

Gore gave him an inquiring look, but he asked no questions. The black sheep of the Shell was giving him a warning; Gore understood that. Whom could the letter be from? He turned pale as the thought of Tickey Tapp came into his mind. Would that man have the audacity to write to him at the school—to run such an open risk of having everything discovered?

The Head or the Housemaster might see the letter. There was a certain amount of supervision exercised over the juniors' correspondence. As a rule, it was not interfered with; but the letters were often looked over, for, of course, it was the Housemaster's duty to see that his boys did not receive letters from disreputable characters—sporting touts and the like.

Gore did not dare to leave the dinner-table; he waited in misery until the meal was over. When the juniors left the dining-room Gore hurried to the letter-rack and secured his letter. It was addressed to him in a strange hand—probably Tickey Tapp's. He did not know the man's writing—doubtless Crooke did—and so the Shell fellow had given him that friendly warning.

Gore thrust the letter into his pocket and hurried out into the quadrangle with it. It had not been opened, as he noted with a breath of relief. He did not venture to open it himself in the house. Not till he was in the seclusion of the old chapel ruins did Gore slit the envelope and take out the letter.

It was from Tickey Tapp, and Gore was relieved to see that the sharper had worded it carefully, in case it should fall into the wrong hands. It ran:

"Dear Master Gore,—I have had to leave rather sudden, owing to circumstances, but I come back early next week. You can see me on Tuesday at six to pay for the two little articles.—Yours respectfully, T. T."

Gore crushed the note in his hand.

The sharper had been careful; he did not want to



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betray him, so long as there was a chance of getting his money. If the Housemaster had seen that letter he would only have supposed that some man in Rylcombe had sold Gore "two little articles," which were to be paid for on Tuesday, and Gore could easily have invented an explanation. The Housemaster would hardly guess that the "two little articles" were two I O U's signed by Gore, promising to pay a cardsharp fifteen pounds.

Gore could understand, too, why the sharper had gone. After the ragging Tom Merry & Co. had given him, he had deemed it safer to disappear from the neighbourhood for a time. He might have had other reasons for disappearing, too, though Gore did not think of him in connection with Talbot.

Doubtless the cardsharp thought that the extension of time on his debt would be welcome enough to the wretched debtor. As a matter of fact, it came like a blow to George Gore. His scheme of getting rid of the stolen notes by paying Tickey Tapp at once was knocked on the head now. He could not even get rid of his plunder by Saturday. He had to keep it until Tuesday—nearly a week.

In his rage and dismay he muttered maledictions on Tom Merry and his friends. Their interference was the cause of this. But for their chipping in and handling Tickey Tapp, Gore could have seen the man before afternoon lessons that day and relieved his mind of a crushing weight.

Now that was all over. He did not know Tickey Tapp's present address, even if he had not dared to trust the stolen notes to the post.

He tore the letter into fragments and scattered them in the ruins. What was he to do? Suppose the money was missed? Suppose there was a search? There came into his mind the remembrance of Eugene Aram, haunted by the body of the man he had slain, the body that he could not hide. The stolen notes seemed to Gore like the body of that murdered man. He could not get rid of them; they haunted him; they were ever present, to condemn him by any chance at any moment.

He must hide them. He looked round the ruined chapel. There was the old crypt below—that would be a safe place. He made up his mind, and descended the stone steps to the crypt.

"Hallo! Going exploring?"

Gore started violently. Crooke of the Shell had just come into the ruins, and was regarding him curiously. Gore hastened up the steps again, his face crimson.

"I'll come with you, if you like," said Crooke. "Better get a lantern if you're going down there, though. There's holes in the floor."

"I—I'm not going—I—I was only going just to have a

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

look in," stammered Gore. "What—what do you want, Crooke? What the—"

He paused. He had been about to demand why Crooke had followed him, but he checked himself abruptly.

"You got that letter?" asked Crooke.

"Yes."

"I thought I'd give you the tip—I knew the set," said Crooke. "If one of the prefects had known it—"

"There was nothing in it to hurt," said Gore. "He's gone away, and he wrote to say so, that's all."

"If I were you, I'd give him a hint not to write here," said Crooke drily. "It's a jolly risky thing to do."

"Yes, I—I will."

Gore walked out of the rains, and Crooke went with him, chatting. Crooke's talk ran on races and "geegees," and odds, and dead certs, and sure snips—a subject that was generally interesting enough to Gore, but which now got on his nerves horribly. He answered almost at random. But he did not dare to let Crooke see that he was anxious to be rid of him, and when the bell rang for afternoon classes Crooke went with him to the Form-room. The bundle of notes still reposed in George Gore's pocket. Would he ever get rid of them, or would they cling to him, like the body of the murdered man to Eugene Aram? He wondered wretchedly, and he thought of the last scene of the "two stalwart men" who came for the self-betrayed criminal, and how they went back when Eugene Aram walked between, with gyres upon his wrists. Was that how Gore of the Shell was destined to leave St. Jim's?

CHAPTER 12.

The Way of the Transgressor.

"I 'VE been thinkin', you chaps—"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that remark at tea-time on Saturday. The St. Jim's Boy Scouts had been on a long run that afternoon—beating the neighbourhood for Tickey Tapp. They had discovered no sign of him.

The Terrible Three and Talbot were at tea in Study No. 6 with Blake & Co. They were hungry after the scout run, and in great spirits. They felt that their drastic measures with Tickey Tapp had been a success.

For Tom Merry had even gone to the length of inquiring at the Green Man for him, and had learned from Mr. Jolliffe that Tickey Tapp had left.

"You've been whatting?" inquired Monty Lowther, with an expression of incredulity.

"Thinkin', deah boy!"

"Tell us another," said Lowther.

"I regard you as an ass, Lowthah! I have been thinkin'. We have been successful—I considah that we have handled this mattah remarkably well. My ideah has worked out all right."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.

"It was my ideah to wag that wottah till he travellid off. We have done it, and he is gone. I am not likely, of course, to bwag in any way, but I weally think you fellows might recognise that my ideah was a wippin' good one, and that I have superintended the mattah in a weally toppin' mannah!"

"Top-notch!" said Talbot, with a smile. "But what have you been thinking about? Don't startle us like that without explaining the results."

"Weally, Talbot—howevah, I have been thinkin', as I remarked. I have been thinkin' about Goah. Of course, I am down on Goah—he has acted like a wotten blackguard! But I weally think it's a time we weassured him."

"Eh?"

"I am suah that he is wepentant. He has been in fightwully low spiwits for days, and is always moochin' off somebwh by himself. Of course, he feels fightwully ashamed of havin' been caught actin' in that caddish mannah last Wednesday. We have very propobly given him the cold shoudlah. But I think it is time to chuck it. I weally considah we might tell Goah that we wegard bygones as bygones, and weassure him about it, you know."

"It's a fact that he's been awfully down in the mouth THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 376.

OUR COMPANION "THE BOYS' FRIENDS," "THE MAGNET," "THE BREADTHOUGHT," "THE PENNY POPULAR," "CHUCKLES," 10,
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since Wednesday," said Manners. "I've noticed it. He's been in hot water with Linton every day over his lessons."

"Yaas; and that appeahs to betray a state of wepentance and remorse, you know."

"More likely worrying over the money he's lost!" granted Blake.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

"Go hon!" said Tom Merry. "I suppose that rotter Tickey Tapp cleaned him right out, and he's stony—and he owes Crooke money. Crooke was asking him for it yesterday, with a dozen fellows within hearing, and Gore couldn't settle. Can't say I pity him much—he had a pretty severe lesson before, and he ought to have had more sense."

"Yaas; but if he is sowwy now it's up to us to let bygones be bygones," said Arthur Augustus. "It makes a fellow feel wotten to feel that chaps are lookin' down on him, and does not encourage him to be decent. So I was goin' to suggest that we fetch him in heah to tea."

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Blake.

Blake did not like Gore.

"It would be only the decent thing, Blake," said D'Arcy. "It would be wathah a bothah pewpaps, but—"

"Oh, I don't mind. Wire in."

"Vewy good! You fellahs don't object?"

"My deah chap," said Monty Lowther, "bring him in, by all means. We'll kiss him on his baby brow, and—"

"I wrefuse to have my wippin' ideah widicled, Lowthah. Talbot, as you are Goah's study-mate, may I wequest you to fetch him in?"

"You may," said Talbot, laughing.

Talbot went good-naturally to fetch Gore. As a matter of fact, Talbot was a little concerned about his study-mate.

Whether it was repentance or remorse or regret for lost cash, certainly Gore had been in very low water for the last few days.

Talbot and his chums were far from suspecting what was really the matter with him. The last few days had been a long-draw-out horror to George Gore.

He had found a hiding-place for the stolen notes—in a crevice of the old, ivy-mantled tower; but, once they were hidden there, he had been assailed by a terror that they might be discovered by chance. After a few hours he had sought them and removed them again. Again and again he had hidden them, and each time that haunting terror was renewed; each time he had unearthed them once more, and carried them about with him for a time, while he thought and thought to find a new and safer place of concealment.

The state of the wretched boy's mind during these days may be better imagined than described. He neglected his work, with consequent trouble in the Form-room; he lost his appetite; he grew pale and distraught and morose. He "mooched" away by himself, and hardly spoke a word to anyone. Then sometimes a fear that his conduct would be remarked, commented upon, and suspected drove him to make efforts to appear natural, and he would seek his friends and talk to them vaguely, almost distractedly, till their surprised looks apprised him that he was giving away his troubled state of mind. Every day he feared to hear that the Head had missed the money from his safe; but the discovery was not made. When would it come? Every day seemed a century long to him. Tuesday seemed more distant than ever—the day when he would be able to relieve himself of his burden.

He was in his study, plunged in gloomy thought, when Talbot came in. Only half an hour before he had taken the notes once more from a secret hiding-place, and they were in his pocket again. That time they had been slipped into a crevice in the old crypt; and he had heard some fellows talking of exploring the crypt, and he had rushed away to remove the hidden notes in a panic. He felt that he could not endure the strain much longer. Sooner or later he felt a horrible dread that the secret would fall from his tongue in a feverish, unguarded lethargy.

Talbot looked at him, and wondered. At that moment George Gore's face betrayed all the enking misery that was eating at his heart. What was the matter with

him? Gore made a sudden movement before Talbot could speak. His face fell into his hands, and he burst into a racking sob.

Talbot started forward.

"Gore, what's the matter, old fellow?"

Gore started at the sound of his voice, as if electrified. He raised his face from his hands. His eyes were dry and burning. He fixed a look on Talbot of fury and hatred. At that moment the wretched boy hated the whole world, and hated himself.

"Leave me alone!" he snarled. "What do you want?"

"You're in trouble," said Talbot quietly.

"I'm not."

"I won't ask you any questions, Gore; but if a chap could help you—"

Gore burst into a wild laugh.

"Help me! I'm past helping!" His fury passed, he flung himself into the chair again, and a dry sob shook him from head to foot. "Yes; if you want to know, I'm in trouble. Let me alone."

"You won't tell me what it is?"

Gore shivered.

"No, I won't!" His passionate anger revived again.

"What are you asking me questions for? Let me alone! Mind your own business!" He sprang to his feet again, and clenched his hands, and advanced towards Talbot, savage and threatening. "Hang you! Let me alone, I say!"

Talbot looked at him, and stepped quietly out of the study. He had not come there to quarrel with Gore, and Gore would have struck him the next moment. Gore slammed the door furiously after him.

"Is he comin'?" asked Arthur Augustus, as Talbot came back into Study No. 6.

Talbot shook his head.

"Pewwaps I'd bettah go and ask him," suggested Arthur Augustus.

"I'd leave him alone just now, if I were you," said Talbot quietly.

"Bai Jove! Heah he is!"

George Gore passed the open doorway of the study, tramping towards the stairs. Arthur Augustus stepped out and called to him.

"Goah, dear boy, come in to tea, will you?"

Gore did not reply or turn his head. Arthur Augustus whipped after him, and laid a kindly hand on his shoulder, stopping him.

"Goah, deah boy— Bai Jove!"

Without a word, Gore struck him violently on the chest, sending him reeling back, and strode away. Arthur Augustus collapsed against the wall, gasping with astonishment and rage.

"Bai Jove! The wottah! The cad! I'll—"

Talbot's hand fell on his arm as he was about to rush after Gore.

"Hold on, Gussy!"

"The uttah wottah has stwuck me!"

"Come back into the study."

"Wats! I am goin'!"

"Gussy, old man, you'd better come."

Something in Talbot's look and tone had the effect of calming Arthur Augustus.

"Is the chap off his wockah?" he asked.

"I think he's very near it," said Talbot.

"Oh, vewy well!"

Ten in Study No. 6 did not end very cheerfully that evening. Gore's strange conduct worried the juniors. Even those who liked him least felt concerned about him.

In the old quadrangle Gore of the Shell was tramping to and fro under the elms in the dusk, pale, distracted, with burning eyes. How was it to end? Hope was dead in the breast of the reckless boy who had hurried so lightly upon the road to ruin, and had nearly reached the goal!

THE END.

(Next Wednesday's grand long, complete story of Talbot and Tom Merry is entitled "For Another's Sake!" Order your copy of the "Gem Library" now.)

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SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS.

Bob Hall, a fine, strapping young fellow, succeeds in joining a famous Hussar regiment, known as the Die Harde. After Bob has been in the regiment for some time his neo-dwell cousin, Captain Lascelles, joins also. Bob finds that, so far from being friendly, Lascelles is constantly endeavouring to get him into trouble, with the object of having him dismissed from the Service in disgrace. Bob, however, with the help of his many friends, is successful in defeating the villain's schemes. Bob comes into contact with the Earl of Dalkey, who finds that Bob is some connection of his family, and promises to have investigations made. It transpires that Bob is heir to a large fortune, which Lascelles, in default of Bob being able to prove that he is the son of his father, intends to claim. After plotting the downfall of two other officers in the regiment, and being exposed by Bob, Lascelles is compelled to send in his papers and resign his commission. Bob Hall is then promoted to the rank of sergeant, and, having to go to London on business, hears that Lascelles is arranging to marry the daughter of the Earl of Dalkey for the sake of her money. He wires to Lieutenant Haines, and they are able to prevent the marriage. Some time after, Bob is greatly astonished at being told that his father, whom everyone had believed to be dead, is still alive, and, later, in company with an old friend of his father's, sees him in the street. He is seated in a runaway motor-car, at the wheel of which Lascelles is sitting. Bob loses sight of the swift-moving car, but manages to see its number. He goes to Scotland Yard, where the owner of the car is immediately identified.

(Now go on with the Story.)

On the Track of Lascelles!

"He's the proprietor of a garage down Holborn way," a stout police-inspector remarked, as he closed the ponderous tome. "I s'pose I'd better send someone down there to nuke inquiries. Like as not he'll disclaim all liability, and as there's been no mischief done I can't say whether proceedings will be taken or not."

The inspector slowly turned and began a confabulation with some other plain clothes men. Evidently they were in no hurry to proceed to the examination of an offence which, from their point of view, was of an insignificant nature. Bob clutched O'Rafferty by the arm.

"Let's get out of here and go down to Holborn on our own account," he suggested hurriedly. "These chaps won't be there for hours. Wait a second till I find out the fellow's name, then we'll scoot!"

O'Rafferty waited by the door till Bob had obtained the information he sought, and then they both hastened to the street. Hailing a taxi, Bob directed the chauffeur to drive as quickly as possible, and a few minutes later the two friends were entering the garage.

The long building was brilliant with electric light, motors of every size, and propelled by all kinds of driving power, were ranged along the walls, or were being cleaned by the experienced mechanics after their day's work. Others kept coming in, and the whole scene was of workmanlike method and discipline. Bob pushed his way towards a small office on one side, and inquired for the manager. That individual was telephoned for, and appeared shortly afterwards, emerging from the works at the back of the premises.

Bob mentioned the number of the motor-car, and inquired if it belonged to the works.

"That's so," the manager replied. "Why do you ask?" "Because we're deeply interested in a couple of gentlemen we saw in it less than an hour ago," the lad replied, feeling his way carefully, for he wanted to elicit certain information, and he knew that the manager might be slow to disclose the identity of those to whom he rented his cars.

"Oh, that's so affair of mine!" the man grinned. "I only take care that the driver has a certificate, and that the borrower is good for the money. Besides, I couldn't give you much information in any case, for neither of the gentlemen was known to me."

"Well, I'm afraid you're in the way of trouble," Bob replied. "And as both gentlemen are relations of mine, I'd naturally like to help them out of a fix. The car was being driven furiously along Fleet Street and the Strand, and the police are already making investigations. That won't do you much good, you know. I'm prepared, however, to help you if you answer my questions, which are very simple. Did the elderly gentleman come here, and, if so, was he in company with the other one?"

"Of course he came here with the other gent," the manager replied, round-eyed. "Why, the elderly one was more in a hurry to get the car than him who hired it. What was his name, though? Hi, Bill, who was that as took out the car an hour ago? You remember his name? No! Well, inquire at the office."

"Mr. Sinclair was his name," the man shouted from the office door.

"Ay, that's it," the manager assented. "The elder gent didn't give his name, but he was in a mortal hurry."

Bob and O'Rafferty stared at one another.

"Did the gentleman say how long he'd require the car?" the doctor inquired.

"He's taken it for three days, and paid his money down. He's going into the country."

"Where?" "Well, he said he was going to Hampshire first, but he might travel farther."

"You said the elderly gentleman was in a hurry," Bob remarked. "How do you know that?"

"How do I know it? Well, that was easy enough. Why, he couldn't stand still, he was all of a fidget. He thought the car would never be ready, and fussed about that much that I was real glad to see him off the premises. He kept on saying that they'd be late, and the other one had hard work to keep him quiet and prevent him going to the station and taking a train instead. Only he was told that he'd have a walk of twelve miles when he got to Winchester, or nothing would have induced him to wait."

"But why was he in such a hurry?" Bob persisted. "Did he say why he was so anxious to be off?"

"Of course he did, and I was sorry for him, too," the man replied. "Isn't he going to see a relation as is dying? If you're a relative of his you ought to know that!"

Bob's face went grey. He stepped forward, and, grasping the manager by the arm, he almost shook him as he asked his last question.

"A relative!" he gasped. "Did he tell you who he was?"

"His son, whom he hadn't seen since he was a child."

The lad staggered backwards with a groan.

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OUR COMPANION "THE BOYS' FRIEND,"

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"THE DREADHOUGHT,"

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PAPER:

Every Monday.

Every Monday.

Every Thursday.

Every Friday.

Every Saturday, 2

"Can't you see how that cur Lascelles has managed to entrap my poor old father!" he cried hoarsely to O'Rafferty. "He told him I was dying, and the old gentleman, who had long since given me up for lost, was transported with anguish. Oh, Lascelles, you white-livered villain, I'll pay you out for this!" Doctor, let's hurry to Winchester! Come, for Heaven's sake—come!"

Bob Seeks His Father.

"Winchester!" O'Rafferty cried. "Why did Lascelles hit on that place, I wonder? There must be some reason! The scoundrel has confederates in that locality, and he knows of some house where he can imprison your father without attracting attention. Take a pull on yourself, and let's think this thing out."

Bob was terribly excited, but by a supreme effort he managed to master his agitation. The events of the day had shaken him considerably. To hear for the first time that his father was alive, then to see him, and finally to learn that Lascelles was deceiving the old gentleman to his doom under the pretence that he was taking him to see his long-lost son, were a succession of incidents calculated to shake the strongest nerve. But all depended now on energy and resource, and the young soldier was always at his best in a moment of crisis.

"Yes, we must get what information we can," he agreed, so quietly that O'Rafferty stared at the change that had come over him. "Let's call a taxi. Lascelles once tried to do for me in London with the aid of a couple of scoundrels. If we find that they are not in their old haunts I will strongly suspect that he has employed them again and sent them on ahead to Winchester. This is not a job he could hope to carry through by himself."

"Then where do you mean to drive to now?"

"To Gwalior Street, in the neighbourhood of the Mile End Road. Ah! There's a likely-looking driver. Jump in, O'Rafferty, and let's be off!"

The taxi sped down Holborn and on to the Mile End Road, and when Bob reached the spot where he had alighted on that fateful occasion some months before, when he had been assaulted and left for dead, he paid the driver, and led the way down the side-streets which he once had traversed without suspicion of the trap into which he was being decoyed. To-night, however, all was different; he was not expected, nor would his arrival be welcome.

The house in Gwalior Street still showed a glare through the faint light, and the lad knocked peremptorily. Once more the door was opened, but this time Bob did not wait to parley; catching the man who flung it open by the throat, the young sergeant tripped him up and held him down on his back in the hall.

"Cleave the door, O'Rafferty!" he whispered hoarsely. "That's right. Now, let's drag this fellow into the room yonder."

Bob hauled his captive along the floor, reaching the front sitting-room in a couple of strides, and there O'Rafferty struck a match and lit a candle which was on the mantelpiece. The worthy doctor up to this had been so amazed at Bob's method of doing business as to be rendered speechless. Now, however, he found his tongue.

"Talk of Irishmen! Why, they ain't in it with you," he grinned. "If this is the way you chaps over here go to work when you want to find out anything, then I guess I'm better in my village in Wicklow. Why, you don't even get the chap a chance. If you'd asked him a question, and he'd turned nasty, or—"

"I know him, the scoundrel!" Bob interjected quickly. "He'd have given the alarm if he'd had time. Now, you villain, you know who I am, I can see that from your face, and I haven't come here just to chat with you. I want a straight answer to a straight question, and I'm going to get it. Has Lascelles been here lately?"

The man was spluttering and quaking, but as Bob made his inquiry he shot a quick glance at the lad out of his shifty eyes.

"Not to my knowledge," he growled. "What's more, I don't see how he could come here unbeknownst to me. I ain't having too much of your sauce, though, and so I tell you, I've nothing to do with the folks as live here, and—"

"You're one of the gang!" Bob rapped out contemptuously. "I know enough about you already to have the police mark you down, if I liked. Don't try any bluster, for you'll find it won't pay. Are Blunt and Smithwick on the premises? Ah, I see you're surprised that I know their names! Well, you may be sure I made it my business to find out some few things about them after the way the cuts handled me. Answer my question—are they here or not?"

"No, they ain't."

"When did they go, then?"

"They haven't been here for a couple of days."

Bob looked steadily at the deceitful, shifty face before him. Then he spoke.

"Keep that chap here, and hit him over the head if he dares to escape or make a row," he said. "I'm going upstairs."

"But you may come across a gang of 'em there. One chap can't tackle half a dozen," the doctor protested. "If you're going into danger that way, then I'll be there, too. It's not likely—"

"If there's a row, you'll hear it soon enough," Bob replied. "Then you can come to my assistance. I know where those scoundrels live, and I won't do anything rash, you may bet your life on that. There's too much at stake to run any risks."

As he spoke, Bob slipped out of the room, and O'Rafferty thereby was unable to urge his remonstrance any longer. Mounting the stairs quickly but noiselessly, the young sergeant reached the second landing, and flung open the door of the room in which he had been assaulted on a prior occasion. It was in darkness, so, standing on the threshold, he struck a match and held it over his head. The room was empty.

He walked in and lit a lamp. Then he gazed around. Everything there gave an indication of present usage. There were the remains of a meal on the table; an evening paper of the previous day lay on a chair; some clothes were carelessly lying about; the room still smelt of tobacco. The lad passed, undecided what next to do. Should he hide himself, and wait for the return of the occupant? But time was passing. If he went down to Winchester without any clue as to his father's whereabouts, he might search ineffectually for days. If, on the other hand, there was no chance of obtaining a clue, then the sooner he started on his journey the better in all ways.

As he looked around, a crumpled envelope lying on the table caught his eye, and he stepped across and spread it out. Bending down, he gazed at it eagerly. Ah! It was as he had fancied. He knew Lascelles' handwriting of old, when the latter was an officer in the Die Hards. Now he recognised it on the envelope which was addressed to Blunt. There also was the postmark of the previous date. Then Lascelles was still in communication with the villains. Evidently, it would be well to make sure if they were still in London before the lad himself started for Winchester.

Bob shoved the envelope in his pocket. As he did so his arms were gripped from behind, a muffer was flung over his mouth, and he was drawn backwards. He kicked and struggled but, being thrown suddenly off his balance, his efforts to free himself were short and hopeless. He was borne to the ground, a gag was forced into his mouth, and whilst the scoundrel Blunt knelt on his chest, his confederate Smithwick pinioned his arms and legs.

"Ha! We've got him!" Blunt grinned as he rose to his feet, and gazed down at his helpless prisoner. "This ought to mean fifty quid apiece to us, old pard. The cap'n will fair chuckle when he hears that he's bagged the 'brace of 'em. Now, what next? The young cur is a hot 'un, and I'd like to get him off my hands without delay. Somehow he's a bit too tricky to let a cove feel certain he'll be able to hold him."

"Garn! He can't give us the slip now. We'll get the cart and dump him in it. He can lie here till we're ready."

"No fear. I ain't going to leave him here. We'll carry him down to the yard, and there he can stay whilst we yoke up. Catch hold of him, and let's hook it out of this."

Bob listened eagerly as the ruffians spoke, and rejoiced when he heard that they intended to carry him out of the house. O'Rafferty downstairs would be on the alert, and would be certain to come out of the room when he heard the noise. By the way, though, how did his enemies manage to steal on him so stealthily? the lad wondered. That was strange. They could not be the pair of awkward, blundering scoundrels he had hitherto thought.

His hopes, however, were quickly dispelled. To his amazement, Blunt walked over to the press and opened the door, which was built into the wall. The last time that the ruffians had disappeared that way the lad had already been rendered unconscious, so that he did not know of this secret entrance to the room. Now he understood how they had crept on him so noiselessly. His back had been turned as they had entered.

Lifting him up, they carried him out on to a passage-way, and down a flight of stone steps. Thus they emerged into the basement of the old building, and so into the yard at the back. Blunt led out a horse from the shed and yoked the animal to a cart, into which Bob was then lifted and covered with sack. The gates were opened, Smithwick took the reins, and drove out into the lane-way, from which he turned in a few minutes into Gwalior Street; and, thus hidden from the sight

of all, the lad was driven away, without even attracting the attention of the police on duty.

Meanwhile, O'Rafferty, sitting on the table in the lower room; and keeping a vigilant eye on his captive, waited anxiously for Bob's return. Minutes passed, and still he heard no sound, for the short scuffle had been on the second story, and the noise had not penetrated to the hall. At last the doctor could stand the suspense no longer; the tense stillness was harder to bear than any uproar. Grasping his stick, he stood up and addressed the man facing him.

"See here!" he growled. "I'm going upstairs, and you're to come along with me. If anything has happened to that friend of mine, I'll hold you responsible. I'll tell the police, and have you arrested. So you'd better run straight if you value your skin. Now march in front of me, and don't try to get beyond the length of my arm, either. If you do, I'll bring my stick down on your head. Show the way, and look sharp!"

Following his prisoner, O'Rafferty mounted the stairs, examined all the rooms on the first landing, found them empty, and then ascended to the second story. He entered the room in which Bob had been captured a few minutes before, and gazed around. The lamp was still burning. The doctor was puzzled. Turning to his companion, he thought he detected an expression of surprise in his features, so, without more ado, the Irishman walked to the door, and locked and bolted it. Then he returned to the spot where the other was standing.

"Just listen to me, my beauty!" he growled. "You and I are alone, and that's a thunderin' fine stick I have in my fist. Dr. O'Rafferty is a man who says what he means, and as sure as you and I are standing here, I'll thrash you till every bone in your body is sore if you don't tell me what's happened. My friend has disappeared, and he wouldn't do that on his own account without letting me know. No humbug, now! You can tell me if you like, and if you don't choose—well, I've got a method of persuasion that I never knew to fail."

As he spoke, the doctor gripped the scoundrel by the coat-collar, and, raising his stick, he prepared, without more ado, to carry out his threat.

Kidnaped.

Through the dark night a motor-car raced along at break-neck speed, Lascelles gripping the wheel and gazing ahead, whilst Bob's father sat beside him in a condition of feverish anxiety. On and on the car thundered, out past Aldershot, along the roads Lascelles-knew so well, when he had been stationed there with the Die Harids. A sudden turn, a slight mistake, an obstacle of any kind, and both occupants would have been hurled to destruction. Yet the old man displayed most eagerness for speed. He had faced danger often before, and had never quailed before it.

As will be remembered, Lascelles had raced at break-neck speed through crowded London, and now, when the police were endeavouring to track him down, he had passed out of the country, and for the time, at least, he was safe. And no one rejoiced more than Alec Hall, who sat next him, for did not the latter think that Lascelles was risking all things in order that he might carry the old man to Winchester to see Bob whilst yet there was time? Such was the cowardly artifice used by the scoundrel to decoy the old soldier to his ruin.

"More pace! Put on more pace, Lascelles!" old Alec Hall growled. "Even whilst we are on the road, my boy, whom I have not known since childhood, may pass away for ever. It would drive me mad if that happened. I long to see him, to explain all, to nurse him back to health, if possible, to—"

"Don't worry; we'll be there in time," Lascelles replied, as the car tore down a declivity and shot like a living thing to the crest of a hill. "We're going as fast as the motor will take us, and its engines are forty-horse power. Keep quiet, and don't distract me. It takes all I know to keep to the road on a night like this."

The car tore on. Alec Hall for some minutes obeyed his nephew's injunction, and then his anxiety got the better of him again.

"How did you hear that Bob was ill? Tell me about him," he began. "I'd like to know what he's like. Is he tall and strong, like you? Is he clever? You say he's a soldier. Well, I'm glad of that! The old-fighting spirit was bred in the lad, and it had to come on top. What a life he must have had, though, struggling and feuding for himself since he was a nipper! You've been kind to him, Lascelles—yes, I'm sure of that! A man who could act as you're doing now is the sort who'd always stick to a relation. My boy, of course, was poor, but I'm sure that made no difference in your treatment towards him."

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 375.

OUR COMPANION "THE BOYS' FRIEND,"

"THE MAGNET,"

"THE BREADTHROAT,"

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"

"CHUCKLES,"

Every Monday.

Every Monday.

Every Thursday.

Every Friday.

Every Saturday.

Now Aldershot was left far behind, and the car was scudding towards Winchester. It rocked and swayed from side to side as, flashing past the milestones, it drew nearer and nearer to its destination. Twelve miles or so from the town Lascelles applied the brake, and brought the motor slowly round a narrow lane-way. Then at half-speed he ran it along an incline, which it scaled, raced it down a slight hill, and finally stopped it outside a farmhouse.

"We've reached the end of the journey," he said. "You'd better get down."

Alec Hall, cold and numb, stepped off the car on to the road. The scene was a dismal one. Far away on either side the flat fields stretched out to the horizon, with gaunt trees here and there rising towards the sky. Not another house was in sight; not even the barking of a dog in the distance gave a hint of man's presence in that dreary locality. The farmhouse itself stood out bleak and ominous against the gloomy background; there was not a ray of light to act as a beacon or give evidence that it was inhabited. Yet the old man hastily shook the rickety gate, and it yawned back on its creaking hinges.

He stumbled eagerly up the path, and Lascelles, leaving the motor on the lane-way, followed in grim silence. Alec Hall pressed the catch, and, tripping over the step, he staggered into the kitchen.

"Where's Bob?" was all he gasped. "We'd better go quiet, or else we may make a row. Perhaps he's sleeping."

Lascelles struck a match.

"This part of the house isn't used," he remarked coolly. "Go on up those stairs, and you'll find something different. That's right. Take your time, whilst I hold the light so that you can see. That room there, to the left. In you go; that's your bed-room. Now wait there whilst I find if you are ready for your reception."

Alec Hall opened the door and entered a large bed-room. Two men were sitting by the log fire, and the windows had their shutters barred and heavy hangings across the splayed to prevent the light from emerging through any chinks. The room was fairly comfortable, and, taking the strangers for a couple of the folk who owned the farm, and who had been kind to his son, the old man hurriedly advanced, holding out his hand.

"I must thank you for all your kindness to my boy," he cried impulsively. "What is the latest news? I hope you will be able to report favourably."

The two scoundrels shuffled uncomfortably. "Don't know as there's much news to tell!" one of them grunted. "Say, gov'nor, just take off your overcoat and sit down. We're going to look after you and—"

Alec Hall started. Outside, the motor had suddenly begun to throb, and even as he turned his head to listen he could hear it moving off with a rush and a shriek.

"The motor!" he cried. "Someone is tampering with it! Where's Captain Lascelles? I must tell him that—"

He moved as if he would leave the room, but one of the men sprang to the door and put his back to it.

"Not so fast!" he growled. "That's Captain Lascelles as is going off, but he'll be back to-morrow. Meantime, you're to stay here. We'll look after you, as I told you, and if you behave—"

"But my son!" the old gentleman cried, in amazement. "What does this mean? My boy is here and ill, and you say you are going to look after me! Who are you? Why has my nephew left so unexpectedly? Explain yourself, fellow, or else—"

"Your son ain't here! That was all a bit of talk to get you into custody without a row!" said one of the men, with brutal frankness. "If ye behave yourself we'll treat you civil, so there! We're keepers, we are, and—"

"Keepers!" Alec Hall thundered. "Do you think I'm insane? Do you mean that I've been decoyed here? Do ye dare to tell me that my nephew—"

"Captain Lascelles knows what he's doing, and if ye deal fair with him when he comes back you'll get your liberty again," the ruffian growled. "If ye don't do as he asks you'll get more'n you bargain for: that's straight!"

The two scoundrels locked the door, and Alec Hall was left alone. The plucky old soldier was unable for some moments to fully realise the depth of depravity of which he had been made the victim. Neither could he think out any reason which would account for Lascelles' outrageous behaviour. When at last the full extent of the scoundrel's infamous conduct was borne in upon him he raged and stormed, vainly endeavouring to burst out from his prison. But his efforts were futile; he was securely caged, and the long night slowly dragged its length without bringing him hope or relief.

(Another grand instalment of this fine military serial will be published in next week's "GEN.")

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

WASTED.

Jock was sitting having a peaceful pipe, when his friend Sandy looked in to congratulate him on being the winner in the Thousand Pound Lottery.

"Mairvellous slice o' luck—eh, mon?"
"Ay, ay, Sandy. But I wad hae ye ken I've lost a bawbee ower it."

"Hoo was that, Jock?"
"I bowt twa teekits where one wad hae doon!"—Sent in by Norman Avery, Durham.

REALISTIC.

In America it is customary to describe anyone who stares about him as a "rubber"—a contraction of "rubber-neck."

An Englishman, who was travelling in America, one day found himself seated in a train opposite a woman who was carrying a very ugly baby. The baby seemed to fascinate the traveller—he couldn't take his eyes off it.

The child's mother began to be annoyed after a time at the persistent stare, and, in the hope that the Englishman would desist, exclaimed:

"Rubber!"
The Englishman, however, was not impressed by this epithet, as he didn't know the subtleties of the American language.

"Thank goodness!" he said. "I thought it was real."—Sent in by Miss Hilda Parker, Forest Gate, E.

MYSTERIOUS.

At a certain out-of-the-way railway-station in Wiltshire a number of soldiers were standing on the platform, waiting for the arrival of their train.

Near by were a farm-haid and his wife.
"I say, Garge," she said, after looking at the men in wonderment for some time, "their's somethin' I can't understand about they salgers."

"Ay, lass," replied her husband. "What be it?"
"I can't think how they get their laigs into they twisted trousers."—Sent in by F. Lucas, Warminster.

EITHER WAY WOULD DO.

"Stranger," said a benighted American traveller, as he came upon a raw-looking settler at the door of a log-hut, "which is the road to Oshkosh?"

"Waal," responded the man, "I guess thar's two of 'em from hereabouts."

"Which is the better one?"
"Ain't much difference.

Both on 'em's infarnal bad. Take which you like, afore you're got ha'f-way you'll wish you'd tuck 't'other."—Sent in by A. Hammond, Kentish Town, N.W.

NOT GUILTY!

Mistress: "Bridget, what ever, becomes of the cutlery? I'm continually missing some. Really, I suspect the dustmen as they come through the scullery."

Boy: "Faik, in a m. you're wrong, then, entirely! They're too honest at all. When they brought back three knives last week that they'd found in the dustbin."—Sent in by Cyril Madeley, Stafford.

NO LONG WORDS WANTED.

Some time ago the son of an American millionaire railway-director was, through his father's influence, given a position of some importance on one of the largest railways in the West. He had just graduated from college, and in the orders which he from time to time issued to men under him always made use of the longest and most unusual words. This habit led to some expensive blunders, and, the matter coming before the general manager, he suggested a change in style to the young official in the following letter:

"In promulgating your esoteric cogitations, and in articulating your superficial sentimentalities and amicable, philosophical or psychological observations, beware of platitudinous ponderosity. Let your conversational communication possess a clarified conciseness, a compacted comprehensiveness, a coalescent consistency, and a concatenated cogency. Eschew all conglomeration of stultulent garrulity, jejune babblement, and asinine affectation. Let your extemporaneous decantings and voracious veracity without rhodomontade or thrasoconical bombast. Sedulously avoid all polysyllabic profundity, pompous prolixity, psittacous vacuity, ventriloquial verbosity, and vauquois rapidity. Shun double entendre, prurient jocosity, and pestiferous profanity, obscure or apparent. In other words, talk plainly, briefly, naturally, sensibly, purely, and truthfully. Keep from slang, don't put on airs, say what you mean, mean what you say, and don't use big words."

The young official took the hint, and changed his style.—Sent in by David Evans, Liverpool.

WHAT HE FORGOT.

The following story is told of a detachment of Kitchener's Army when in camp.

On the first night, when they "turned in," they were instructed how to lie down and roll themselves in their blankets, and make themselves generally comfortable.

An officer, who had been fussing around a good deal, and had had a lot to say about the arrangements, was reminded by a satirical civilian that he had forgotten something.

"What's that?" he snapped.
"You haven't kissed them good-night," was the reply.—Sent in by Miss G. Bond, Bewdley.

INTERRUPTED.

"You ought to have seen Mr. Marshall when he called on Dolly the other night," remarked Johnny to his sister's young man. "He looked fine, sitting there, with his arms—"

"Johnny!" gasped his sister, with her face the colour of a boiled lobster.

"Well, so he did!" persisted Johnny. "He had his arm

"John!" screamed his mother.

"Why," whined the boy, "I was—"

"John," bellowed his father, "leave the room at once!"
Johnny left the room, crying as he did so.

"I was only going to say he had his Army clothes on!" he snuffed.—Sent in by Miss B. Baylis, Blackpool.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 376.

As the "GEM" Storyette Competition has proved so popular, it has been decided to run this novel feature in conjunction with our new Companion Paper,

THE BOYS' FRIEND, 1d.,

Published every Monday,

In order to give more of our readers a chance of winning one of our useful Money Prizes.

If you know a really funny joke, or a short, interesting paragraph, send it along (on a post-card) before you forget it, and address it to: The Editor, THE BOYS' FRIEND and GEM, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, E.C.

Look out for YOUR Prize Storyette in next week's GEM or BOYS' FRIEND.

THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to —
 EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY,
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON, E.C.
 OUR THREE COMPANION PAPERS!
 "THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
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 EVERY MONDAY EVERY FRIDAY EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday—

"FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE!"

By Martin Clifford.

Our next grand, long, complete story of St. Jim's, entitled as above, will receive a rousing welcome from my chums, the incidents it contains being of a most absorbing character. George Gore, the cad of the Shell, who has taken to the path of dishonour by stealing from the Head's safe in order to discharge a debt, appeals to Talbot in his hour of remorse, and the one-time prince of cracksmen nobly volunteers to get Gore out of his scrape. Talbot's act of generosity, however, leads to terrible results for himself, and there is a dramatic sequel to the action of the handsome Shell fellow who made the supreme sacrifice.

"FOR ANOTHER'S SAKE!"

THE TONE OF "THE GEM."

An Essex Chum's Emphatic Opinion.

Although I feel certain in my own mind that the standard of our popular little paper is as high as it ever was, I am always pleased to have the opinion of my reader-chums on such an important subject, and that was the reason why I published on my Chat Page a short time ago a couple of contradictory letters, the writers of which were unconsciously at war with each other, the requirements of each party being entirely different.

Going through my morning postbag, I have just brought to light the following loyal letter, which I have no doubt will find favour with the majority of "Gemites":

"Leigh-on-Sea.

"Dear Editor,—I notice in this week's issue of the GEM you publish two letters from readers who are complaining that the paper is not as good now as it used to be. I should just like to say that both your correspondents are 'talking out of their hats.'

"I have read the GEM for many years, and am of the opinion that it is better, if possible, every week. The Talbot stories are superb. I do think it unfair of chaps to keep writing grumbling instead of cheering letters at a time like this. If they never have anything worse to grumble at in life than the ripping GEM and 'Magnet' stories, they will lead a happy existence. I have never written to you before, but this week I thought I would, as I feel very strongly on this matter. He must be a very narrow-minded person who does not realise that it must be very difficult for you to please everybody. All the chaps I know who buy the GEM are quite satisfied with it, and wish me to add their good wishes to mine for the continued success of your papers. Personally I think the old paper would be better without such readers as 'Indignant.' If a chap has no confidence in the Editor of the paper he reads, I wonder he cares to buy it.

"I notice 'Six Jolly Fishers' say they have read the companion papers for the past two years; but perhaps if he had read them as long as I have they would not be so quick to write scathing letters.

"I read the companion papers whilst at school, and although I have been in business for a long time, I still continue to read them, and shall do so until they really do get rotten—which, I am sure, will never happen. I do hope you will excuse my writing such a lengthy epistle. I just wanted you to know that where there are two grumblers there are hundreds of staunch 'Gemites' ready to rally round the old paper.

"If you think this letter might do the above-mentioned grumblers a bit of good, you are quite at liberty to publish it in the GEM.

"Once more wishing you the best of luck, I remain,

"Yours faithfully,
 "SATISFIED."

I think "Satisfied" most sincerely for his staunch support and sensible comments.

My readers may take it from me that the quality and general excellence of this favourite story-paper will in nowise diminish. I am making it my life-work to provide British boys with a good, healthy class of literature; and, provided I continue to have the whole-hearted assistance of such readers as "Satisfied," my efforts in the direction named will be repaid a thousandfold.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

J. H. Jones (Johannesburg).—I sympathise with you in having your mails delayed, but your favourite paper must be all the sweeter when it does come.

F. H. Burns (N.S.W.).—I consider that the loyalty of Australia towards the Old Country is one of the most pleasing features of the present crisis.—The best stamp-collecting league with which I am acquainted is the "Gem" Exchange Circle, controlled by Mr. F. B. Bartlett, 82, Harcourt Road, Sheffield, England. You should write to him for full particulars.

F. Gonsalves (Shanghai).—The subscription in your case would be 7s. per annum.

"A Girl Reader" (Folkestone).—I was most interested to hear how the British Tommies enthused over the "Gem" Library. Sorry, but "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays" is long since out of print.

E. W. M.—You need not have hesitated to write to me, as I can assure you that nothing gives me greater pleasure than my readers' letters. In reply to your question, I incline to the belief that a good ventriloquist is born, not made. If it is your intention to cultivate the art, Messrs. Glaisier & Co., Charing Cross Road, London, W.C., will be pleased to supply you with a book on practical ventriloquism.

Beatrice Roeve (Nottingham).—Many thanks for your splendid letter.

J. D'Ambrósio (Hamilton).—As you will see, the "Gem" is now printed in larger type, so your parents need no longer object to your reading it on the grounds that it may impair your sight. Sorry to hear of your indisposition, and hope you have by this time bucked up and become fit again.

H. P. (Putney).—The fact that you were prejudiced against this paper in the past need not affect your present loyalty. I shall at all times be glad to hear from you. Levison's character is very unreliable, and his reforms have never extended over any considerable lapse of time.

Ethel Procter (Brixton).—The reader in question has now been satisfied. Thanks, however, for your offer.

B. M. (Southport).—The story in question is entitled "The Mystery of the Painted Room," but I am sorry to say it is now out of print.

Graham McGarrick (Maida Vale).—You will see that your suggestion has been duly adopted.

"Dublin Reader."—Lacy was the extraordinary cricketer you refer to. Many thanks for your good wishes. Like yourself, I expect a good many others would hardly care to speculate what Wednesday would be like without the "Gem." Hope I may always rely upon your loyal support.

THE EDITOR.

RHEUMATISM

GREAT FREE DISTRIBUTION of 4/6 BOXES of the REMARKABLE U.A.E. TREATMENT.



Hand of a lady, showing the position of the joints of Uric Acid, which cause the excruciating agonies of Rheumatism. Note the distorted fingers.



The same hand, showing the joints free from Uric Acid and the fingers in their natural shape.

I want everyone suffering from Rheumatism, Lumbago, Neuralgia, Sciatica or Gout to send me their names and addresses, so that I can send them **FREE a 4s. 6d. box** of the world-famous U.A.E. (Uric Acid Expeller). I want to convince every sufferer at my expense that U.A.E. does what thousands of so-called remedies have failed to accomplish—**ACTUALLY CURES RHEUMATISM, LUMBAGO, NEURALGIA, GOUT**, and all Uric Acid complaints. I know it does. I am sure of it, and I want you to know it and be sure of it.

You cannot coax Rheumatism out through the feet or skin with plasters or belts, you cannot tease it out with Liniments or Embrocations. **YOU MUST DRIVE THE URIC ACID—WHICH CAUSES THESE COMPLAINTS—OUT OF THE BLOOD.** This is just what this great Rheumatic Remedy U.A.E. does. It **EXPELS the CAUSE** and that is why it cures Rheumatism, Gout, Lumbago, Neuralgia, Sciatica, etc. It cures the aching muscles, swollen limbs, cramped and stiffened joints, and it cures quickly. **I CAN PROVE IT TO YOU.** It does not matter what form of Rheumatism you have or how long you have had it. It does not matter what remedies you have tried. U.A.E. and Uric Acid cannot exist together in the same blood. **READ OFFER BELOW and WRITE AT ONCE.** If you do not suffer yourself draw the attention of someone who does to this announcement.

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Simply fill in the Coupon at the foot (or write, mentioning this paper), and post me to-day, and I will send you a 4/6 box of U.A.E. to try, together with Analyst's certificate of purity, doctor's opinion, and a book entitled, "The Origin, Nature, and Treatment of Uric Acid Disorders," also a few extracts from the many thousands of testimonials received. Write at once; do not delay until your constitution is wrecked or your heart injured by Rheumatic poison.

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