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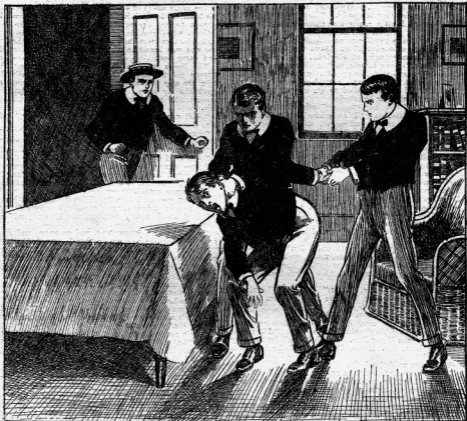


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LEVISON'S LAST CARD!

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

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



There were three fellows in the study—Levison, Mellish, and Lumley-Lumley. And the three presented a somewhat startling aspect. Levison of the Fourth was in the grasp of his study-mates, and they were bumping his head on the table. Ernest Levison was yelling. "Yow-ow-ow! Stoppit, you silly asses! Yooop!" (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER I.

A Gentleman To See Levison.

"G OOT afternoon, shentlemens!" There were four "shentlemens" adorning the old gateway of St. Jim's with their persons—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther and Talbot, of the Shell. The four juniors were talking cricket in general, and the Rookwood match in particular, when the soft, oily voice greeted them.

They stared at the oily gentleman. He was a little man, in a rusty black frock-coat, with a rusty silk hat, and a purple, aquiline nose. Tom Merry and Manners and Talbot regarded him with surprise. Monty Lowther, however, who was nothing if not a humorist, took off his straw hat and bowed, and replied:

"Goot afternoon, mine frent. Nice vezzer we're having, ain't it?"

Whereat Monty Lowther's chums smiled, and the

Next Wednesday:

"FINDING HIS LEVEL!" AND "THE CITY OF FLAME!"

gentleman with the aquiline nose smiled too—an oily smile.

"I have called to see a young shentleman," he explained.

"Take your choice," said Monty Lowther urbanely. "Here are four of the nicest young gentlemen at St. Jim's. This is Tom Merry—"

"I have not called to see Mishter Merry."

"Well, here's Manners."

"Mein young fren—"

"And here's Talbot, generally called 'the Toff,' on account of his first-class manners. Talbot, a shentleman to see you!"

"Fathed!" said Talbot, laughing.

"And here's myself, perhaps the nicest of the lot," said Monty Lowther modestly. "Any of my pals will tell you that I am a really nice shentleman. Now, vot can ve do for you, Mishter Solomons?"

"Mein name is not Sholomons. Mein name is Moses."

Tom Merry started a little. Moses was the name of a well-known moneylender at Wayland, and now that Tom Merry looked more closely at the little gentleman in black he remembered having seen him before. It was a puzzle what the Wayland moneylender could want at St. Jim's. If he had called to see any of the fellows there was trouble for somebody.

"I've heard that name before," said Monty Lowther, with grave politeness. "It's a—ahem!—a foreign name. So kind of you to call and see us, Mishter Moses. Vat can ve do for you? Look at zis splendid jacket." Lowther took hold of Tom Merry's Eton jacket and held it up to view. "Look at dat! It vill fit you like ze paper on ze wall, and only tree-and-seeks."

"Shut up!" said Tom Merry, jerking his jacket away from the playful Lowther. "What do you want here, Mr. Moses?"

"I have called to see a young shentleman," said Mr. Moses, still oily, but very determined.

"Not one of us?" asked Lowther, in a disappointed tone. "Who's the lucky dog?"

"Mishter Levison."

"Levison of the Fourth?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yesh."

Tom gave a quick glance round. Fortunately there was nobody else near the gate, and Taggies was in his lodge. The juniors drew closer to Mr. Moses, to screen him, as it were, from the view of fellows in the quadrangle.

"This won't do, Mr. Moses," said Tom hurriedly. "You can't have any business with Levison of the Fourth!"

"Yesh, I have business vith him."

"Look here, you know it won't do Levison any good if you call to see him," said Tom uneasily. "I'll take a message to him if you like. But—but don't let anybody see you here, Mr. Moses, it would get Levison into trouble."

Mr. Moses nodded calmly.

"I am aware of shat," he replied. "Shat is Mishter Levison's fault, for shat he has not paid me my monish."

Even Monty Lowther looked grave now. With all Levison's reckless and blackguardly ways, they had never suspected the black sheep of the Fourth of having had recourse to a moneylender. The chums of the Shell did not like Levison—indeed, the Terrible Three were on the worst of terms with him. But Levison was a St. Jim's fellow, anyway, and at the thought of what would happen to him if the Head learned that Mr. Moses had come over from Wayland to collect a debt from him the Shell fellows became very serious indeed. Levison might not be worth the trouble, but they felt a natural desire to shield him, if possible, from the consequences of his own reckless folly.

"Levison owes you money?" exclaimed Talbot sharply.

"Yesh."

"You know that he would be flogged, perhaps expelled, if the Head knew?"

"Yesh."

"Then you oughtn't to come here."

Mr. Moses shrugged his shoulders.

"Mishter Levison should pay his debts," he said.

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"Look here," said Tom Merry. "Don't come in, Mr. Moses. You don't want to get Levison hauled over the coals—"

"I have called to see shat young shentleman."

"But you can't see him!" exclaimed Tim excitedly.

"Do you want to ruin him?"

"Yesh, if he does not pay my monish," said Mr. Moses calmly.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth. He understood now. Undoubtedly the moneylender had tried every method of screwing the money out of Levison of the Fourth before he took this extreme step. And there was no doubt that Levison would have paid him if he could rather than have exposed himself to this. It looked as if the black sheep of St. Jim's had come to the end of his tether at last. With wonderful cunning Levison had always dodged the results of his misdeeds; the other fellows, who knew his little ways, had wondered at his luck. But, as more than one fellow had warned Levison, the end was bound to come at last. It looked as if it had come now.

Mr. Moses made a step forward. The four Shell fellows did not move. They were greatly inclined to take the oily gentleman by the scruff of the neck and eject him by force. Whatever Levison had done, the moneylender ought never to have lent money to a school-boy.

"Vill you let me pass, young shentlemans?" asked Mr. Moses smoothly.

"Look here," said Tom uneasily, "wait a bit, Mr. Moses. I—if you must see Levison, I—I'll go and tell him. You wait for him outside, and I'll send him out."

"Vat good is shat?"

"He—he may be able to make some arrangement with you," urged Tom. "Give him a chance, you know!"

"He may be able to borrow the tin," said Manners.

Mr. Moses smiled.

"Ferry goot! I like to oblige young shentlemans. I vill wait in der road, but I vill not wait long!"

"Trot along a bit, or Taggies will see you," said Tom.

"I will go vrun dozen steps, and no more, and shat I only do to oblige you young shentlemans."

"Thank you," said Tom, with an effort. It went against the grain to be civil to the moneylender.

Mr. Moses smiled again, and ambled along the road. The juniors simply gasped with relief to see him go. They regarded one another with startled, almost scared looks. Monty Lowther whistled softly.

"Well, Levison's done it this time!" he said.

"We must help him if we can," said Talbot quickly. "If it isn't much we may be able to get him out of it."

Tom Merry nodded.

"He's an awful cad, and this serves him right," he said. "but it's up to us to save him from the sack if we can. The thumping ass, to get into a scrape like this! I thought he was too deep for anything of the kind. He generally knows how to take care of himself."

"The cleverest rascal comes a cropper at last," said Lowther. "Still, he's a St. Jim's chap, though he doesn't do us credit, and we'll fish him out if we can."

"You fellows watch that greasy brute, and see that he doesn't come in," said Tom hurriedly. "I'll fetch Levison. For goodness' sake keep that rotter out, even if you have to scrag him!"

"I'd rather scrag him than not," remarked Lowther.

Tom Merry dashed away at a run towards the School House. Lowther and Manners and Talbot mounted guard at the gate, determined that Mr. Moses should not enter the precincts of the school, even if they had to adopt the desperate expedient of "scragging" him.

CHAPTER 2

A Cool Hand.

JUST the fellow I was lookin' for, deah boy!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form met Tom Merry as he came striding into the School House.

"Can't stop now," said Tom hurriedly.

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cheerfully. "Wabbish! This is wathah important, Tom Mewwy! I have received a fivah from my patah—"

"Fathhead!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I'm in a hurry!" roared Tom Merry. "Gerrout of the way, you duffer!"

"Wats! Now, havin' a fivah in hand— Wow-wow!"

Arthur Augustus broke off suddenly as the captain of the Shell grasped him by the shoulders and sat him down forcibly on the step and rushed on.

Arthur Augustus sat in almost a paralysed state for a couple of minutes, his breath quite taken away. Then he scrambled up wrathfully.

"The uttah wottah!" he gasped. "Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy, you boundah, if you want me to give you a fearful thwashin'—"

But Tom Merry was gone.

The Shell fellow had mounted the stairs three at a time, and was scudding along the passage above. He halted at Levison's door, knocked, and entered hurriedly. There was not a minute to lose.

There were three fellows in the study—Levison, Mellish, and Lumley-Lumley, and the three presented a somewhat startling aspect. Levison of the Fourth was in the grasp of his study-mates, and they were bumping his head on the table. Ernest Levison was yelling.

"Yow-ow-ow! Stoppit, you silly asses! Yooop!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"I guess you'll stop your blessed conjuring tricks in this study, Levison!" panted Lumley-Lumley.

"Yow-yow! Leggo! It was only a joke, you silly fathhead!" howled Levison.

"I guess I don't like that kind of a joke."

"What's the row?" said Tom Merry, as Levison's study-mates released him and Levison stood rubbing his head and glaring. He was hurt.

Lumley-Lumley grunted.

"His beastly conjuring tricks!" he growled. "We're going to cure him. I dare say it's dashed clever, but when I find Mellish's watch in my pocket I get fed up. Chap might get accused of boning a watch after a trick like that. So we decided to knock some sense into Levison's head. If he wants to play conjuring tricks he can go and join some blessed circus, he can't do it in this study!"

"Yow-ow!" groaned Levison.

Tom Merry grinned. Levison of the Fourth was a clever conjurer, and he had an almost unearthly skill in that peculiar line. His sleight-of-hand was a wonder; but fellows naturally get "fed up" with finding other people's property passed into their pockets without their knowledge. Levison's sense of humour, like most of his gifts, was peculiar.

"I came here to see you, Levison," said Tom.

"Well, you can see me," growled Levison, rubbing his head.

"There's a man come to call on you."

"Blow him!"

"He can't be blowed, unfortunately. It's a man you'd better come and see at once. We're keeping him outside the gates."

Levison started.

"Hallo!" said Mellish. "Who's that that you're keeping outside the gates? One of Levison's horsey pals?"

"I guess there'll be a row if Banks the bookie comes here," grinned Lumley-Lumley. "You're jolly well not going to have bookmakers in this study, Levison."

"It isn't a bookmaker," said Tom. "You'd better come at once, Levison."

Levison nodded and followed him from the study. Percy Mellish moved for the door after them, and Lumley-Lumley promptly interposed.

"Cheese it!" he said tersely. "It's no business of yours, Mellish."

"I'm jolly well going to see the man," said Mellish.

"You're jolly well not!" said Lumley-Lumley. "If Levison's in a scrape you're not going to spy it all out, my pippin. You'll stay there."

"Look here, I can go out if I like, I suppose?" shouted Mellish.

"That's your little mistake. You can't!"

And as Lumley-Lumley had his back to the door, it was evident that Mellish couldn't. The spy of the Fourth had to give it up.

Tom Merry and Levison hurried out of the School House. Levison seemed to have forgotten the painful raps on his head. His face was dark and anxious, but he did not speak until they were in the quadrangle.

"Who is it?" he asked then.

"Mr. Moses, from Wayland."

Levison set his teeth.

"Then he's come?"

"Yes; he was coming in to call on you, when we stopped him for a bit."

"What did you do that for?"

"I should think it's pretty plain. If this comes out you'll get the sack."

"Well, you'd be glad if I got the sack," said Levison cynically. "You're no friend of mine."

"The other fellows are keeping an eye on him, and he's agreed to wait for you outside," said Tom, without replying to Levison's remark. "You'd better see him down the road and make some arrangement with him if you can."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't make any arrangement but by paying him," he said, "and I can't do that. If I could have I should have done it and kept him away."

"Then you expected this?"

"I've been expecting it for days, since the old rascal last wrote to me."

Levison spoke coolly and flippantly, but Tom Merry understood very well the stress of mind the Fourth-former must have suffered during the days he had been in fear of the moneylender's visit. Levison was facing the situation with his usual cool flippancy, but he must have felt the strain all the same.

Tom Merry paused.

"Look here, Levison! Is it much?" he asked. "We might be able to help you out."

"Why should you?"

"Never mind that. Is it much?"

"It was five quid last term. It's ten now."

"How can it be ten now—"

"Interest."

"Why, the man must be an awful thief."

"Of course he is!"

"What an utter ass you were to go to him," said Tom, in distress. "You knew his reputation, Levison. There are decent moneylenders, I dare say, if you had to do it."

"Decent moneylenders, if there are any, don't lend money to schoolboys."

"N-no, I suppose not. But—but what a duffer you were. And only to raise money for some of your rotten betting, I suppose?"

Levison laughed.

"But it's no good rubbing that in," said Tom. "I dare say you're sorry enough now that you went to him, if it comes to that."

"Quite a mistake; I'm not sorry," said Levison coolly.

"You're not?" said Tom, with a stare.

"Not at all."

"You mean you think you can get out of this all right?"

"No, I don't; I think I'm done for here. But I'm not going to whine. Last term I hoped I might be able to fix it, but my people are hard up, and I've had no luck with the gee-gees, and it's all U.P. I've got to stand it, that's all! But I'm not going to whine."

"It means ruin to you."

"Thanks for your sympathy," said Levison satirically. "I suppose you can't back it up with a loan of ten quid?"

"Of course, we couldn't possibly raise so much money as that. I had no idea—"

"You'd better be careful how you get mixed up in the affair at all," said Levison coolly. "There's bound to be a row, and I suppose you don't want it said that you were concerned in it."

"I hadn't thought about that. I was only thinking of helping you out of this fix," said Tom.

"Hallo, here you are!" exclaimed Blake of the Fourth, cutting across the road to intercept Tom Merry. "What have you been doing to the one and only?"

"Sorry! Can't stop now!"

"Running away from Gussy?" grinned Blake. "He's raging for gore. He wanted you to help him spend his fiver, and you sat him down on the cold steps instead—" Blake broke off. "Where are you rushing off to, you see?"

Tom Merry and Levison hurried on towards the gates, leaving Blake staring. There was a gleam in Levison's eyes.

"So D'Arcy has a fiver?" he said, with a sneer. "Pity he isn't a friend of mine!"

Tom Merry made no reply. Generous as Arthur Augustus was, he could hardly have been asked to hand Levison his fiver to be given to a moneylender. Lowther and Manners and Talbot met them at the gates with anxious looks.

"He's down the road, Levison," said Talbot.

"Thanks for keeping him out," said Levison. "It won't do any good; he'll come in. He means to get me punished for not paying him. He thought I should be too scared of it to let him down or he'd never have lent me the five. Now the beast is as spiteful as a cat."

"Can't anything be done?" said Talbot anxiously.

"No. Thanks all the same!"

And Levison, cool and careless—in manner, at least—passed out of the gates and strolled down the road with his hands in his pockets. Tom Merry & Co. looked after him, and, little as they liked Levison or his ways, they could not help feeling a certain admiration for his nerve. If the crash had come at last, there was no doubt that Levison of the Fourth had plenty of nerve to help him face it.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison's Last Card.

MR. MOSES was waiting in the lane. The oily gentleman had taken off his shiny silk hat, under the shade of a tree, and was fanning himself with it. The afternoon was hot. Mr. Moses looked shiny all over.

Levison slackened his steps as he came towards the waiting moneylender. Mr. Moses was not a hundred yards from the gates. The black sheep of the Fourth had not much time to think.

It seemed that the finish had come at last, for it was the fixed intention of Mr. Moses to visit the Head, unless Levison paid up. And that Levison could not do. The moneylender had counted upon the junior's fear of exposure and ruin. He had lent Levison five pounds, and he had already piled up an equal sum in interest, and he had had not the slightest doubt that the St. Jim's fellow would pay it rather than take the consequences.

He had not calculated upon Levison's actual inability to pay. As a matter of fact, Levison's people were hard up, and his allowance had been reduced to a minimum. Some of the fellows knew that his father found it difficult to keep him at St. Jim's at all. But Levison generally managed to keep up an appearance of being quite as well off as most of the fellows, and he had, in fact, given Mr. Moses a false impression on that point. Even the acute and experienced moneylender did not plumb the depths of Levison's cunning. Certainly Levison had intended to pay, but for that he had had to trust to luck—and his luck was out. He had been unable to keep even the interest paid, and it had piled up at a compound rate fast enough to take a borrower's breath away.

When Mr. Moses had realised, at last, that there was no getting his money from Levison, either principal or interest, he grew very bitter indeed. He understood at last that the boy could not get it from his people; for if he could he certainly would have done so. The moneylender had, in fact, been taken in, and by a schoolboy. It was not surprising that he resolved

to make Levison pay dearly for the five pounds now hopelessly lost.

Levison knew that. He realised that it was rather vengeance than the hope of getting his money that had brought Mr. Moses to St. Jim's that afternoon. Mr. Moses would be glad to receive his money instead of his vengeance, but he would not go without one or the other.

It was a knotty problem for the black sheep of St. Jim's to think out, and he had pondered it in vain—till now. But now his brain was working acutely. The outline of a plan was in his mind—a desperate expedient, but no more desperate than the circumstances he now found himself in. Desperate diseases require desperate remedies, as he told himself, with a bitter smile.

Mr. Moses watched him coming, with a grim expression, as he fanned himself with his greasy silk hat.

Levison raised his cap politely as he came up. His mind was made up by that time. It was to be a contest of keenness between him and Mr. Moses—between the cunning and experienced moneylender and the cad of the Fourth. Levison was troubled with no more scruples than Mr. Moses himself. They were, in fact, a well-matched pair.

"Vell, Mr. Levison?" said the oily gentleman.

"Good-afternoon!" said Levison. "Quite a pleasure to see you here, Mr. Moses."

"You have my monieh?"

"You've called a little too early," said Levison calmly, though his heart was beating. "If you'd come a couple of hours later I could have done business."

The moneylender shrugged his shoulders.

"That is not good enough," he said. "You owe me ten pounds, Mieshter Levison—"

"Five for the loan, and five for interest," said Levison.

"Yesh."

"You can let the loan stand over if I pay up the interest?"

"Yesh; that is puziness," said Mr. Moses. "You pay me mine five pounds, and ve lets der loan stand over. I troubles you for five pounds."

"This evening," said Levison.

"I have waited too long, and I not believe you."

"It's a dead cert," said Levison calmly. "In a couple of hours' time I shall bring you a fiver, if you care to wait for it. I am quite certain of it. A friend of mine is going to lend it to me to get me out of this fix."

"Your fronts seem fery anxious about you," remarked Mr. Moses, with a grin. "Vhy not get shat fiver at vunce?"

"I wasn't referring to those chaps. It's another fellow named D'Arcy; you may have heard of him."

Mr. Moses nodded.

"He is a son of Lord Eastwood, and rolling in tin," said Levison. "He is going to stand me five to get me out of this. Now, it won't do you any good to go to the Head, Mr. Moses. You'll get me sacked, but you'll lose five quid—and the other five too."

"If I could believe you, Mieshter Levison!" said the moneylender. "But you have taken me in vunce. I think shat you are a young gentleman wiz people who have money, and you are nozzing of the kind."

"My peopie have been hard hit by the war," said Levison coolly. "I can't get anything from home, as it happens, or I should have settled already. But you can have your fiver in a couple of hours—perhaps sooner. You needn't even go back to Wayland unless you like."

"I am a puzzy man; I have no hours to vaste."

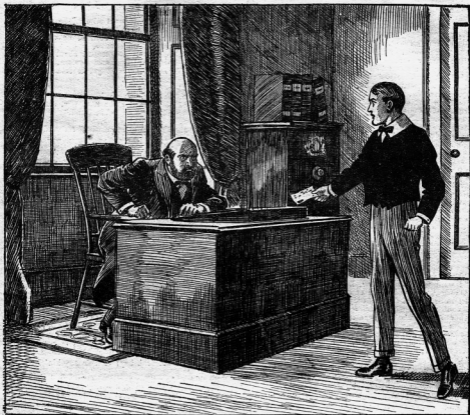
"Then I'll come over and see you at your office," said Levison. "Dash it all, if I don't keep my word, you can call on the Head to-morrow."

Mr. Moses hesitated. He was strongly inclined to accept Levison's terms. He was a business man, and would have preferred hard cash to any amount of vengeance. But he could not help doubting whether this was simply a trick to defer the evil day.

"Ferry vell," he said at last. "I takes your word vunce more, Mieshter Levison. But shat is the last time. If you do not come, I shall not call here again to give you a chance as I have dote to-day. I shall write to Dr. Holmes."

"Done!"

"Mark mein words, Mieshter Levison. I wait for you



Mr. Moses had sat down at a desk, and taken up a pen, "Please go away, Mishter Levison," he said. "I have nozzing more to say. I am now writing to your headmaster." "I've got the fiver," said Levison. "Vat!" (See Chapter 5.)

till six o'clock, and if you are not dere, I write to your headmaster, and he receive der letter by the first post in the morning."

"That's understood."

"But it will be useless to come wizout the monish. You comprehend?"

"Quite so."

Mr. Moses set his shiny hat on his shiny head.

"Shat is settled, then," he said.

"Wait a minute. Your office will be closed in two hours," said Levison. "I will come to your private house. You'll expect me there. D'Arcy may come with me, and I don't know whether he'd consent to come to your office."

"I will expect you at my house." Mr. Moses paused. "I would be ferry glad to oblige Mishter D'Arcy with a litle loan, if he could vish for one. If you could manage shat for me, Mishter Levison, I make you easier terms."

Levison nodded.

"I'll see about that."

Mr. Moses walked ponderously away towards Rylcombe. He had another unhappy victim to interview there before he took his train back to Wayland.

Levison stood in the lane, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his brows wrinkled, his lips tightly set.

"Neck or nothing!" he muttered. "The hound! He's swindled me, and he'll have no mercy on me. Neck or nothing this time!"

He gritted his teeth, and walked towards the school gates. The Shell fellows were still there, and they met him with inquiring looks. Talbot of the Shell had a very troubled expression.

"What luck?" Tom Merry asked.

"He's gone," said Levison.

"But you haven't paid him."

"I've made an arrangement."

"Then it's all right?" asked Talbot, in great relief.

"Right as rain!" said Levison coolly.

He strolled on into the quadrangle.

"Well," said Monty Lowther, "that chap is a cough-drop. He seems born to fall on his feet. I really thought it was the finish for him."

"I only hope he is really out of his trouble," said Talbot.

"Well, the man's gone," said Tom. "Thank goodness he has. Let's get down to the cricket. That'll take the taste of him out of our mouths."

The Shell fellows went down to the cricket ground, and Levison and his dingy affairs passed from their minds. Levison had told them that it was all right, and they hoped that it was.

But Levison, at that moment, was in a grim mood. It was far from being "all right." There was a task before Levison that taxed all the resources of his cool and clever brain, and, at the best, he was not sure of success. But it was the last card he had to play, and he proceeded to play it with cool determination.

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CHAPTER 4.

Advice Required.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was in his study—No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage.

The swell of St. Jim's looked thoughtful, and a little wreatly too.

The afternoon's post had brought him a handsome tip from his "governor"—a whole fiver. The expenditure of that handsome tip was a matter requiring thought and care. A motor-car excursion on the next half-holiday seemed the best idea to Arthur Augustus, with a choice selection of friends, and a picnic, especially if Miss Marie could be induced to come.

Arthur Augustus intended to call his many friends into consultation on the subject. Blake and Herries and Digby, his study-mates, however, put off the consultation till after cricket. And Tom Perry—being busy at that moment about Levison's affairs—had sat D'Arcy down on the School-House steps instead of listening to his plans for the expenditure of the fiver.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt a little exasperated. He was brushing off a few remaining specks of dust from his beautiful trousers, when Levison of the Fourth came into Study No. 6.

The swell of St. Jim's suspended the operations of the clothes-brush, and turned his eyeglass upon Levison. He did not like Levison, and did not approve of him, and he made no secret of the fact. However, the Adonis of the Fourth was always courteous.

"Got a few minutes to spare?" asked Levison, with great civility.

"Yaas, deah boy!"

"I want you to advise me, D'Arcy, if you will." Arthur Augustus beamed at once. He was adviser-in-chief to Study No. 6, but Study No. 6 always made it a point of receiving his advice humorously. Never had Arthur Augustus's study-mates admitted the supreme wisdom of Arthur Augustus. Never had Levison, for that matter; but Levison appeared to be turning over a new leaf in that respect now, and he rose at once in D'Arcy's estimation.

"Certainly, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus cordially. "If you are in a difficult or awkward posish, Levison, you can't do bettah than consult a fellow of tact and judgment. Pway sit down."

Levison sat down.

"I am in an awkward position," he said. "You've given me lots of good advice at different times, D'Arcy, and I wish now I'd taken it."

"Yaas!"

"But I didn't, and—and there you are. I'm in a fix." "That wotten wacin', I suppose," said Arthur Augustus, frowning a little.

"No."

"Pway make a clean breast of it, deah boy, and I will advise you the best in my powah."

"I'm in debt."

Arthur Augustus's beaming smile froze a little. He was not a suspicious chap. He was the last fellow to suspect anybody of anything. But he could not help thinking just then that Levison must have heard of his newly-arrived fiver, and had come to the study in quest of it. Arthur Augustus was willing to give advice to any extent, and at any length. But his fiver was his fiver, and he did not intend to give it away. He was generous to a fault, but there were limits.

The expression on his face did not escape Levison. He was watching the swell of St. Jim's closely.

"In debt!" repeated Arthur Augustus slowly.

"Yes. But I haven't come here to borrow money."

"Ob, good!"

"I have no right to borrow of you, for one thing," said Levison, "and you couldn't lend me enough, for another. I dare say you're stoney, too."

Arthur Augustus coloured a little. He felt that his momentary suspicion of Levison was unworthy. Levison, it appeared, had not even heard of that fiver, after all.

"I was stoney this mornin'," said D'Arcy. "But I have had a fivah this aftahnoon from my governah, and also a ten-shillin' note from my Aunt Adolinah. If you are in want of a small sum, Levison, the ten shillin's is at your service."

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Levison shook his head.

"I don't want money; I want advice," he said.

Arthur Augustus beamed again. That was a compliment to his mental powers such as he would never have received from his study-mates.

"Go ahead, deah boy. Tell me all about it."

"Last term I was hard up," said Levison. "I had to raise five quid, and I couldn't get it from anywhere, so I went to a moneylender."

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course, he oughtn't to have lent money to a schoolboy, and he couldn't claim it in law, but unless I pay him he will show me up to the Head."

"That's awfl'y serious."

"I can't raise the money at present," resumed Levison. "But shortly I shall be able to do so. It's only ten quid."

"Only!" repeated D'Arcy.

"But Mr. Moses says he won't wait. I've talked and talked to him, but it's no good," said Levison. "He came over here this afternoon to see the Head, but I managed to edge him off."

"Gweat Scott!"

"Of course, I'm speaking to you in confidence, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, of course."

"I shouldn't like it to be generally known that I'm in this rotten fix. But I know you've got lots of discretion."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose it seems rather a cheek for me to come to you for advice," said Levison. "We haven't really been friends. We're too different. But you wouldn't be down on a chap who's got himself into a fix, and who's trying to turn over a new leaf."

"Certainly, not, deah boy! I should be vevy glad to see you turnin' ovah a new leaf, and givin' up smokin' and bettin', and those coddish things."

"I've done that," said Levison.

"Vevy good!"

"If you'll help me I think I can get time from that man, and pull out."

"What can I do, deah boy? I'll do anythin' I can, of course."

"Would you be willing to see him?"

"Yaas, if it would do any good."

"You see, I've got a lot of faith in your judgment," explained Levison. "I think that if you spoke to the man, and reasoned with him, he would come round a bit. He won't listen to me, but he would to you. You have a way of putting things that I haven't."

Arthur Augustus looked very flattered, though he did not suspect for a moment that the cad of the Fourth was flattering him. He only felt that his well-known judgment was getting its just tribute at last.

"If you think I could do any good by talkin' to the man I am quite at your service, Levison," he said.

"Thanks! That's all I'm asking you to do. I don't want any money, or anything of that kind. If you'll come over to Wayland with me, and talk to him straight, that's all I want. I feel convinced that he will listen to you, and come round."

"Bai Jove! A chap would get into a wovw if he were seen goin' into Moses's office," said Arthur Augustus.

"It's his private house," explained Levison.

"Ob, that's all right!"

"It won't take long to hike over," said Levison.

"I am entirely at your service, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, rising to his feet. "Those chaps will expect tea weady when they come in from the cwicket, but they can wait for me instead. I am vevy sorry that I cannot help you out of your fix with cash, Levison."

"Ob, that doesn't matter. I don't want that; I'm not a beggar," said Levison. "Besides, you haven't ten quids, and a fiver would be no good. By the way, have you taken the number of your fiver?"

"No."

"You ought to in case you should lose it," said Levison.

"Well, I'm not likely to lose it out of my pocket-book," said Arthur Augustus. "But you are quite wight. I will take the numbah."

Levison, with a peculiar gleam in his eyes, watched Arthur Augustus take the banknote from the pocket-book.

"Numbah 0004444," said Arthur Augustus. "I'll jot it down in my wammah. Now that's done."

He slipped the book back into his pocket. The two juniors left the study. As they did so Levison stumbled, and fell heavily against the elegant Fourth-Former. He caught hold of D'Arcy to save himself, and bumped him against the wall.

"Ow! Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.
"Sorry; my foot caught in the carpet. You really ought to have that carpet mended."

"It's all right."
The two juniors hurried down the passage. Not for an instant did it cross the unsuspecting mind of Arthur Augustus that that stumble had been intentional, and still less could he dream that the pocket-book containing the fever had been transferred from his pocket to Levison's. Levison's skill in sleight-of-hand had not failed him.

A few minutes later the cad of the Fourth and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were cycling away to Wayland. D'Arcy's pocket-book was in Levison's pocket, and Levison was smiling grimly. The first part of his scheme had succeeded. Had Levison, in his desperation, become a thief? If D'Arcy had known of the transfer of his handsome little russia-leather pocket-book he would certainly have thought so, though he would have been puzzled to know why Levison should have made him take the number of the note immediately before purloining it. For now that the number was ascertained the note was as valueless as waste-paper to a thief. The scheme hatched by Levison's cunning brain was much deeper than that.

CHAPTER 5.

The Five-pound Note.

"**H**ERE we are!"
The two juniors jumped off their bicycles in the quiet street. Mr. Moses's private house was a handsome building in the residential quarter of Wayland, and from its appearance it could be seen that the oily gentleman did very well out of the "absent per cent" business. The bicycles were left against the railings, and the two juniors went up the path to the house. They were shown into a room, and told that Mr. Moses had not yet returned.

"I presume we had better wait for him," remarked Arthur Augustus, as he stretched his elegant limbs in an uncomfortable armchair.

"Yes; if you don't mind," said Levison. "It's not far off six now. He'll be here before six."

"I am quite at your service, dear boy. I only hope that I shall be able to bring Mr. Moses to reason."

"I'm sure of it. But if you fail I shall be just as much obliged. It's awfully good of you to take all this trouble for me."

"Not at all, dear boy."

It was about ten minutes later when Mr. Moses came in. There was a twinkle of satisfaction in his eyes as they rested on D'Arcy. Mr. Moses would have given a great deal to get the son of Lord Eastwood into his clutches.

"Ferry glad to see you here, Mishter D'Arcy!" he said, rubbing his shiny hands. "Perhaps I can do a leetle bizness wiz you."

Arthur Augustus was about to elevate his noble nose at the bare idea of doing business with Mr. Moses, but he remembered in time that he was there upon a mission of conciliation.

"Thank you vewy much, Mr. Moses," he said. "I am not wequir' financial assistance at the present moment. I have called to speak to you about my friend Levison's affairs."

Mr. Moses gave Levison a sharp look. If the fever was not forthcoming the moneylender intended to carry out his threat.

"Levison is in wathah low watah at the present time," continued Arthur Augustus. "I trust, Mr. Moses, that you will give him plenty of time?"

"Until six o'clock," said Mr. Moses smoothly.
"Bai Jove! But it is five minutes to six now."

"Exactly."
"Weally, Mr. Moses—"
"Unless Mishter Levison pays his debt, he knows vat to expect," said Mr. Moses. "I am afraid I have no time to waste, shentlemen."

"I should like to point out to you, Mr. Moses, that this conduct on your part is vewy wotten, not to say wascally."
"Thank you!"

"I regard you as a vewy unpleasant chawctah!"
Mr. Moses smiled.
"Goot-efening!" he said, and moved away towards the inner door, by which he had entered the room.

Levison whispered hurriedly to D'Arcy:
"Don't let him go. Try again."
Arthur Augustus was getting angry. His eloquence had failed so far. He stepped in the way of the moneylender, and Mr. Moses had to stop.

"Pway listen to me, sir," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I have not finished yet."

"Will you let me pass, young shentleman?"
"I have not finished my remarks yet. I trust that you will wedect, Mr. Moses, that you are actin' in a vewy wephensible mannah, and—"

Mr. Moses took the swell of St. Jim's by the shoulder and pushed him aside, and passed into the inner room. Arthur Augustus was left trembling with wrath.

"Bai Jove! Levison, do you think it would make mattahs worse for you if I gave that awful wotah a feaful thwashin'?"

"Probably," said Levison, suppressing a grin. "It can't be helped. Wait here a minute, and I'll have another try myself."

"Vewy well, dear boy."
Levison followed Mr. Moses into the inner room, and closed the door after him. Mr. Moses had sat down at a desk and taken up a pen.

"Please go away, Mishter Levison," he said. "I have nozing more to say. I am now writing to your headmaster."

"I've got the fever."

"Vat?"

"Look!"

Mr. Moses stared at the crisp and rustling note in Levison's fingers. An oily smile came over his face as he took it.

"Goot!" he remarked. "Ferry goot! So you had der money, after all!"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Levison easily, though there was a chill at his heart. "That settles us up to date, Mr. Moses, for the interest. I shall come along in a few days for my paper."

"Ven you pay der five pounds loan, and not before, Mishter Levison."

"Of course."
Mr. Moses wrote out a receipt for the banknote, and Levison put it in his pocket. The moneylender's manner was quite cordial as the junior left him. It appeared that Levison was able to raise money, after all; and persons who could raise money were sure of Mr. Moses's good graces.

Levison passed into the outer room, signed to D'Arcy to follow him, and left the waiting-room. He slipped back for a moment for his cap, which he had apparently forgotten, and rejoined D'Arcy in the hall. The two juniors left the house, and in the armchair where Arthur Augustus had been seated there reposed now the little russia-leather pocket-book which contained the fever.

The juniors mounted their machines, and rode away towards St. Jim's. Levison was very quiet and calm; Arthur Augustus looked distressed.

"I'm sowsy I wasn't able to awrange anythin' for you, dear boy," he remarked.

"Can't be helped."

"You didn't have any bettah luck?"

"No."

"What is the beast goin' to do?"

"Put the screw on, I suppose," said Levison. "But don't worry. I shall get out of it somehow. I'm much obliged to you as it is. I shan't forget this."

"But if he goes to the Head—"

"He won't do that yet. He will keep that till the
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last," said Levison. "Anyray, it can't be helped. Next week I may have some luck."

"I hope so, deah boy."

They reached the school, and put up their machines. Arthur Augustus hurried off to Study No. 6, where his chums were at tea, and wondering what had become of him. Levison lingered in the bike-shed till he was gone. When he was alone the black sheep of the Fourth looked about him, to make sure that he was not observed, and then struck a match, and lighted the receipt he had received from Mr. Moses. In a few seconds it was reduced to ashes. There remained no written record of the fact that Levison of the Fourth had paid Mr. Moses five pounds that day, but Levison's reason for that most peculiar action was a secret locked in his own breast.

CHAPTER 6. A Mystery.

"WHERE have you been?"

"Here's the duffer!"

"Only one sardine left for you, Gussy."

Such were the remarks that greeted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he entered Study No. 6 in the School House.

There were seven juniors at tea in the study—Blake and Herries and Digby of the Fourth, and the Terrible Three and Talbot of the Shell. They had nearly finished tea, too.

"Sowwy, deah boys!" Said Arthur Augustus. "I was called away quite suddenly. I twust our guests will excuse me for bein' late?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry gracefully.

"Now that the light of your countenance is shed upon us we can forgive anything," said Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus sat down to tea, and looked rather gingerly at the solitary sardine. But his noble countenance brightened up as Blake lifted a dish of toast and eggs from the fender. The feasters in the study had not forgotten the absentee, after all.

"Thank you, deah boy!"

"We had to get tea ourselves," said Herries. "You were going to have it ready for us. It was your go."

"Yaas; I wegwet sincerely that I was called away undah the circs, especially as I want to consult you fellows about my fivah."

"I'll look after that for you, if you like," suggested Lowther. "Hand it over to me, and I'll promise that you won't see it or be troubled with it in any way again."

"Pway don't be funnay, Lowther. Now, I was thinkin' of a wippin' wun in a motah-cah on Saturday aftahnoon and a picnic."

"Hear, hear!"

"It will be my treat, deah boy, and I have an extra ten bob in case it wuns ovah the fivah," said Arthur Augustus. "But the great question is whethah Miss Mawie will come."

"Ask Talbot," grinned Monty Lowther.

Talbot coloured a little. Miss Marie was Talbot's great chum.

"Yaas, that's what I was thinkin' of," said Arthur Augustus. "I twust that Talbot will use his influence with Miss Mawie to induce her to come on a wun, you know. But that is not all. I was thinkin' of sendin' a wiah to Cousin Ethel, and droppin' in for her in the cah."

"Bravo!"

"Blessed if Gussy isn't simply bursting with good ideas to-day!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in great admiration.

"Takes the biscuit, and no mistake!" said Blake. "He ought to have a putty medal or something for thinking these great thoughts!"

"We shall wequiah a vewy large cah, for two ladies and eight gentlemen," said Arthur Augustus. "We can wun ovah to the gawage at Wayland and see about that. I was thinkin' of my patah's cah, but he has lent it to the Wed Cwoss. Talbot will explain to Miss Mawie that she simply must come, undah the circs."

"I'll do my best, with pleasure," said Talbot. "It

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will be a rippling excursion. I suggest a vote of thanks to Gussy."

"Hear, hear!"

"Passed unanimously, also nem con," said Lowther.

"And a vote of confidence, too," said Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen, the 'Ayes' have it!" said Monty Lowther, with Parliamentary solemnity.

"Pway don't wot, deah boys. I weally think it is watah a nobbay ideah, you know. You fellows can come with me to Wayland to-morrow to select the cah."

"And you can lock up the fiver in the deak," said Blake. "We can't trust you to carry money about."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You lost your last fiver, and it didn't turn up for two days," said Digby.

"Wats! I have taken the numbah—Levison suggested to me to take the numbah, which was weally vewy thoughtful of him," said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, a chap can't always be botherin' takin' the numbahs of banknotes. Still, it is only pwudent."

"Quite right of Levison," said Blake. "You can get good advice from a bad character, you see."

"Oh, Levison isn't weally so vewy bad, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "He has sense enough to ask a sensible chap for advice when he's in a fix, anyway, and there are some fellows who haven't."

"So Levison's been asking your advice, has he?" said Blake suspiciously. "What was he pulling your leg for this time?"

"He was not pullin' my leg, Blake."

"My dear chap, Levison's got more brains to the square inch than you have to the square yard," said Blake. "Did he want the fiver?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what did he want?"

"Advice frowm a fellah of tact and judgment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus screwed his eyeglass a little more tightly into his eye, and surveyed his grinning friends severely. He could see nothing comie in Levison coming to him for advice. But the other fellows could. There was little advice that the simple Arthur Augustus would be able to give to the keenest and cutest fellow in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

"I uttably fail to see the reason of this ridiculous mewriment," said D'Arcy stiffly. "Levison took a vewy sensible step in askin' my advice. I am only sowwy that I was not able to help him out of his fix."

"Has he told you about Moses?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! How do you know, Tom Mewwy?"

"We met Moses at the gate, and edged him off," said Tom. "I understood from Levison that he had made some arrangement with him."

"He was probably thinkin' of askin' my advice," said D'Arcy loftily. "He trusted to me to get him out of the scrape."

"Bow-wow!"

"Weally, you uttah asses—"

"Nothing will get him out of his scrape but tea quid in a lump," said Tom Merry, "and perhaps not that. He was born to tumble into shady scrapes."

"Yaas, I'm afraid that is cowwect. Levison weally spoke to me in confidence, but as you fellows know all about it, it is not a secret in this study. But pway don't talk about it outside. Pway be discewet. You see, the duffah would get into a feahful wif if it got out. He hoped that I might be able to persuade that wotten mewlendah to do the wight thing, but it was no go."

Blake jumped.

"You've been to see Moses?" he shouted.

"Yaas, watah!"

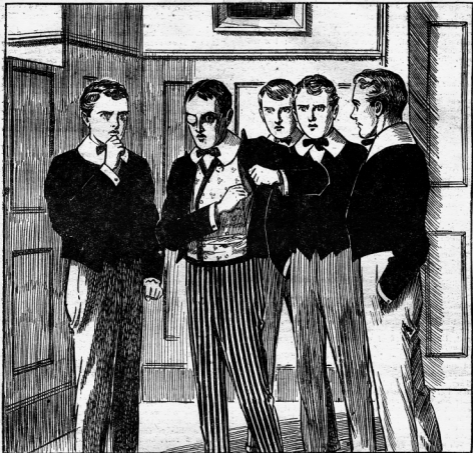
"Oh, you ass!" said Blake.

"Weally, you know—"

"Levison asked you to see Moses, to persuade him to come to reasonable terms?" asked Talbot, with a curious look.

"Yaas. He welied on my tact and judgment, you know."

Talbot smiled. He was pretty certain that Levison had



D'Arcy drew his hand out of the breast pocket of his jacket—empty! "Lost something?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell. "My pocket-book!" "Your pocket-book!" ejaculated Blake, "and the five in it?" (See Chapter 7.)

not taken D'Arcy for the moneylender simply from a reliance on his tact and judgment.

"Unfortunately, it was no go," said Arthur Augustus. "The wottah refused to listen to weason."

"Blessed if I can make it out," said Blake, puzzled. "Levison must have known that you couldn't do any good. You've been with him to see Moses?"

"Ynaas."
"Well, it beats me. Levison must have had some axe to grind, but I can't make it out," said Blake. "He knew that talking to Moses wouldn't do any good. You haven't paid the man any money?"

"Nothin' at all."
"Then why the thunder did Levison want you to see him?" exclaimed Lowther.

"To weason with him—he weliwed on me to persuade the wottah to give him a chance, you know. He explained that I have a way of puttin' things—"

"He was pullin' your leg, of course."

"Weally, Lowthab—"
"There's something fishy about this," said Blake. "Levison must have had some reason for getting Gussy to go there; and it wasn't the reason he gave Gussy.

Any kid could take poor old Gussy in by buttering him up—"

"I wogard you as an ass, Blake!"

Unheeding Arthur Augustus, the juniors looked at one another perplexedly. Levison could not have taken the trouble to flatter Arthur Augustus, and to take him over to Wayland, for nothing. What had he done it for? It was a puzzle; there was nothing, so far as they could see, that the black sheep of the Fourth could gain by such a proceeding.

"You're sure you didn't pay Moses anything?" asked Tom Merry at last.

"Of course I am sunh, you duffah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not see why you cannot understand that it is quite a simple mattah. Do you think I should be ass enough to give that wascally Moses my fiveh?"

"And Levison didn't even ask you for it?"

"He did not."

"Well, it's a giddy puzzle."

"It is not a puzzle at all," said Arthur Augustus.

"Fellahs outside my own studdy may have a bethah appreciation of a fellow's tact—"

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY!

"FINDING HIS LEVEL!"

"Oh, don't be funny, Gussy."

"I am not bein' funny, you chump!"

"Levison's got some little game on," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "I can't tell what it is; it's too deep for me—Levison always is too deep for us, you know. But he's up to something."

"Yes, rather!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus, having finished his tea, rose to his feet, and departed from the study. He paused one moment in the doorway to repeat his remark:

"Wats!"

Then he walked away, with his noble nose high in the air.

CHAPTER 7.

Lost, Stolen, or Strayed!

TOM MERRY & CO. were chatting in the common-room that evening, waiting for the summons to the dormitory, when there was a sudden startled ejaculation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

"Greatest Scott!"

D'Arcy was feeling in the inside breast-pocket of his jacket. There was a blank expression on his face as he drew forth his hand—empty!

"Lost something?" asked Kangaroo of the Shell.

"My pocket-book!"

"Your pocket-book!" ejaculated Blake, "and the five in it?"

"Yass."

"Oh, you ass! Didn't I tell you to lock it up in the desk?"

"Weally, Blake, it is wathah bad form to say 'I told you so,'" said Arthur Augustus. "I must have dropped it somewhah, and it will turn up. It is verry odd that a pocket-book should drop out of an inside pocket. But it must have done so, I pweetume. Pway help me to look for it, Blake, instead of remarkin' 'I told you so,' in that unfeelin' way."

Blake grunted, but he threw down his "Chuckles" and started to help. Tom Merry & Co. lent their assistance also.

They scouted round the common-room, and they scanned the passages and the stairs, and they examined Study No. 6. But after a quarter of an hour of careful search, the pocket-book had failed to come to light.

"Must have dropped it in the quad," said Tom Merry at last. "No good searching in the quad after dark. Leave it till the morning."

"It's wotten! You see, I had private lettahs in that pocket-book, not to mention a fiveah and a note for ten shillings. Howevah, I suppose it will turn up all wight."

"When did you have it last?" asked Talbot.

Arthur Augustus reflected.

"I had the lettah this aftahnoon," he said. "You wemembah I showed you the fiveah, Blake, before you went down to the cwicket."

Blake nodded.

"That was aftah three o'clock," said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, I saw it latah than that—just before I went out with Levison. I happened to mention it to him, and he suggested that I should take the numbah, so I took it. Then I put the fiveah back in the book, and the book in my pocket. I may have dropped it bikin' ovah to Wayland. Jollay lucky Levison made me take the numbah, as it turns out."

"It's lucky, if you've lost it outside the school," said Talbot.

"Might have dropped in the bike-shed or the quad," said Blake. "It's jolly queer, though. I don't see how a book could drop out of that pocket. And I don't quite see how Gussy could drop it without seeing it fall. Did you have a spill on your bike?"

"No."

Blake wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Let's go and see Levison," he said.

The other fellows understood at once, with the exception of Arthur Augustus. He turned his eyeglass on Blake in surprised inquiry.

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"Levison may know something about it," agreed Tom Merry.

"What could he know about it, Tom Merwuy?"

"It may be another of his rotten tricks," explained the captain of the Shell. "He amuses himself that way sometimes. He was at it this afternoon in his own study—he'd planted Mellish's watch in Lumley-Lumley's pocket, and they were thumping him for it. They were going for him when I came to tell him that Moses was after him. This may be another of his conjuring tricks."

"Bai Jove! I suppose it's possible," said Arthur Augustus slowly. "I wemembah once he got my fountain-pen away somehow, and hid it in my Sunday toppah. He is always playin' some wotten twick. Let's go and see him."

The search-party proceeded to Levison's study. The four juniors who shared that study were all at their prep—Levison, Mellish, Lumley-Lumley, and Blenkinsop. They looked surprised as nearly a dozen juniors crowded in. The search-party pretty well filled the study from wall to wall.

"Hallo! What's up?" asked Lumley-Lumley.

"Gussy's lost his pocket-book, with a five in it," said Blake.

"Just like Gussy!"

"Weally, Lumlay—"

"Do you know anything about it, Levison?"

Levison stared.

"If I what should I know about it?" he said.

"You came to our study and pulled Gussy's leg," said Blake. "You must have done it for something, so I suppose you were playing some trick."

"Levison did not pull my leg, you uttah ass—"

"Gussy's pocket-book has gone," continued Blake, unheeding D'Arcy's wrathful interruption. "It's gone from his pocket, and it couldn't very well fall out. It looks like one of your tricks."

"Well; it isn't."

"You don't know anything about it?"

"Nothing."

"You're such an awful fabricator," said Blake; "there's no believing a word you say."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Look here, Levison," said Tom Merry. "It's pretty dangerous playing tricks with money. If you've got the pocket-book, you'd better hand it over. Unless it turns up by to-morrow, we shall have to conclude that whoever has taken it means to keep the money in it."

"That's likely enough," said Levison. "People don't, as a rule, steal banknotes to give them back again."

"D'Arcy has the number, and whoever is found with that note will be nabbed as a thief," said Lorthier.

"I know he has the number," said Levison. "He has the number because I advised him to take it. He wasn't going to take it, otherwise."

"That's quite true."

"And if I were going to steal a blessed banknote I shouldn't advise the owner to take the number first," sneered Levison.

"You're not accused of stealing it," said Tom Merry. "We think you've very likely taken it to stick in some chap's pocket, for one of your rotten jokes."

"Well, I haven't."

"I am quite suah that Levison has not played any twicks this time, Tom Merwuy. I may have dropped it goin' ovah to Wayland; pewwaps in the house of that wottah we went to—"

"Shuah!" said Levison hurriedly.

"All wight, deah boy; I'm not goin' to say anything," said Arthur Augustus. "I know how to keep a secret."

"Hallo! What's the giddy secret?" grinned Lumley-Lumley.

"I'm afraid I cannot ansawah that question, Lumlay. You see—"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake, dragging his elegant chum out of the study. "All St. Jim's will know it soon. We shall have to wait till to-morrow about the pocket-book. It may be lying about the quad all the time. But if it

Doesn't turn up to-morrow, Gussy, you'll have to publish the number of the note."

"Yaas; and if I get it back it will be owing to Levison makin' me take the numbah. I will put a notice on the board about it this evenin'."

Before bed-time, most of the School House fellows had read the following notice on the board:

"LOST.—Somewhere in the school, or outside, or somewhere, a russia-leather pocket-book, containing a five-pound note (No. 0004444), and a ten-shilling currency-note, and several private letters of no value to anyone but the owner. Anyone finding the same is requested to return it to A. A. D'Arcy, IVth Form, Study No. 6."

The notice was read and commented upon, but up to bed-time nobody had returned the lost pocket-book to A. A. D'Arcy, IVth Form, Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 8.

Returned to the Owner!

TOM MERRY & Co. were down on the following morning almost before the rising-bell had ceased to ring.

They were very anxious to look for the russia-leather pocket-book and find it before there was any further discussion about the matter.

If the fiver did not turn up there would be unpleasant comments, at least, and a great deal of fuss. And the projected excursion for Saturday afternoon would be put off indefinitely.

But that Arthur Augustus had not lost his pocket-book anywhere within the walls of St. Jim's was quite clear by breakfast-time.

The juniors sought for it high and low, here, there, and everywhere, with all the keenness of Boy Scouts looking for "sign."

A crowd of fellows helped them, and pretty nearly every inch of the quad was searched, as well as the buildings. Figgins & Co. of the New House kindly lent a hand in the search when they heard what the trouble was. But there was no sign of the pocket-book.

Tom Merry & Co. went in to breakfast, with the knowledge that the pocket-book must have been lost outside the school—unless it was stolen. In the latter case, the thief was keeping it very close.

But they shrank, naturally, from such a suspicion. Levison might have played a trick with the pocket-book, but they hardly believed he would steal it, though they knew in what desperate need he was for money. But the fact that he had caused D'Arcy to make a note of the number precluded the suspicion that he could have purloined it.

If Levison had taken it for one of his unpleasant tricks, it would have turned up by this time, or Levison would have owned up; for the matter had now come to the knowledge of the prefects. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, had seen the notice on the board, and observed the searchers at work. He inquired into the matter, and told D'Arcy to report to him if the pocket-book was found.

Kildare certainly would not have seen anything humorous in sleight-of-hand tricks such as Levison delighted in, and the juniors felt that, if Levison had been at work again, he would have owned up before it came to the knowledge of those in authority.

"The ass dropped it outside somewhere," said Blake, when they came in to breakfast. "Better put an ad. in the 'Rylcombe Times.'"

And that was what D'Arcy decided to do. But there was a surprise waiting for the juniors after morning lessons. Toby, the page, brought a packet to Arthur Augustus, after the juniors had left the Form-room. It came by post that morning.

Arthur Augustus looked at the big, fat envelope in some surprise. It bore several stamps, and the postmark of Weyland.

"Bai Jove! What the dooce can this be, deah boys?" said D'Arcy, in wonder. "Feels like a pass-book, but I haven't a pass-book now. My patah has refused to start another bankin'-account for me."

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY:

"FINDING HIS LEVEL!"

"Open it and see, fathead!" was Blake's suggestion. "Yaas, that's a good ideah," agreed Arthur Augustus. He slit open the big envelope, and uttered almost a yell.

"Gweat Scott!"
"Well, ass!"
"My pocket-book!"
"What!"

Tom Merry & Co. gathered round in astonishment. Levison had joined them, with a grin on his face.

It was the pocket-book right enough. Arthur Augustus stared at it in wonder, as he drew it from the large, thick envelope. The lost article had come back by post! It was surprising enough.

"That's the blessed thing, right enough," said Blake. "Perhaps you'll say now you're sorry for putting it on to me, or trying to," said Levison, with a sneer.

"Rats!" said Blake, at once. "It seems that it wasn't you after all, but it was only natural to suppose that it was one of your rotten tricks. Still, that's the pocket-book right enough. Somebody's found it, and sent it back by post."

"Vewy kind of them," said D'Arcy. "Isn't there a letter with it?" asked Talbot of the Shell.

Arthur Augustus looked into the envelope.

"Yaas, by Jove!"

The juniors all read the letter together. It was brief.

"Sir,—This pocket-book was found in the room after you left. The name in it is yours, so I am returning it to you per post.—Yours faithfully,

"AARON MOSES."

"Moses!" ejaculated Levison.

"Moses, bai Jove!"

"You thumping ass!" said Blake. "You left it there! You'd better chew up that letter. If Kildare gets to know that you've been to see old Moses, you'll be called up before the Housemaster."

Arthur Augustus rubbed his aristocratic nose in a very puzzled way.

"I weally do not undahstand it," he said. "It is vewy remarkable that my pocket-book should have slipped out of my pocket there without my notice! However, I suppose it must have done so. I am obliged to Mr. Moses for weturnin' it."

"Well, he couldn't keep it, I suppose, and your name's in it," said Lowther. "What are you doing with it now, fathead?"

"Puttin' it in my pocket."

"Aren't you going to see if it's right inside?"

"Bai Jove! I vevah thought of that."

Arthur Augustus opened the pocket-book.

"Heah are my lettahs, all wight," he said. "Lettah fwoom Cousin Ethel, lettah fwoom that chap Buntah at Gweyfwiah—Bai Jove, I must weally unawah that letter one of these days—lettah fwoom my patah, and a lettah fwoom old Conway in Flandahs. They're all wight."

"And the fiver?" howled the juniors. Arthur Augustus was going over his correspondence first, apparently regarding that as the more important.

"All in good time, deah boys. That's in anothah compartment. Yaas, heah's the ten-shillin' note, all wight. Now, whah's that fivah?"

Arthur Augustus began to look serious.

He searched through all the receptacles inside the pocket-book, and thurned the letters out, and examined each one separately.

But the fiver did not come to light. Blake jerked the pocket-book away, and examined it himself. There was no trace of the fiver.

"That's jolly queer," he said at last.

"Sure it was inside!" asked Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! Levison saw me put it in just befoah we started for Moses' place."

"That's so," said Levison, with a nod.

"It isn't here now," said Blake. "It's been taken out. It couldn't have fallen out, with this band round it."

"It was in the same compartment with the ten shillin' note, and that hasn't fallen out, deah boy."

"I say, that's jolly odd!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors looked thoroughly perplexed as they felt.

There was only one possible conclusion they could come to, and that was, that the banknote had been taken out of the pocket-book while it was in the possession of Mr. Moses. But it seemed incredible that Mr. Moses could have taken it. They knew that the moneylender was greedy and unscrupulous, and that his business methods were little more honest than stealing; but surely a business man would never be stupid enough to commit such a theft! If he had not too much honesty, he must have too much sense.

"Moses couldn't be such an idiot," said Talbot, at last. "He wouldn't be above doing it, perhaps, but he would know it was too risky. He would know that the number of the note would be known."

"He didn't know about Levison makin' me take the numbah."

"But your father would know the number, and if he did not, he could get it from the bank that sent him the note," said Talbot. "It would only be a question of time."

"Yaas, I nevah thought of that."

"Anyway, the note can't be passed," said Tom Merry. "You've only got to tell the police the number, and it will be stopped, and whoever tries to pass it will be arrested."

"Yaas, wathah! I'll bike down to the police-station befoah dinnah."

"Hold on!" said Levison.

All eyes were turned on Levison.

"I know that Moses took it," said Levison. "It's plain enough. Don't you remember, D'Arcy, he shoved you when he was going out of the room; and I saw him hiding something in his hand afterwards. That was when he had the pocket-book. He picked your pocket."

"Gweat Scott!"

"You see, you couldn't have dropped the book there. You had it in an inside breast-pocket, and your pocket was buttoned. It couldn't have slipped out."

"I don't see how it could," said Blake. "Do you remember Moses shoving you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah! He shoved me quite wuffly, because I insisted upon his stoppin' and listenin' to my remarks," said Arthur Augustus. "I was feahfully watty at such a wascal layin' hands on me, and I asked Levison whethah it would make mattahs worse for him if I gave the wottah a feahful thwashin'."

"That looks as if the old rascal actually picked the fat-head's pocket," said Tom Merry. "Blessed if I can understand it! He's a thief in a way, but I shouldn't have thought he was that kind of thief. Anyway, it will come out if he tries to pass the note."

"And it will come out that Gussy was there," said Levison quietly. "You don't want that to come out. It would come out about me, and I should be expelled. I know that wouldn't worry you much. But you don't want D'Arcy flogged, I suppose? The Head wouldn't be likely to care much why he went there, if he knew he went there at all."

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors had not thought of that. But they knew how angry Dr. Holmes would be, if he should discover that a St. Jim's fellow had visited a moneylender, especially a moneylender with Mr. Moses's particularly unsavoury reputation.

"Bai Jove! We can't let the wottah keep the fivah, though," said Arthur Augustus, in dismay.

"That's why he's taken it," said Levison coolly. "He knows you won't let it come out that you were in his house, so you can't say anything."

Talbot fixed his eyes on Levison with a very strange expression. But he did not speak, and Levison avoided his glance. The Shell fellow who had once been known as the "Toff," and whose past had been so strange and

chequered, was keener than the other fellows, and his glance was very penetrating as it dwelt on Levison. There were strange thoughts in his mind, but he did not utter them. Levison, cad and black sheep as he was, had done Talbot more than one good turn. Talbot was the only fellow he had ever shown any liking or friendship for. It was not for Talbot to speak.

There was a long silence after Levison's words. The juniors were angry and indignant. But Levison had spoken the truth. It would never do for the Head to know that D'Arcy and Levison had been to the moneylender. Levison's transactions with Mr. Moses were more than enough to earn him the "sack"; and Arthur Augustus could not be the cause of his betrayal. And D'Arcy himself would certainly have been called very severely over the coals.

It was Arthur Augustus who broke the silence. His eyes gleamed behind his eyeglass, and his voice trembled with indignation.

"We shall have to keep it dark, deah boys. The wottah knows that I can't give Levison away. I chipped in to help Levison, not to get him the sack; and he would get the sack if it all came out. I should get into a waw, too, but I'd wisk that. That awful wottah knows we can't say anythin', and we shall have to let him keep the fivah."

"It's queer," said Tom Merry.

"It seems to me plain enough," said Levison. "Moses makes five quids clear, because he knows he can't be given away."

"I—I suppose so! But—but it's queer. I can't quite understand his doing it. He is a rascal. But—but picking pockets is quite another matter. Still, I must say it looks as if he did it. It's pretty hard lines on Gussy to lose the fiver."

"That's all wight, deah boy," said D'Arcy, with an effort. "It's wathah written about our little excursion on Saturday afternoon, that's all."

"We must think it out," said Talbot quietly. "It may not be necessary to lose the fiver after all."

"Nothin' must be done that would give Levison away, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus quickly.

Talbot nodded, and sauntered away, with a deep shade of thought on his brow. There were thoughts in the mind of the Toff that had not occurred to the other juniors.

CHAPTER 9.

Talbot Makes a Discovery.

SATURDAY came and went, and that little motor-car excursion did not come off.

Arthur Augustus had taken his little notice from the board; and he had reported to Kildare that the pocket-book had been found. The matter was dropped.

The swell of St. Jim's resigned himself to the loss of the fiver.

But though the matter was dropped, the juniors did not forget it. They were feeling angry and indignant. That Mr. Moses was an unscrupulous rascal they had known before; but that he was capable of picking the pocket of a visitor, secure in the knowledge that his visitor would never dare to let it be known that he had been in the house, was a surprise to them. It seemed certain enough; and yet it was an unlikely happening. If there had been any other theory to account for the loss of the banknote, the Co. would have jumped at it. But there appeared none. It had been deliberately taken from the pocket-book, and the pocket-book had been in Mr. Moses' possession. That seemed to make the matter clear.

Talbot perhaps was the one who felt the most doubtful. He was giving the matter a good deal of thought, and sometimes his eyes rested curiously upon Levison—very curiously.

Levison appeared to avoid Talbot as much as he could. Perhaps the keenness of the one-time Toff made him uneasy.

But Levison had declared to Arthur Augustus that the loss of the fiver should be made good. Arthur Augustus

ANSWERS

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waved the matter aside, but the black sheep of the Fourth seemed quite in earnest.

"You were there on my business when you lost it," said Levison. "It's up to me, and I'm going to settle it. Next week, I hope."

"That's all right, dear boy," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Don't worry about that. I can stand it, you know."

"But you're not going to stand it," said Levison. "I'm going to settle it. You'll see."

Levison dropped the subject with that.

Tom Merry asked the black sheep of the Fourth a few days later how he was getting on with Mr. Moses. Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"He's given me time," he said. "I think it will be all right. So long as it isn't jawed about here, I think I shall pull out."

"Glad to hear it," said Tom. "It won't be talked about here. Only for goodness' sake keep clear of that man, when you've once got rid of him. You're generally so cute."

Levison laughed, and made no reply.

The black sheep seemed to be easier in his mind, and, as far as could be seen, he was no longer troubling his head about Mr. Moses. But when he was alone Levison's brow was sometimes wrinkled, and almost a hunted look came into his eyes. He was by no means out of the wood yet, and he knew it. His desperate resource had landed him into deep waters.

It might have been observed that Levison was very anxious about his correspondence. He scanned the letter-rack incessantly. It was probably a communication from Mr. Moses that he was expecting, and there was always danger that such a communication might fall into the hands of a master or a prefect. For the correspondence of the St. Jim's fellows, though not as a rule interfered with, was subject to supervision; and if a letter from a moneylender had been noted, Levison would have been called up before the Head at once.

He was alone in his study one afternoon after lessons, solacing himself with a cigarette, when Talbot of the Shell came in. Levison coloured, and threw the cigarette into the grate. Talbot was the only fellow at St. Jim's for whose good opinion Levison cared a straw.

Talbot did not appear to notice the haze of cigarette smoke in the study. His handsome face was very grave.

"Hallo!" said Levison. "Why aren't you at cricket?"

"I've looked in to speak to you, Levison."

"Thanks!"

Talbot closed the door.

"Do you mind if I speak quite frankly?" he asked.

"Not a bit."

"The chaps have the impression that you've got out of your fix."

"And you haven't?"

"No. It seems to me that you are deeper in it than ever," said Talbot, looking at him.

"You are jolly keen," said Levison, with a laugh. "It's not much use trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the Toff."

"I want to help you out of it if I can," said Talbot quietly. "I've been thinking it out. Last term I was hard up, and I wanted money to help an old acquaintance out of a fix. I didn't know where to raise the money, and you paid up five quid I had lent you."

"That's an old story."

"I didn't know at the time where you raised the five quid," went on Talbot, his eyes on Levison's face. "I knew you weren't rolling in money, and I knew you couldn't raise it easily. But I didn't ask you any questions. It never even crossed my mind that you might have gone to a moneylender for it."

"That's what you were thinking of doing yourself."

"Yes; but you paid up in time, and I wasn't forced to do it," said Talbot. "Since this has come out, I can't help thinking that that's how you raised the money—that what you owe Moses is what you paid me last term.—I owed you the money, and you needed it," said Levison. "It was only decent to pay up, I suppose?"

"But you had to raise it from Moses?"

Levison was silent.

"The other chaps think you borrowed money from Moses on account of your betting," said Talbot.

"They would!" said Levison, with a sneer.

"But you didn't!"

"As if I'd be such an ass!" said Levison impatiently.

"Do you think I didn't know the risk of getting into that villain's clutches? I wasn't fool enough to go to him on my own account."

"But on my account?"

"Well, I owed you the money," said Levison, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You had lent it to me to get me out of a scrape, and you needed it badly. I should have been a pretty cad if I hadn't paid up."

"I had no idea you were raising it from that money-lender," said Talbot, in a moved voice. "I've thought it out the last few days, and I see it plainly enough now. You wouldn't have got into Moses' clutches if you could have helped it; but you did that for me. If you hadn't paid me then I should have had to go to Moses myself. I had to have the money, and there was no other way. If you hadn't turned up trumps, I might be in your fix at the present moment. The rotter would have treated me as badly as he's treated you."

"You're well out of it," said Levison.

"But you're still in it."

"Can't be helped."

"It must be helped," said Talbot quietly. "It's true that you owed me the money, but I should never have pressed you for it, nor even asked you for it; and you knew that. You did it of your own accord, and got yourself into this scrape. Well, we're in this together, Levison."

Levison shook his head.

"I don't want to plant it on your shoulders," he said. "I can get out of the fix. I've taken my measures, and I think they will be a success. Anyway, you couldn't raise the money. You see, the fiver has grown into a tenner by this time—that's Mr. Moses' way."

"The tenner will have to be paid before it becomes a pony," said Talbot, with a faint smile. "I suppose you are on the rocks?"

"Half-a-crown a week pocket-money," said Levison bitterly. "My people are worse off than ever since the war. It's a twist for them to keep me here at all. If I get sacked, it will be a blessing in disguise for them."

"You won't get sacked, if it can be helped. You know I've been working for the Northcote Prize," said Talbot. "That's twenty quid. The names will be out soon, and I think I have every chance. You see, I've been putting my beef into it. I had to sell my bike last term, and I want a bike. If I get that prize, that's ten for you and ten for me."

"My hat!"

"It will be next week at the latest," said Talbot. "If I don't get it, we must think of some other way. But I'm almost sure, since Manners withdrew. Manners was the only chap I was afraid of in that. I believe he stood out to give me the cert, as a matter of fact. If I get it that will see you clear."

Levison made a restless movement.

"I'm not going to rob you," he said at last. "You don't have any too much money on your scholarship, and you want it."

Talbot shook his head.

"It's really my debt as much as yours," he said. "You must let me help you out with it, Levison. If I don't get that prize, we'll put our heads together over it. If I do get it, that makes it easy. Then you can clear off Moses, and start fresh."

"I don't think I shall need it," muttered Levison.

Talbot gave him a penetrating look.

"I don't ask for your confidence, Levison," he said; "but—but if you're playing some deep game, I'd advise you to chuck it over. You know I'm speaking as a friend."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't believe that Moses picked D'Arcy's pocket. It's ridiculous on the face of it. He's a rogue, but not a pickpocket. I don't profess to understand the matter, but there's a trick somewhere; and you may get into it deeper, instead of pulling out, if you're not careful. D'Arcy's fiver ought to be returned to him."

"You think I've got it?" sneered Levison.

"I don't know what to think."

"It's going to be made up to D'Arcy," said Levison, biting his lip. "I've promised him that. He won't lose anything. I'm not a thief, if that's what you've got in your head."

"You won't tell me what you've done?"

"How do you know I've done anything?"

Talbot was silent.

"You are keener than the other chaps," said Levison.

"Suppose I tell you that I have borrowed D'Arcy's five, to return it to him next week? No great harm in that, considering the fix I was in."

"Levison!"

"Well, you've made me tell you, and now you've got to keep it dark," said Levison. "I was in an awful scrape, and a fellow can't be too particular in dealing with a man like Moses. He's piled up cent. per cent. interest on me in a few months. Why shouldn't I fight him with his own weapons?"

"But what have you done?"

"I'll keep that to myself. It would shock you," said Levison satirically. "But I can tell you that D'Arcy will lose nothing."

"But you cannot pay Moses?"

"I mayn't have to pay him after all."

"But you ought to pay him the loan, if not the interest. He has no right to the interest, but he has a right to his own money."

"That's his look-out: A swindler who gets swindled has only himself to thank."

Talbot drew a deep breath.

"I won't give you my opinion about that, Levison. I don't know what you've done, but I know you're playing a risky game. Wouldn't it be better to pay Moses as soon as you can, with my help, in a straightforward way, and have done with it?"

"It's too late!"

"Too late?"

Levison smiled sourly.

"Yes; too late. I'm in for it, and either I get clear, or I go to the dogs with a crash. I don't know yet how it will work out, but I think I'm safe. Once he has passed that note through the bank—"

"He? Who?"

Levison caught himself up sharp.

"Never mind who; I'm talking too much. It's safer for you to know nothing about it. I'm not going to drag you into it."

"If you told me I might help you."

"Possibly; but I tell you I'm not going to let you risk it. You see, I've got some good points," sneered Levison. "You did me a tremendous good turn once, and I never forget it. You're about the only chap in the school who ever treated me decently, and there's such a thing as gratitude. I'd shove my troubles on anybody else's shoulders, but not on yours. Queer, ain't it?"

"I'd be glad to stand by you, considering that you got into this on my account."

"I know you would, but you're not going to run the risk. You risked prison once in your early days when you were called the Toff. I'm not going to bring you within reach of it again."

"Prison!" exclaimed Talbot, in a startled voice.

Levison laughed an unpleasant laugh.

"That's where it stands," he said.

"I'm between the devil and the deep sea, and in that position a chap can't be particular. I'm playing Moses at his own game, or a little sharper, and I'm doing it alone."

Levison walked out of the study without another word to end the discussion. Talbot stood with a pale and troubled face. Talbot of the Shell was the only fellow who had ever found any good in Levison, but the good in him, what there was of it, was strangely and inextricably mixed with evil.

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What had Levison done? was the thought that troubled Talbot's mind now. What had he done, and how was the wayward and reckless blackguard of the Fourth to be rescued from his own wrongdoing?

CHAPTER 10.

Diamond Cut Diamond.

"MISHTER LEVISON, good-afternoon!"

Mr. Moses was quite cordial in his manner as Levison came into his private room. It was nearly a week since Levison's talk with Talbot, and during that week Levison had not referred to the subject again. He had been waiting—waiting for what he alone knew.

But that day a little note from Mr. Moses had reached him, and after lessons he had cycled over to Wayland to call on the moneylender.

Levison was icy cool, but the reddish gleam in his eyes, the tightness of his thin lips, showed that his nerves were in a state of tension.

"Sit down, Mishter Levison," said the moneylender in his oily way. "You have received my little note?"

"Yes."

"And you call on me so promptly," smiled Mr. Moses. "Shat is good!"

"I don't want you to write to the school any more," said Levison. "If your note had reached the wrong person it would have caused trouble."

"But if you let the date pass rizout sending me my monish I must write," smiled Mr. Moses.

"I've come to settle up."

"Shat is good. You owe me six pounds."

"Another quid in interest already!" said Levison, with a bitter smile.

"A man must live," sighed Mr. Moses. "Shese are hard times, ferry hard times for an honest man."

"That needn't bother you!" sneered Levison.

Mr. Moses laughed.

"By the way, can you give me back that five I paid you?" asked Levison, eyeing the moneylender. "I want it particularly. You would just as soon have quids."

"Shust as soon," agreed Mr. Moses. "But I no longer have shat five. It is two weeks since you pay him, and I do not keep fivers about the house."

Levison nodded.

"No; I know you had a burglary here once," he remarked.

Mr. Moses chuckled.

"Yesh, and the burglaw found nozzing," he remarked. "I am a piziness man. I keeps mein monish in der bank."

"But that special five—I want it."

"I am shorry, but I send him to der bank der same day," said Mr. Moses.

"If you had told me to keep it for you I keeps him, and sharge you a little interest for shat, but you have said nozzing."

Levison's eyes gleamed.

"You sent it to your bank?" he asked.

"Yesh."

"Look here, suppose I offer you six quids for it in gold?"

Mr. Moses spread out his shiny hands with a despairing gesture.

"Vy did you not tell me before, Mishter Levison? I would have kept him a week, tree weeks, if you offer me ten shillings for shat. But you say nozzing, and I send him to der bank wiz the ozzers."

He watched Levison's face curiously.

"Shat five was your own?" he asked.

"My tear Mishter Levison, if you have put your foot in it, I am shorry. I would do anyzing to get it back, but it is not possible. The note may be in London or Manchester or anywere—I know not."

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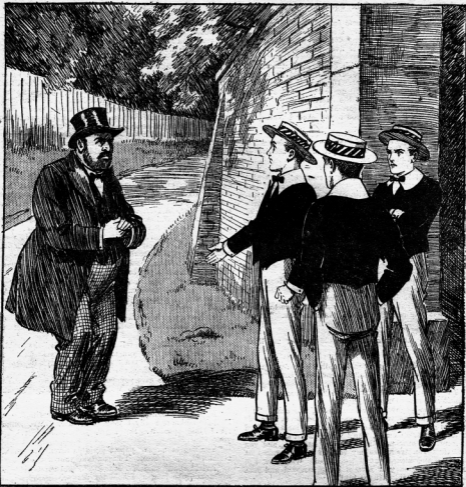
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"I have called to see Levison," said Mr. Moses. "But you can't," exclaimed Tom Merry excitedly. "Do you want to ruin him?" "Yesh, if he does not pay my monish," said Mr. Moses calmly. (See Chapter I.)

Mr. Moses was evidently speaking the truth. That, as a matter of fact, was what Levison wished to know.

"You've parted with the fiver?" he said.

"Yesh."

"Good!"

"Goot?" repeated the puzzled moneylender. "I do not understand you, Michter Levison. You have said you vant it back."

"I wanted to know whether you'd parted with it," said Levison. "I know all about your habits with money, but I wanted to be quite sure."

"Vy?"

"Because," said Levison, in a low, deliberate voice, "because, Mr. Moses, I didn't pay you that fiver."

"Vat?"

"You remember that D'Arcy came with me?"

"Yesh," said Mr. Moses, eyeing Levison intently, and a little uneasily.

"When he got home he found his pocket-book missing."

"Shat was left here," said Mr. Moses, with a gesture

towards the armchair. "I find him and send him by post."

"The fiver was in it."

"Vat?"

"It was D'Arcy's fiver."

"Master D'Arcy's?"

"Yes, and it was in his pocket-book. When he got the pocket-book back he looked in it for the fiver, and it was gone."

Mr. Moses stared blankly at Levison.

"Zen he did not drop the pocket-book in shat chair," he said. "You pick his pocket, and take shat fiver you pay me."

"If you can prove that, Mr. Moses, you're all right," said Levison, with a bitter sneer. "But I think you'll find it hard to prove it. D'Arcy found that the fiver was gone, and he remembered that you laid hands on him here. He concluded, of course, that you had picked his pocket."

"Vat?" yelled Mr. Moses.

"He concluded that you had picked his pocket, and so

did the other fellows, and he would have gone to the police about it."

"Der police!" said Mr. Moses faintly.
"Yes, certainly. One thing stopped him; he didn't want it to come out about my dealings with you. For my sake, he decided to lose the five, and say nothing."

"My cootness!"
"But," pursued Levison, with bitter distinctness, "if it should come out about me, D'Arcy would no longer have any reason to keep silent. If you give me away at Jim's, Mr. Moses, D'Arcy will go to the police at once, and tell them the number of the five."

"Bless my shoul!" gasped Mr. Moses.
"You can say I paid it to you if you like. I shall deny every word of it, of course."

"Oh!"
"D'Arcy is firmly convinced that you picked his pocket. When the five is traced to you, you will be accused of robbing him and prosecuted."

"My cootness!"
"Then we'll have it all out in a court of law," said Levison coolly. "You can say what you like about me. I can prove that the pocket-book never was in my possession. It will be proved that D'Arcy left it here with the five in it—after you had laid hands on him. It will be proved clear enough that it couldn't have dropped out of his pocket; it must have been actually taken. But, in any case, there's your note to prove that the pocket-book was here, and there's the fact that you passed the five-pound note. There were no witnesses that I gave it to you, and I've burned your receipt."

Mr. Moses gazed at Levison in a dazed way.
He seemed quite at a loss for words. Mr. Moses was a very cunning rascal himself, but the cunning rascality of this mere schoolboy took his breath away.

"If you say that I paid it to you, you'll have to prove that it was ever in my possession," said Levison. "Prove it if you can."

"My cootness!"
"And now, Mr. Moses, I'll trouble you for my little paper."

"Your little paper!"
"Yes. My debt to you can be called off. And you're going to give me five pounds back—to settle with D'Arcy."

"You young schoundrel!" gasped Mr. Moses.
Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"You've only got yourself to thank," he said. "I'd have paid the five you lent me, with ten or twenty per cent. interest with pleasure. You charged me a hundred per cent. for two months, which works out at six hundred per cent. per annum. That is simply stealing, and you know it. You traded on my fear of being exposed at St. Jim's and kicked out of the school. Well, now I'm going to trade on your fear of being arrested and sent to prison for theft! Tit for tat!"

"Der prison is der proper place for you, Mishter Levison!" said the moneylender, blinking at him. "For a poy of your age to be such a rascal! it is astonishing!"

"You've driven me to it," said Levison. "You intended to go on bleeding me, term after term, and holding it over my head that you could ruin me. Well, now you can ruin me if you like, and I'll ruin you at the same time! Tit for tat, Mr. Moses! You should be careful how you drive a chap into a corner!"

There was a long silence in the room. Mr. Moses's wrinkled brow showed that he was thinking deeply over the strange situation. It was a new experience for the sharper to be caught by one who was more sharp and unscrupulous than himself.

Levison watched him with a mocking, satirical grin.
It was a pleasure to him to see the usurer cornered after the trouble he had caused him, the days and nights of fear and uneasiness.

So far as he could see his cunning scheme had worked perfectly. He had the moneylender under his thumb quite as much as he was himself under the thumb of Mr. Moses.

Mr. Moses could carry out his oft-uttered threat of exposing Levison at the school—there was nothing to stop that—but it would be followed by the charge against himself of stealing D'Arcy's banknote.

How was he to prove that Levison had handed it to him?

A lie could cost Levison nothing. He would deny it. He would proclaim that he still owed Mr. Moses the full sum, and had paid him nothing. How was it to be proved that the banknote had ever been in Levison's hands at all? How, indeed, had he extracted it from D'Arcy's pocket-book without D'Arcy's knowledge? For Mr. Moses knew that D'Arcy could not possibly be a party to this trick. Levison himself must be a skilled pickpocket, evidently; but of Levison's reputation in the school as a conjurer and sleight-of-hand performer Mr. Moses, of course, knew nothing. Mr. Moses thought it out, and he could not help seeing that, if the banknote had really belonged to D'Arcy, he was in a scrape.

Such cunning and utter unscrupulousness on the part of a schoolboy he had never dreamed possible. And to do Levison justice, even he would never have resorted to such duplicity but for the fact that the moneylender's rapacity had driven him fairly into a corner. A fair interest on his loan he could and would have paid, until an opportunity came for redeeming it wholly. But the rate of six hundred per cent. per annum was too steep for a fellow of Levison's means. Mr. Moses's line of business was, in fact, little better than blackmail, and against a blackmailer Levison considered any means good enough. He had his own way of looking at things.

He waited patiently for Mr. Moses to speak. He was in no hurry. He felt that he held the moneylender in a cleft-stick, and he could be patient.

"Mishter Levison," said the usurer at last, "I have never thought zat a poy could be so great a rascal!"

"But you've had lots of experience of rascality, surely!" sneered Levison. "You are a rascal yourself, you know! I suppose you were a rascal at my age—what?"

Mr. Moses nearly choked. He was greatly inclined to finish the interview by taking the junior by the scruff of his neck.

"You are willing to tell lies—many lies," he said. "How do I know that you are not telling me you now, and that der banknote was not Master D'Arcy's at all?"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.
"You ask me to give you your paper and five pounds, ain't it?" continued Mr. Moses. "Well, I giffs you nozzings!"

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I giffs you nozzing," repeated Mr. Moses. "I finds out if that banknote really belong to Mishter D'Arcy, and son I thinks about it. But I giffs you nozzing! I keep your paper!"

"You'll give me my paper," said Levison, "or you'll stand a charge of theft. You can take your choice."

"I risks shat," said Mr. Moses. "I feel sure shat you say nozzing so long as I hold my tongue. Perhaps you succeed wiz shat charge against me, and perhaps you do not. But if zere is talk, you are disgraced and kicked out of your school. Shat is certain. Now you will go, Mishter Levison."

Levison rose to his feet.
"You won't give me my paper?"

"No!"
"You'll take the consequences, then!"
"I will risk shat!" sneered Mr. Moses.

Levison gave him a bitter look and left the room, slamming the door after him. He had succeeded only in part. The two rascals were equally in each other's power now. So long as Mr. Moses kept silent, Levison would not make the matter public to his own ruin, and Mr. Moses kept the paper with Levison's signature on it. He could not venture to use it now. It was useless to him, Levison reflected. But it remained in existence, and might turn up at an awkward moment.

But Levison felt pretty well satisfied as he cycled back to St. Jim's. At least, he had cut the usurer's claws; Mr. Moses could no longer dun him for money—could no longer threaten him with exposure. It was to his interest as well as Levison's that there should be no exposure now. The danger had been at least averted, if not finished with. It was a case if diamond cut diamond, and Levison, at least, had not had the worst of it.

CHAPTER 11.

Mr. Moses Calls on Business.

"BRAVO!"

"Yaas, bwavo, deah boy!"
"Jolly good!"

There was a merry crowd in the hall of the old School House when Levison came in. Talbot of the Shell, his handsome face flushed, was the centre of congratulations. Levison looked at the cheery crowd in surprise.

"What's on?" he asked.
"Haven't you heard, deah boy?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The names are up."
"Ek—what names?"
"For the Northcote Prize, deah boy. And Talbot's first."

"Bravo, Talbot!"
"That's jolly good news," said Levison, with sincere satisfaction. "Then Talbot's bagged the twenty quids?"
"Yaas, wathah!"
"Congratulations, Talbot!" said Levison.
"Thanks!" said Talbot, with a smile. "It's jolly good

luck, isn't it?"
"You must have swotted for it."
"Well, I did swot, rather."
"It's simply topping!" said Tom Merry, clapping his chum on the shoulder. "You'll get your new bike out of that, Talbot."

"You bet!" said Talbot.
"It's weally wippin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "I congratulate you like anythin', deah boy! I weally don't think I could have done it myself."
"Jolly sure you couldn't," remarked Herries.
"Weally, Hewies!"

Levison went up to his study. He plunged into the armchair and sat thinking. Talbot had all the money he needed now, and he knew that the "Toff" would willingly have handed over enough to extricate him from his difficulties. At the same time, the scholarship boy was in need of the money. It was strange that Levison, who would willingly have victimised anybody else, shrank from laying his troubles on Talbot. He felt little remorse for the use he had made of D'Arcy's banknote, though he intended to repay it, but he shrank from taking from Talbot money that the scholarship junior needed for himself.

Blake of the Fourth looked into the study a few minutes later.

"Coming?" he asked.
"Eh? Where?" said Levison, in surprise.
"Study No. 6! We're celebrating Talbot's giddy victory," said Blake. "The one and only is rolling in cash again, and so is Talbot, and we're making it a jamboree. Everybody's welcome—room in the passage for those who can't get into the study. Come on!"

Blake disappeared without waiting for a reply. Levison did not follow him.
He was in no mood for a jollification. There was a weight growing upon his mind.

He had succeeded in the curious trick he had played upon Mr. Moses, and he felt, according to his peculiar point of view, that he was justified. But, somehow, he was already feeling less satisfied than at first.

After all, deep and cunning as he was, he was but a boy against a man—and that man a keen and unscrupulous moneylender. What if Mr. Moses should contrive to turn the tables upon him after all?
Levison shivered at that thought.

To extricate himself from his scrape, he had plunged into—what? He knew that it was a crime.

True, he intended to repay the five pounds to D'Arcy's. But repayment or no repayment, that could not alter the fact that he had paid D'Arcy's money to Mr. Moses, and he knew what that would be called, if it became known.

Yet, think over it as he would, he could not see any weakness in his position. Mr. Moses had refused to return him his paper, but he could never dare to use it, under the present circumstances. What could the man do?

Nothing! Yet Levison felt a vague and growing uneasiness, and he half-wished that he had taken his chance, and had never played that cunning trick. More

than once in his experience he had found that cunning over-reaches itself.

In that mood he was not inclined to join the merry party in Study No. 6.

He could hear the cheery voices in the passage, the gathering of the many friends of Talbot to the celebration. He remained alone in his study, leaning on the window-sill, the cool air of the quadrangle-fanning his heated brow. Had he saved himself, or had he only plunged deeper into danger? That was the question that hammered mercilessly in his brain, and to which he could find no decided answer.

The sun was sinking in the west; the old quadrangle was flooded with golden light; the ancient elms cast long shadows. Fellows with ruddy faces were coming in from the playing-fields. It was a pleasant scene, but Levison hardly saw it.

He started suddenly from his gloomy thoughts. A fat figure in a rusty black coat and a shiny silk hat had appeared at the gates, and was crossing towards the School House.

Levison's eyes fixed upon it with terror.

It was Mr. Moses.

He had come!

Levison watched the moneylender like a fellow in a trance. Mr. Moses had come to St. Jim's!

There he was, crossing the quad with his slow, deliberate steps, glanced at curiously by the fellows he passed.

He had come to see the Head! What else could he have come for? Levison's brain turned almost giddy! He would be called upon now to stick to his falsehood—to make his accusation against the moneylender—his false accusation—and after all, he would not be sayed, whatever happened to Mr. Moses.

The wretched junior clenched his hands hard. But a bitter, savage look came over his face—if he was to suffer, that rascally usurer should suffer too. He would not fall alone!

He watched the moneylender as he came on, and finally disappeared from sight in the porch of the School House. He was in the House now, and Levison waited, in bitter anxiety, for the summons he felt must come! The summons to the Head's study—to face Mr. Moses in the presence of Dr. Holmes!

But it did not come!

Minute after minute passed, but there came no knock at the door. Surely the man must have explained to the Head by this time his side of the story! Surely the Head would send for the accused junior!

There was a step in the passage at last. Levison trembled. He tried to pull himself together as the door opened. He expected to see a prefect, Kildare or Darrel, charged to take him into the presence of the Head.

To his surprise and relief, it was Tom Merry of the Shell who looked into the study. Tom Merry's face was very grave.

"Will you come, Levison?"

"Where is he?"

Tom did not need telling to whom Levison alluded.

"In Study No. 6. Come on!"

"But—but why—I don't understand," gasped Levison. "Hasn't he—hasn't he been to the Head?"

"Not yet."

"He—he came to—to—"

"To see D'Arcy! You'd better come."

"I'm coming."

Was there a chance yet? Levison's mind was in a whirl as he followed the captain of the Shell from the study.

CHAPTER 12.

A Surprise for Study No. 6.

"GREAT SCOTT!"
That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's ejaculation when Toby, the page, with a startled look on his face, announced his visitor.

Study No. 6 was crowded just then. The four chums were all at home, of course, and the Terrible Three and Talbot, and Kangaroo and Glyn and

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Grundy of the Shell, and Reilly and Hammond and Kerruish, and several other fellows.

They all jumped when Toby announced that Mr. Moses had called to see Master D'Arcy.

Mr. Moses was well known by name to most of the fellows. He was quite a notorious character in Wayland and the neighbourhood, and most people had heard of him. Most surprised of all was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Mr. Moses, Toby?" he repeated.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy?" said the page, looking quite scared. Toby was not sure whether it wasn't his duty to take Mr. Moses to the Housemaster rather than to the junior he had asked to see. But Toby was anxious not to get the popular swell of St. Jim's into trouble if he could help it.

"My hat!" said Kangaroo. "I didn't know you had asked Moses to the celebration, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I have not asked him, you duffah!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have not the slightest ideah why he has come heah. I wufuse to see him."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries. "Tell him to clear off, Toby."

"Hold on," said Talbot, in his quiet way. "He must have come on some kind of business, D'Arcy. Hadn't you better see him?"

"It is wathah infwah dig to see such a vewy wotten chawactah, Talbot."

"Yes; but—"

"Oh, let him come in," said Tom Merry, catching the anxious expression on Talbot's face. "You see, you called on him the other day, and perhaps he's returning the visit."

"Wate!"

"You don't want him to go to the Head and mention that you called on him, you know."

"I wufuse to be influenced by any feah of what that old wepwobate may do," said Arthur Augustus, mounting the high horse, as it were.

"Better see him," urged Talbot. "It might mean trouble for somebody else if you don't!"

"Bai Jove! Pewwapa so! Where is he, Toby?"

"I—I've brought him up into the passage, sir," mumbled Toby. "I—I was afraid that somebody might see him, sir."

"Good lad," said Blake. "Trot him in."

Toby disappeared.

"I think we'd better get off," remarked Kangaroo, rising. "We'll excuse you while you interview your banker, Gussy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The guests took the Cornstalk junior's hint, and cleared out of the study, greatly wondering. Only Tom Merry & Co. remained. A minute later Mr. Moses was shown in. He came in with his oily smile, and his shiny topper in his hand.

"Goot-efening!" he said.

Blake closed the door quickly behind him. What would happen if it became known that the moneylender was in the school he hardly knew; but he knew that it would be something very serious. He felt almost giddy at the bare idea of the Head or the Housemaster coming into contact with the shiny Mr. Moses. And anybody might have seen the man come in. His presence there had to be kept a secret if possible, until they could get rid of him.

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle into his eye, and regarded the oily gentleman with a haughty glance. Arthur Augustus disliked and despised the man from his very soul, and he did not feel disposed to conceal the fact.

"Pway, Mr. Moses, to what do I owe the honah of this visit?" he inquired frigidly.

"A loetle matter of bizness."

"You have no business with me, Mr. Moses."

Mr. Moses smiled.

"Mein bizness is wiz you, and not with all these young shentlemens," he remarked.

"I have no secrets from my friends," said D'Arcy icily. "Don't go, you fellows. In fact, I insist upon your remainin' to heah what this man has to say to me."

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I wufuse to admit that I have any business whatevah with such a person."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ferry well," said Mr. Moses, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Shat is as you like, Master D'Arcy. You will remember you called on me wiz Mishter Levison."

"Yaas."

"On shat occasion, Mishter Levison paid me a five-pound note."

"What?"

"The number of shat note was 0004444," said Mr. Moses.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Shat note I paid into my bank, in der usual way," pursued the moneylender. "But zis afternoon Mishter Levison call and tell me shat it was your note."

"If that was the numbah, Mr. Moses, that was my note," said Arthur Augustus. "But I was undah the impression that—that—"

"Shat is vat I want to know," said Mr. Moses. "If shat was your note, Mishter Levison told me der truth zis afternoon. Shat is vat I come to find out."

"Bai Jove!"

"You say that Levison paid you the note?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yesh!"

The juniors looked at one another blankly.

"Then how did the pocket-book come to be left at your place?" demanded Tom Merry.

"You had petter ask Mishter Levison," said the moneylender. "I find him in a chair after Mishter D'Arcy go, and I send him pack by post. Mishter Levison tell me he vill accuse me of picking Mishter D'Arcy's pocket."

"We—we believed—"

Mr. Moses grinned.

"You believe shat I have done shat?"

"Yes."

"Ferry clever young shentleman, shat young shentleman," remarked Mr. Moses, rubbing his shiny hands.

"I shink shat he go to prison some day. Zere are many like him in der prisons."

"I wufuse to cwedit your statement wegardin' Levison," said Arthur Augustus. "I am suah that you wobbed me."

"And you are prepared to say so in se court of law?" asked Mr. Moses.

"Yaas, wathah! I have been keepin' it dark for Levison's sake."

"So shat young shentleman tell me," grinned Mr. Moses; "a ferry clever young shentleman."

"Let's get Levison here, and see what he says," suggested Blake.

"Yaas, fetch him along, somebody."

Tom Merry quitted the study. He returned in a couple of minutes, followed by Levison of the Fourth.

Levison was a little pale, but he was quite cool.

Tom Merry closed the door again, after Levison was in the study. There were several curious fellows hanging about the passage, and he was in dread of the news getting out that Mr. Moses was in the study.

The sudden arrival of the Housemaster on the scene would have meant serious consequences, for Levison, at least.

Mr. Moses looked at Levison with his oily smile.

"So you've come here," said Levison, between his teeth.

"I come to ask Mishter D'Arcy veszer shat note was his note," said Mr. Moses.

"You know it was when you stole it."

"Isn't he a clever young shentleman?" grinned Mr. Moses. "He has nerve. He vill tell shat lie ofer again."

"It's up to you to prove that it's a lie," said Levison grimly. "I suppose you've come here to show me up to the Head? Well, there'll be a warrant out against you soon afterwards."

Talbot compressed his lips.

From what he suspected, and from what Levison had admitted to him, he knew that Mr. Moses's statement was true. And the other fellows were wavering in their minds. Blake was looking very grim.

"We'll have this out," he remarked. "Levison says

that Moses picked Gussy's pocket in his house. Moses says that Levison paid him the note."

"Shat is so."
"Levison could not have paid him the note, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "The note was in my pocket-book, in my pocket, when I went to Mr. Moses."

"Perhaps!" said Blake. "But it begins to look clear to me now. I couldn't make out why Levison wanted you to go there."

"It was to speak to Mr. Moses, and twy—"
"Hate!" said Blake. "I knew he was only puling your leg, so far as that was concerned; we all know that."

"Weally, Blake—"
"And we know that Levison can get anything out of anybody's pocket, if he chooses," said Blake. "That's no news to us."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."
Levison bit his lip hard.

His fears had not been groundless. By coming to the school, and interviewing the owner of the banknote, Mr. Moses had knocked the ground from under his feet. For, justifiable as his scheme appeared in his own eyes, Levison knew that none of the juniors would dream of backing him up in it, if they knew the truth. He was quite well aware of how his scheme would appear to them.

He had over-reached himself after all.
Blake's eyes were fixed on him with a very grim expression.

"We're going to get at the truth of this," said Jack Blake. "It looks to me as if Levison has been making use of Gussy to play a foul trick."

"Bai Jove!"
Even upon Arthur Augustus's innocent mind the truth was beginning to dawn at last.

Talbot did not speak. He knew the truth already.
All eyes were on Levison. Mr. Moses was smiling; but the black sheep of the Fourth was deadly pale, and his breath came thick and hard.

"It's up to you to explain, Levison," said Blake quietly. "Tell us why you took D'Arcy with you to the money-lender!"

CHAPTER 13.

Talbot to the Rescue!

LEVISON was silent.
The juniors waited for his reply; but it was slow to come.

It was all very well to tell Arthur Augustus that he relied upon his tact and judgment and his intellectual powers, but that was no good for the other fellows. What motive had Levison had in taking the swell of St. Jim's with him to the moneylender's, excepting the obvious one?

"Well!" rapped out Blake.
"I—I thought he might be able to influence Moses," stammered Levison, at last.

"Rats!"
"Bosh!" said Herries.
"Skittles!" said Monty Lowther.
"You'd better tell us a better one than that," remarked Manners.

"Weally, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus feebly. "Levison told me he wedled on me as a fellow of judgment, you know."

"He might tell you that," agreed Blake. "It's not much good his telling us, though. He had some reason for taking you with him, and I've been wondering what it was. I think I know now."

Levison breathed hard.
"I shink, Mishter Levison, shat you have been a leetle too clever," murmured Mr. Moses, still smiling.

Levison gave Blake a fierce look.
"What do you suspect me of?" he snarled.

"I suspect that you'd already got hold of Gussy's banknote," said Blake directly. "I suspect that you left the pocket-book where it was found. We know you can pick pockets; you've done it often enough for a lark."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Moses. "Shat also will come

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out in shat court of law, Mishter Levison. There shall be vittnesses, isn't it?"

"You thought you'd get Moses into a cleft stick that way," pursued Blake. "It was rather thick to believe that Moses had picked Gussy's pocket. Anyway, he couldn't have done it if you hadn't taken Gussy there. You can't explain why you took him. You pulled his leg, and buttered him up, and made him go with you; and it's pretty clear what you did it for, now."

"Oh, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Weally, Blake, do you think that the boundah was takin' me in all the time?"

"I know he was, ass!"
"Of course he was," growled Herries. "We all knew that. The only question was, what he was doing it for, and now we know."

Levison was silent.
His house of cards was tumbling down about his ears. Once more, as had happened before, he had been too clever, too cunning.

"I shink," said Mr. Moses, grinning, "shat warrant for me will neffer be issued, Mishter Levison. I shink zese young shentlemen do not believe shat I have picked ze pocket of Mishter D'Arcy."

"So you fellows are backing that thief up against me?" said Levison bitterly.

"He's not the only thief here," said Blake. "You had D'Arcy's fiver, and a fellow who picks pockets is a thief."

"Yaas, wathah!"
"You've told us that Moses laid hands on Gussy in the house, and then he could have got the pocket-book away," said Blake. "Didn't Levison happen to lay hands on you, Gussy, before you got to Moses's place?"

"Gweat Scott!"
"Oh, he did, did he?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wemembah he bumped into me in the most clumsy mannah as we were goin' out of the studay and wuffed my collah," said Arthur Augustus. "Just what he did the time he pinched my fountain-pen and put it in my Sundah toppah aftahwards, the wottah!"

"That makes it pretty clear, I think. And it's clear, too, why he made you take the number of the note," said Blake. "It was all ready for this little scheme to dish Moses by accusing him of stealing it."

"Yaas, bai Jove!"
"A ferry clever young shentleman!" murmured Mr. Moses, rubbing his hands. "Shust a leetle too clever!"

Levison's face was almost haggard.

There was condemnation in every look now. The juniors knew—or, rather, felt—the truth of the matter.

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

Arthur Augustus's eye fairly burned with anger behind his eyeglass.

He had been made use of by the cad of the Fourth in carrying out a scheme that was little short of criminal, and his noble leg had been pulled, and he had been the victim of flattery. It was more than enough to enrage the swell of St. Jim's. He crimsoned as he remembered how easily the blackguard of the Fourth had taken him in.

"I think all so shentlemen are satisfied now," remarked Mr. Moses. "I think shat Mishter D'Arcy will not accuse me of picking ze pocket, isn't it?"

"Bai Jove! Certainly not! I weally beg your pardon for havin' entainted such a suspiah, Mr. Moses!"

"Shat is nozzing," said Mr. Moses, with a wave of his city hand.

"But it was weally your own fault," explained Arthur Augustus. "I considahed you a greatah wascal than you are, but if you had not been a wascal at all I should not have done so. So you weally have only yourself to blame, you see, for bein' a wascal in the first place."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Monty Lowther. Mr. Moses grinned quite unmoved. "Hard words break no bones" was Mr. Moses's motto. Perhaps he was accustomed to being considered a rascal, and did not let such trifles worry him.

"I should wecommend you," pursued Arthur Augustus, "to turn ovah a new leaf, and not be such a wascal again, Mr. Moses. It is nevah too late to mend, you know, and I can see no reason why you should not become honest."

"There's no charge for sermons in this study, Mr. Moses," Monty Lowther explained. "D'Arcy does these things gratis."

"Weally, Lowthah—"
"I think shat my bizness here is ended," said Mr. Moses calmly. "I vill now call on der Head and tell him about shat young shentleman who is so ferry, ferry clever!"

"Oh!"
"Bai Jove!"
Levison set his teeth hard.

But he did not shrink. He had played for a high stake, and he had lost. The game was up, and he had nerve to face the music.

"Go ahead!" he said. "Hang you! If you'd been anything but a thief and a scoundrel I shouldn't have been driven to this! Do as you like!"

"There is somethin' in that, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus slowly. "You see, Levison has acted like a criminal, but there is no doubt thut Mr. Moses was cheatin' him in a wascally mannah. Mr. Moses, if you vill cleah off and let Levison alone, I vill allow you to keep my fivah. Othahwise I shall insist upon its bein' returned to me."

"Good old Gussy!" said Tom Merry.
Mr. Moses smiled.

"I keeps shat fiver, anyway," he said. "Mishter Levison pay him to me, and I sends him to der bank. If Mishter Levison steal him, shat is not my bizness. I do not pay him back till Mishter Levison is proved to have stolen him."

"Oh deah!"
The juniors looked at one another in a helpless way. Rascal as Levison had been, they did not want him sent to prison. Mr. Moses held the whip-hand, and he held the fiver.

"I—I can't accuse Levison," said D'Arcy. "I shall have to let thut mattah dwop. Weally, Levison, you have acted vevy wottenly."

"I was going to pay the fiver back," said Levison huskily. "I didn't intend to steal it. I only borrowed it to dish thut scoundrel."

The wretched junior was attempting no further denial. He knew thut the game was up, and thut further lying would not serve him.

Arthur Augustus nodded.
"Yaas; I believe thut," he admitted. "You see, deah boys, Levison is not a thief. He was playin' a dirty twick, but he did not mean to steal the fivah. I shall say nothin' about it. If Mr. Moses is honest he will hand it back to me."

Mr. Moses laughed: Apparently he was not honest. Levison turned to the door.

"I'll pay it back," he said. "I shall be leavng the school now, and I'll sell my things and raise the money. You won't lose anything, D'Arcy; I never intended thut you should. I don't blame myself for borrowng the fiver; I never meant to let you lose the money. As for the trick I played Moses, I consider thut it was justified, as he was swindling me. But I can see it's all over, and I'm going. Go to the Head, you oily scoundrel, as soon as you like!"

Levison's hand was on the door.
"Stop!" said Talbot.

The miserably junior turned back. Talbot had said hardly a word hitherto, but he had been thinking, and he now stepped quietly forward.

"You mean to go to the Head, Mr. Moses?" he asked.
"Yesh."

"And why?"
"Mishter Levison have not paid me my monish."

"But you'd rather be paid, I suppose?"
The oily gentleman chuckled.

"Yesh. If Mishter Levison pay me, I give him my paper shat I hold viz his signature. Now, it is seven pounds shat he owe me."

"Seven!" said Levison bitterly.

"Seven," said Mr. Moses calmly. "My time and trouble must be paid for, Mishter Levison. Zen zero is der interest. You have paid me five pounds, and now you owe me seven pounds."

"On a loan of five in the first place!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Who wouldn't be a Shylock? It's as good as a corner in wheat."

"Well, I haven't seven shillings, let alone seven pounds," said Levison.

Mr. Moses nodded.

"I knows shat," he remarked. "But I makes you suffer for shat trick shat you play me, my clever young shentleman. Shat is somesing."

"Levison hasn't the money, but I have," said Talbot.

Mr. Moses brightened up. He would greatly have preferred his money to his vengeance. Any amount of vengeance was not worth seven pounds in the eyes of the moneylender.

"You" murmured Levison.
"Give me Levison's paper," said Talbot. "Here's your money."

"My cootness!"

Talbot of the Shell laid seven pounds on the table. It was more than a third part of the prize he had won by long hours of the hardest work. But he did not grudge it.

Mr. Moses's eyes twinkled.
He handed over Levison's paper at once. Talbot passed it to the Fourth-Former. Levison looked at it and nodded.

"That's my paper," he said.

"Better burn it," said Talbot.

The paper crisped in the flame of a match.

Levison drew a deep, deep breath.

Mr. Moses opened a capacious purse, and stowed away the seven pounds. He was looking very satisfied. His visit to St. Jim's had been a profitable one.

"Now you'd better go," said Blake.

"Goot-efening!" said Mr. Moses cheerfully. "Ven any of you young shentlemens wish for a keetel loan you know vere to come."

"Eh?"
"Always pleased to do bizness with you young shentlemens."

"Yes, we're likely to do business with you—I don't think!" said Blake.

"You vill find me a ferry honest man, and mein terms for a keetel loan are ferry, ferry reasonable," said Mr. Moses. "Always glad to see any of you young shentlemen at my office. Goot-efening!"

And Mr. Moses departed at last, greatly relieving Study No. 6 by getting out of sight at last.

From the study window they watched him crossing the quadrangle in the gathering dusk.

They watched him anxiously. It was still possible

that he might be stopped and asked what business had brought him to St. Jim's.

"Why don't the beast hurry?" growled Tom Merry.

Mr. Moses did not seem inclined to hurry. He crossed the quad to the gates in a leisurely manner. But he disappeared at last, and the juniors breathed more freely.

"Thank goodness he's gone!" said Blake.

Levison drew a deep, almost sobbing breath. The narrowness of his escape almost dazed him.

"And of all the asses!" went on Blake. "I think Talbot takes the cake. Seven quids out of the prize! The duffer!"

Talbot smiled.

"I'm with Levison in this," he said. "It's my debt as much as his. There's your fiver, Gusey, or another just as good."

"I refuse to take your fivah, Talbot."

"You must!" said Talbot. "I'm seeing Levison through, and there's the fiver. You can have that little excursion in the motor-car after all next Saturday instead of last, and we'll get Miss Marie to come."

"But—"

"No 'buts.' I tell you I'm paying up for Levison," said Talbot, "and I'll tell you the reason."

"You needn't tell them anything!" growled Levison.

Talbot smiled.

"I shall tell them, Levison, so that they won't think so badly of what you did."

"I don't care what they think!"

"I do!" said Talbot quietly. "You fellows, you may remember that I was hard up last term, and had to sell my bike, and Levison helped me make up the sum I needed by paying an old debt. He told you about it, I think, when you asked him."

"Yes," said Tom Merry, in wonder.

"Well, I didn't know at the time, but I know now how Levison raised that five pounds," said Talbot. "I suppose you fellows concluded that it was for betting, or something of the kind, that Levison went to Moses to raise money."

"Yass, wathah."

"Naturally we did," said Tom Merry. "Why else should he go to him?"

"He went to him to raise five pounds for me."

"My hat!"

"That was how he got into Moses's clutches—in helping me out of a fix," said Talbot.

"Bai Jove!"

"Levison did!" ejaculated Lowther, in wonder. "Well, my word! What ass was it said the age of miracles was past?"

"It was a jolly decent thing to do, and he's suffered for it," said Talbot. "I don't say I—well, approve of the way he tried to dish Moses. But I know he ran all that risk to help me, and I sha'n't forget that."

"Bai Jove, that was awfully decent of Levison!" said Arthur Augustus. "Levison, deah boy, you must admit that you are an awful wascal, but I take back some of the things I have been thinkin' about you!"

"You needn't!" snapped Levison.

He quitted the study and snapped the door shut. He left the juniors in a state of wonder. They had naturally concluded that the blackguard of the Fourth had gone to the moneylender for shady reasons of his own. That he had done so in order to help another fellow out of a fix was amazing news to them.

"He's a queer beggar," said Tom Merry at last. "I suppose nobody's all bad; and certainly that was a decent thing to do. You're the only chap who ever got any good out of Levison, Talbot; but you seem to have got a good deal."

"Yass, wathah! However, I refuse to take this fivah; but I will agree to expendin' it in common on Saturday, and we will have a wippin' time."

"Hear, hear!"

"And if I may make a suggestion—" said Talbot.

"Anythin', deah boy!"

"Let's have Levison in the crowd."

"Oh!"

"Any old thing," said Blake. "Talbot is rather too good for this world, but we'll let him have his way. We'll be pally with Levison, and see if we can get some good out of him, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

When that great excursion came off Levison of the Fourth was one of the party. Miss Marie consented to come, and Cousin Ethel joined the party, and it was a great success. Of Levison's plot nothing more was said. As Talbot remarked, "Least said soonest mended." It was not impossible that, under Talbot's influence, that peculiar nature, so strangely compounded of good and evil, might be induced to run straight at last.

THE END.

NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"FINDING HIS LEVEL!"

Another Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of TOM MERRY & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

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THE CITY OF FLAME

By ALEC G. PEARSON.

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THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Harold Mackenzie and Jim Holdsworth, while cruising in their yacht the Isis in the Red Sea, land on one of the barren Hanish Islands, where they discover information relating to a mysterious City of Flame.

An Arab suddenly appears, and says he is Anubis of Shoa, the country in which is situated the City of Flame. He warns the comrades of awful dangers they will encounter if they attempt to reach the unknown city, and then vanishes.

Harold Mackenzie, Jim Holdsworth, and Bob Sigsbee, an American member of the crew, form themselves into an expedition for discovering the City of Flame.

After many exciting adventures, they at last reach the land of Shoa, and after crossing a great desert, reach the Temple of the Sun. There they meet Patrick O'Hara, a tall, red-headed Irishman, who is being kept prisoner by the natives, and regarded as a saint; and the comrades also come into collision with Argolis, the chief priest, who wishes their deaths.

A few days later the temple is visited by Queen Clytemna of Shoa, with an enormous retinue. She takes the three adventurers and the Irishman under her protection, and in due course they return with the queen's retinue to the City of Flame, and are lodged in her palace.

The priests, under Argolis, as well as other powerful enemies, are still working against them, and one night while eating their supper they are startled by the discovery that their rifles have mysteriously vanished.

(Now go on with the Story.)

The Death-trap.

"Gone, sure enough!" exclaimed Hal Mackenzie. "But all three rifles were in that corner when the man who brought in the supper quitted the room. I noticed that particularly. And I've not heard the whisper of a sound since, except what we made ourselves talking while we had our supper."

"Which, by the same token, we haven't finished," put in Pat O'Hara, who, not having had a rifle to lose, was less disturbed than the others.

"Hang the supper!" exclaimed Hal impatiently. "This matter is serious. I should have imagined that the door could not have been opened without one of us hearing or seeing it. But if the door was not opened, how were the rifles taken away?"

"Boys," said the Irishman, "listen to me. I tell ye there's queer things happen in this unholy country. That was my experience while I was in the temple. I've seen things there that I couldn't find an explanation for, unless I put them down to magic. Yet I haven't any real belief in magic. Things have happened, I'm telling ye, to which this mysterious disappearance of the rifles is small banes."

"Small banes!" ejaculated Sigsbee. "Snakes alive! It leaves us without weapons!"

"Sure, aren't we the queen's guests?" said O'Hara.

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"I don't count much on that," replied Sigsbee. "Those who are her guests to-day may be her prisoners to-morrow, if the fancy takes her that way. I've no use for being a prisoner, and I'd put up a hard fight for my liberty. But without weapons what sort of a fight can you make against a swarm of armed men?"

The mere suggestion of not being able to put up a fight if occasion required it roused the Irishman at once.

"Thruo for ye!" he exclaimed. "I wasn't thinking av it that way. Thin the wan thing for us to do is to start off an' look for them."

"That's certain," agreed Mackenzie. "But we shall have to go to work cautiously. There are sure to be guards stationed in different parts of the palace."

"As likely as not there is one outside the door of this room," said Jim.

"Unless we are bolted in," replied his chum.

However, somewhat to their surprise, they found that the door was not fastened, nor was there a guard outside. On Sigsbee's advice, they left the door open, and waited for the attendant to come and clear away the dishes and the remainder of the food before starting on their search. And while they waited they finished their supper.

Hal Mackenzie possessed an excellent chronometer watch, which, through all their vicissitudes, he had managed to keep undamaged, and going. It was eleven o'clock by his watch when the attendant came into the room and cleared away the dishes. When he went out of the room for the last time he was about to close the door after him, but Mackenzie stopped him.

"Let the door remain open," he said.

The attendant looked surprised, and was inclined to disobey.

"It is the custom," he asserted, "in the palace for all doors to be closed at night."

"It is our custom," replied Mackenzie, "to sleep with the room door open. There is nothing more to be said. You may go."

The attendant retired, muttering to himself. They waited for another half-hour, and then, as no one else put in an appearance, they started on their quest.

Of course, it was a mere chance search, for they were quite ignorant of the interior arrangements of the palace, except that they had a fairly accurate idea of where the queen's apartments were situated, and deemed it wise to keep clear of that section of the building.

"I don't believe Clytemna has any knowledge of this seizure of our rifles," whispered Mackenzie. "It is the work of Anubis, or I am much mistaken. You see, he must be quite well aware of the advantage which the possession of firearms would give us, while the others know nothing of their use or power."

"I wonder if he knows how to shoot?" said Jim. "There was only one cartridge in the magazine of my rifle, thank goodness!"

"There were three in mine," said Hal.

"Fire in mine," added Sigsbee. "I believe in a full hand."

They had been standing outside the door when they were talking. A long, wide corridor extended to their right and left. They knew that at the end of the left-hand section of the corridor there was a flight of marble stairs which led down to the main entrance of the palace. Obviously, it was useless to search in that direction, for they had to work on

the supposition that the rifles were still in the building. If they had been taken away into the city, search was useless.

They turned, therefore, to the right, and followed the corridor in that direction. There was a flight of stairs also at that end.

The ladies had to grope their way along in darkness, for the people of the city had learned how to make use of the vast stores of natural gas at their disposal. Pipes had been laid to all inhabited houses in the place, and the palace was particularly well illuminated. The streets, of course, obtained their light from the great flames that reared up out of the craters.

By a clever arrangement of shades, and a control of the pressure, the lights in the palace were toned down, and soft. There was none of that glare which in the streets made the eyes ache.

For an hour the quartette wandered about the palace in what, so far, was a vain search for the missing weapons. They moved noiselessly, and when they spoke, it was only in whispers.

They passed through a maze of passages, up and down many flights of stairs, and into any unoccupied chambers which they came across. It was their policy to avoid an encounter with any of the guards or attendants who were on duty, and to that end they had to avoid being seen. But twice they were within an ace of being caught.

The second time it was only by darting into a deep recess when they heard the sound of footsteps, and lying down flat, scarcely venturing to breathe, that they escaped detection by the patrol or a relief of the sentries.

The party consisted of five men, headed by an officer. The officer was Valmire, the man they had wounded in the fight at the lake, and who was in consequence the very reverse of friendly towards them. Had they been discovered by him, the quartette would have come a bad second out of the encounter, with only their fists against spears.

At length they came to a halt in front of a massive teak-wood door, richly carved in a quaint design. It was secured by a huge bronze bolt, two feet in length, and almost as thick as a man's wrist.

"There doesn't seem to be much sense in bolting a door on the outside," remarked Sigbee, "unless you've got someone inside you want to keep there."

"Faith, there's nobody we want to kape!" exclaimed O'Hara, as he laid back the bolt.

There was a pause—just a few moments' natural hesitation—while each one perhaps wondered what was on the other side of that door.

"Push on!" urged Jim. "He who hesitates is lost. And I wouldn't mind betting we're lost already, for it'll be a stroke of luck if we ever find our way back to our rooms."

The door was opened, and one after the other they crossed the threshold. They found themselves in a large chamber, with a groined roof supported by a double row of marble columns. Floor and walls were of white marble. Ancient banners of silk, heavily worked with designs in gold and silver thread, hung on the walls. But so old were they that when Jim Holmsworth touched one the fabric fell to pieces under his hand.

But that which particularly held their attention was a recumbent figure stretched upon a bier of ebony inlaid with gold. It occupied the centre of the chamber, and was bathed in a golden glow of light, which emanated from some unseen source above.

The figure was that of a woman, draped in a royal robe, and with a crown of gold on her head. But so wonderfully was the sculptured figure carved that it looked like a living woman who was lying there asleep.

"The tomb of some dead-and-gone Queen of Shoa," said Mackenzie. "This place is a mausoleum."

"But don't you see, Hal," Jim whispered hoarsely, "that carved figure is the exact image—exact—of the present living queen, Clytemna."

"Let us get out of this place," said Bob Sigbee. "I don't like it. See, there's a door at the far end. We'll find out what that opens on to. If it is another tomb, I shall vote for making tracks back. I ain't got any use for fooling around in tombs while I'm alive. Time enough for that when I'm dead."

The chamber which they entered by way of the second door was neither a mausoleum nor a tomb, but it was the barest apartment they had seen yet. The Shoaans were not given to the use of much furniture, but here was none. The only light in the place came dimly from outside.

Right facing them, hanging across the opposite wall, was a curtain of dressed leather. It moved slightly, as though someone was behind it. O'Hara strode across the room and dragged the curtain aside. There was nothing behind it but the bare wall. Suddenly the chamber became quite dark; the door had closed silently. There was no handle on the inner side, and it was found impossible to open it.

"Trapped!" hissed Mackenzie.

From somewhere outside there reached their ears the sound of a low, mocking laugh.

"What was that?" cried Jim. "Did you hear it? Who was it?"

"I can't tell who it is by the mere sound of a soft laugh," snapped Mackenzie, whose nerves were on edge. "But I expect it was either Anubis or the chief priest, or one of that gang. Anyway, we seem to be fairly trapped in this stone box of a place. We must have been watched all the time."

"Can't you open the door?"

"No, I've been trying. It fits smoothly, just as if it was part of the wall."

They could not see each other's faces, because they were now in pitch-darkness, but the silence which ensued was eloquent testimony to the consternation which they felt.

Presently a soft, hissing sound broke the silence.

"What's that?" someone asked, in a tense whisper.

"Gas," replied Mackenzie, with a sort of despairing calmness. "Can't you smell it? It has been turned on through some hole in the wall. Now that the door is shut, this chamber is probably airtight. How long can we live in a chamber filled with poisonous gas?"

No one answered the question.

A Stratagem.

"We can soon plug the opening up if we can locate it!" exclaimed Sigbee. "It's no manner of use sitting around waiting to be suffocated."

But they could not locate it, and in the meantime the gas was pouring into the chamber. The reek of it filled their nostrils.

"I have an idea!" cried Jim suddenly. "It isn't too late. Lie down flat, all of you."

He didn't explain, and, wondering what his idea was, they all obeyed his instructions.

Jim did not lie down, but, producing his tinder-box, he struck a light with the flint and steel. Instantly there was a burst of flame and a slight explosion, caused by the gas which had accumulated in the room. Jim was hurled on to his back, but he scrambled to his feet again with nothing more serious than a bad shaking.

The others, owing to the fact that they had been lying down, had scarcely felt the shock.

But now, out of the wall to their right, there streamed a jet of flame about two feet in length. This scheme had been successful, so far, for the escaping gas couldn't suffocate them now, as it was burning while it flowed from the pipe. The explosion, too, had cleared the slight accumulation of gas which had got into the chamber.

"Very simple," explained Jim, waving his hand with the air of a professor delivering a lecture. "The idea occurred to me that under ordinary circumstances lighted gas in a room is not harmful, whereas, if it is escaping out of the top, any person in the room stands a good chance of being suffocated. So I lit it up."

"Lit it up?" echoed Hal Mackenzie, as he and the others also rose to their feet. "Seems to me your experiment was a bit risky. Had there been a little more gas in this box of a place, we should all have been blown through the wall when you lit it up, as you call it."

"All's well that ends well," replied Jim cheerfully. "Each of us is still in one piece. And perhaps the explosion has done some good. It may have started the fastening of the door so that we can open it, or something of that sort."

But an examination showed that nothing of the sort had occurred. Indeed, had there been force enough in the explosion for that, it would most assuredly have killed or injured the captive quartette, penned up as they were in a confined space.

"What the blazes is this curtain for?" exclaimed Pat O'Hara, who had been examining the wall at that end of the room. "What in the name of all that's senseless is the use of hanging a curtain across a blank wall?"

"I guess it isn't up there for ornament," replied Sigbee.

"You may bet your bottom dollar it had a use some time or other, though we can't fix what it was. Phew! Say, don't it seem a bit stifling in this blame stone box? There's no ventilation, and that big gas-jet—"

"That's the trouble," interposed Mackenzie. "That gas flame is burning up all the pure air, and there's no fresh supply coming in. We shall have to put it out and block up the pipe."

They could see now that the open end of the pipe—which was about an inch in diameter—was flush with the wall, high up near the ceiling.

"Then my dodge isn't such a big success as I thought it

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NEXT WEDNESDAY:

"FINDING HIS LEVEL!"

would be," said Jim. "But it's served its purpose, in a way. A bit of that curtain would do to stuff into the opening of the pipe. The leather's quite soft."

"Cut a piece off," said Hal. "Look nippy!"

Sigsbee had already whipped out his clasp-knife, and he soon had several strips cut from the curtain. He handed them to Jim, who mounted on to O'Hara's shoulders, and was thus able to reach the gas-jet. He extinguished the flame by pressing the leather over the end of the pipe, which he then stuffed up tightly, so that no gas could possibly escape.

"Corked!" he said, as he jumped to the floor. "What do we do now?"

"Seems to me," replied Hal, "we can do nothing but wait for something to happen."

"With I know. But I suppose the brutes who trapped us will allow a certain time for the gas to do its work, and then somebody'll come to remove our bodies. I hope they won't wait too long, that's all."

"We'll be alive 'n' kicking to receive 'em," Sigsbee remarked grimly.

"I hope so," replied Hal Mackenzie; "but you've got to remember we're in an airtight chamber."

"How's Moses!" growled Pat O'Hara. "'Tis loike canned beef we'll be."

If they were left long enough in this airtight room, death was as certain as it would have been by the suffocating fumes of the gas. For they were simply breathing the air over and over again, which they had expelled from their lungs. And with every breath they expelled it became more and more poisonous. There was no ventilation, and no supply of fresh air. Death would be slower, perhaps more torturing than under the gas, but none the less sure.

"The Black Hole of Calcutta over again," muttered Jim; "but this will be the Black Hole of Shoo."

Then silence fell upon the group, broken only at intervals by the mutterings of the Irishman, who was vowing vengeance against the priests and all who were associated with them, and declaring that he would "get his own back, and some over," if ever he came out of that rat-trap alive.

They had no idea of the passage of time in that truly "black hole," where the darkness was so intense that it could almost be felt, but every minute that dragged by seemed at least an hour.

All suffered alike. At first the difficulty of breathing was hardly perceptible, but with every respiration it increased. As the pure air in the air-tight chamber was slowly being used up, each breath they drew came in shorter and shorter gasps.

After a time they were gripped by an awful lassitude; they felt powerless to rise. Hal Mackenzie endeavoured to do so, but only sank back with a groan. His experience was no different to that of his comrades. They were choking for want of air. Their throats seemed to be slowly closing up. A giant hand seemed to be tearing at their chests.

"I can't stand it any longer," gasped Jim, in a voice that was no more than a wheezy creak. "Better pull—the plug—out of the pipe—and let the gas in. Get it over—the torment—quicker."

"No—hold on a bit longer—old chum," Hal panted. "While there's life there's hope."

The silence fell again.

Jim was becoming delirious. He did not babble incoherently, as people do so often in delirium, for he was incapable of making any sound but a horrible gurgling in his throat. But he had queer, distorted visions, or fancies.

He thought he was in an English meadow, with a sparkling stream flowing past it. He tried to reach the water, but as he ran towards it, it seemed to get further away from him. A hot wind seemed to be parching his skin; an unseen hand was gripping him by the throat; he tried to cry out.

Then he heard a voice close to him. It sounded familiar. He strained his ears to listen.

"Rouse up!" it said. "Jim, old chap, our chance has come. Rouse up!"

It was Hal who was speaking.

"What chance?" asked Jim stupidly. "What do you mean? Where are we?"

He had been lying on his back. Now he sat up, and he was able to breathe freely. A rush of comprehension swept over his brain, and he remembered where he was, and all that he and his comrades had gone through.

"We're still in the same place," his chum answered drily, "but don't you notice that the air is fresher. We're able to breathe now all right."

"Why, yes," Jim filled his lungs with air that was comparatively fresh. "I was in the grip of a sort of nightmare. What's happened?"

"A ventilator of some sort has been opened over our heads," replied Hal, "and as the foul air escaped, the fresh

THE GEN. LIBRARY.—No. 385.

air came in. It strikes me that the scoundrels who shut this trap on us are cosing for our bodies."

"Oh! Are they? Well, they'll find them—though not exactly as they expect. But why do you think so?"

"Well, they naturally suppose this room is full of gas, and they have opened some ventilators to let it out before they can enter. D'you see?"

"Hold your whist!" said O'Hara. "They're here!"

A faint—very faint—sound reached their ears, which seemed to come from the other side of the wall, behind the leather curtain. What the sound was, that is, whether it was voices, footsteps, or both, or something quite different, they could not determine. They stood motionless, waiting, listening.

"If there's going to be a fight," whispered Sigsbee huskily, "I could do with a drink of water before it starts."

"Ye'll need to do without," said O'Hara. "Stand by!"

There was a soft scraping noise, and then a broad ribbon of light showed beneath the curtain. Then there was a secret door at that side of the chamber as well, and it had been opened.

Now the voices of men could be heard plainly enough. One said:

"It is the order that the bodies of these strangers shall be taken out by the secret way, so that they shall not be seen by any of Clytemna's guards."

"These white men, I have heard, are difficult to kill," said another. "If they are not yet dead—"

"They who breathe the fire-vapour, which comes from the unseen world—cannot live long. They must have been dead before the sun rose. Enter!"

The curtain was drawn aside, and a man who wore a dress similar to those of the inferior attendants of the temple, stepped over the threshold. Then he stopped abruptly with a cry of amazement and fear. The cry ended in a strangled gurgle, for O'Hara's big hand had closed upon his throat.

The Irishman jerked him into the room, and flung him with such violence on the floor, that he lay there half-stunned. There were two other men outside, and before they could beat a retreat they were tackled by Mackenzie, Tom Holdsworth, and Sigsbee.

The struggle was short, for they were unarmed, and were soon overpowered. They, too, were flung into the chamber.

"Ye'll just change quarters wid us," growled Pat O'Hara; "an' see how ye look! Ye blatherin' undertakers, wid ye come to bury us? Ye'll have an easier time than we did seeing ye'll be able to breathe."

The door was closed on them, and the four adventurers then looked round to take their bearings. But as they had come out of a door right opposite to the one by which they had entered, they were completely out of their reckoning.

In front of them there was a passage which they had never seen before. Where it led they did not know.

"We must chance our luck, and follow it," said Mackenzie.

"There's no other way."

"If we can only find something to drink," muttered Sigsbee, "I'll be more'n a bit pleased. Guess my throat's as dry as a lime-burner's hat."

It seemed that Dame Fortune, having served them some scurvy tricks, was once more inclined to smile on them; for, having come to the end of this passage and traversed another one, they found themselves opposite an open door.

Looking cautiously through to what lay beyond, they saw a large room, which was evidently used as an armoury, for within it there were stacked numbers of weapons of all sorts, but their rifles were not among them.

A discovery which gave them equal, if not greater, satisfaction than the finding of weapons with which to arm themselves was that of a large earthenware carafe, filled with the thin but palatable wine of the country.

"This is great!" exclaimed Jim, who was the first to notice it.

"Here, Sigsbee, you take the first drink; your tongue's fairly hanging out for a wet!"

"Feels to me as if it was rattlin' in my mouth, like a chip of dry beetle-leather!" grinned Sigsbee.

"Wal, here's to all kind friends!"

He drank thirstily. The carafe was passed round.

"An' to blazes wid our inimies," said O'Hara.

That drink of wise put new life into them, or, to quote Sigsbee's words, made them feel "real spry." Food they were not in particular need of, as they had done full justice to an excellent supper the night before.

So they sallied forth from the armoury, ready for the next adventures which might come their way, with the weapons which they had selected. Mackenzie and Sigsbee had chosen broad-bladed spears, Jim had a short, straight sword, and O'Hara a heavy battle-axe, with a haft shaped out of an enormous black rhinoceros horn, inlaid with gold, and about four feet in length.

The Irishman had a fancy for battle-axes, and he was a terrible adversary at close quarters when armed with one.



The curtain was drawn aside, and a man who wore a dress similar to those of the inferior attendants of the temple stepped across the threshold. O'Hara's big, muscular hands gripped him by the throat. (See Chapter 24.)

The Plotters Unmasked.

A portiere of purple cloth, with a heavy fringe of gold, hung across the narrow archway which faced them at the head of a long flight of stairs, and beyond this curtain was the great Hall of Audience. This they knew, because O'Hara had obtained a fleeting glimpse into the hall, which had been described to him by a priest when he was in the temple.

After twenty minutes of aimless wandering about the corridors and stairways of the palace, they had found themselves at last opposite this arched entrance. From within came the sound of voices. Queen Clytemna was holding an audience. She was now speaking.

"What has become of these white strangers?" she demanded imperiously. "I sent a captain of the guard to summon them here, and he has returned, saying they are not to be found. The apartments allotted to them is empty; they have not slept in it, for their couches bore no signs of having been occupied. That is the report brought to me. What has become of them? Can no one answer my question?"

She stamped her foot with impatience. There was a short pause, and then Anubis spoke. The listeners recognized his smooth, oily tones.

"No one can find a certain answer to your question, O Queen," he said, "because no one knows what has become of these strangers, in whom you would seem to repose unusual trust. Yet I could hazard a guess."

"Well, let me hear your guess."
"It is this," pursued Anubis—"that, being men with evil at their hearts, they have escaped from the palace, fearing that you would discover their true designs. We know not who they are; we know not whence they have come—"

"Escaped!" interrupted Clytemna angrily. "What should they have to fear when they are my guests? And are there not guards at all the entrances of the palace? How, then, could they escape?"

"Men who came through the Barrier Mountain by way of the River of Death," replied Anubis, "and who have defied

the sun-god, may well have the power to escape unseen from a palace."

This seemed an unanswerable argument, and even the queen seemed impressed by it. Silence fell again in the Hall of Audience.

"It's time to put a spoke in that fellow's wheel," Hal Mackenzie whispered to his comrades. "Ready?"

"For anything," replied Sigsbee.

"Pull the curtain aside, Jim."

Jim pulled it back with a rattle of the silver rings which ran on the supporting rod, and Hal Mackenzie stepped first into the hall. O'Hara followed close behind him, then came Sigsbee, and last Jim Holdsworth.

The amazement at their sudden and dramatic appearance could hardly have been greater had they risen out of the floor instead of entering by a doorway.

But there was consternation, and terror as well, plainly shown on the faces of two or three who were present, as Mackenzie's keen eyes noted. He marked them down as the men who were plotting against their lives. Anubis, in particular, seemed to have lost all his assurance. His dark-skinned face turned to an ashen grey. However, he was a cunning and resourceful scoundrel, and quickly recovered his wits.

The quartette saluted the queen, and then Hal Mackenzie spoke.

"You have been inquiring for us, O Queen," he said. "We are here."

Queen Clytemna glanced sharply from them to Anubis, and then to the chief priest. Perhaps she formed her own conclusions, for she smiled in a peculiar manner when she noted the discomfited looks of those two arch-plotters.

"It would seem, Anubis, that your guess is somewhat at fault," she observed.

Then she turned to Hal Mackenzie. "You and your companions have been sought for, and could not be found," she said. "And it would seem that

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 385.

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

you have been into a part of the palace where only my guards are permitted to go, for the weapons which you bear came from the armoury. I await your explanation."

And Hal Mackenzie gave it in full, without any hesitation, omitting no single detail, from the time they discovered the loss of the rifles until their escape from the death-trap in that terrible gas-chamber. The story of their night's adventure lost nothing in the telling, for Hal's voice rang clear and full to every part of the audience chamber.

"I accuse that man, Anubis the Egyptian, of having, with others, plotted to kill us!"

"Egyptian?" echoed the queen. "Why do you name him an Egyptian?"

"Because Egypt is the country he belongs to," replied Mackenzie. "I know an Egyptian when I meet one, O Queen; but it seems he is ashamed of his nationality, as he passes himself off as a native of Shoa."

"This was a shot at a venture, though Hal had good reasons for believing his statement was correct. And it went home. Hoarse with fear and rage, Anubis denied the accusations levelled against him—denied that he was an Egyptian, for he was a Queen's Councillor, and for a man of an alien race to have gained that appointment by false pretences was a heinous crime in the eyes of the Shoaans.

"This stranger," he cried, "accuses me of plotting to kill him and his companions, but where are his proofs? He and his companions were creeping about the palace in the dead of night—who shall say for what evil purpose?—and they trapped themselves. Of their own will they entered the gas chamber—"

"But we did not close the door, nor turn the gas on," interrupted Mackenzie.

"Any man can accuse another of a crime," said the wily councillor. "That is not enough. I ask again—where are the proofs?"

"Fastened up in the room which we escaped from," was Hal's quiet reply. "The three men who, on their own confession, came for our dead bodies, but found us very much alive. We left them in that room—a fact which I omitted to mention until this moment, in case our enemies should have made it their business to release them. You will know whose servants they are, O Queen, when you see them!"

"Let those men be brought here," ordered Clytemna. "And let every door of this Hall of Audience be guarded, so that no man either leaves or enters without my permission."

There was never any delay in carrying out Queen Clytemna's orders, and in less than ten minutes the three frightened wretches were produced. But somehow their appearance did not seem to disturb Anubis greatly. Indeed, Jim Holdsworth was certain that a crafty smile hovered on his lips when the men were brought in.

"That mealy-mouthed schemer has another card up his sleeve," Jim whispered to his chum.

"So've I," said Hal. Clytemna looked hard at the cowering wretches when they were brought before her, and nodded her head.

"Your servants, Argolis," she observed drily, turning to the chief priest. "I hope you have taught them to be

truthful, for if they tell me any lies I will have their tongues cut out. You hear!" She fixed her glittering eyes on the unhappy trio. "Let me have the truth! You went to that chamber from which you have just been brought expecting to find the dead bodies of these four white strangers there. Who gave you your instructions?"

Now, these three fellows found themselves in the unenviable position of being "between the devil and the deep sea," to use a familiar expression—or, in this case, between the power of Queen Clytemna and the craftiness of their chief priest.

The queen might threaten to have their tongues cut out if they didn't tell the truth; but, on the other hand, they knew the chief priest would deal out an even more dreadful punishment if they did speak the truth, and they were the servants of the priest.

Moreover, they may have argued, the queen could not know whether they told the truth or not. There was only the word of the strangers against theirs. So they gave a false version of the incident.

It was by chance, their spokesman asserted, that they opened the door of the lethal chamber, not knowing that anybody was inside. Then, to their surprise, the four white men sprang upon them, overpowered them, and shut them up in the room. That was all.

"Is not that sufficient proof, O Queen," cried Anubis triumphantly, "that these strangers, over whom you have thrown the mantle of your protection, have given you a false account of what has happened? And have you forgotten," he added cunningly, "that it was these same strangers who rescued Zenobia, the girl whom you had condemned to death for witchcraft?"

Clytemna frowned when she was reminded of that incident, and Anubis pursued his advantage.

"They have come into the land to work evil, these strangers," he went on, "and to plot against you. Where the white men set foot, others follow. I know, for I have seen. They will come in their thousands, their soldiers with their magic tubes, which kill at a distance. They will wrest the land from you, O Queen, and you will be an outcast and a wanderer. These whom you have welcomed speak fair, but they are liars—"

"You have said enough," interposed Hal Mackenzie, and there was a gleam in his eyes which boded ill for Anubis. He turned to Clytemna. "What I have told you, O Queen, is the truth—no more, no less. For this fellow, who talks too much, I have no further words. This is my answer to him!"

He strode across the floor, and struck Anubis full on the mouth with the back of his hand.

"Now perhaps he will fight," he added. "Let him choose the weapons. I'm ready!"

Pat O'Hara let out a wild Irish yell.

"By the powers," he cried, "that's business! An' if there's any other gentleman present who wud loike a bit av diversban wid me on the same loines, why, I'm ready, too!"

(Another long instalment of this stirring yarn will appear in next Wednesday's GEM. To avoid risk of disappointment, you should order your copy without delay.)

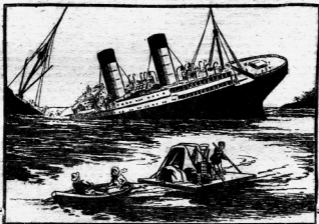
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THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 385.

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HOW TO WIN THEM.

All you have to do is to introduce "THE GEM" to your chums. Show this copy to them and let them read it. Then get them to sign their names. You can rule a sheet of paper in the manner shown below, and the readers who send in the largest list of names will win these magnificent prizes. This Competition is being run together with our companion papers, "The Union Jack," "Boys' Friend," "Boys' Realm," "Magnet," "Nelson Lee Library," "Pluck," "Penny Popular" and "Marvel." It must be understood that this is one Competition, and that the decision of the Editor of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" must be accepted as final and binding in all matters concerning the contest. It does not matter which, or how many of the papers taking part you get your chums to read. While one chum is reading the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY," get another to read the "Boys' Friend," and so on. Keep your lists by you until we print directions as to when they are to be sent to us.

WRITE YOUR SHEET OUT IN THIS FORM.

I.....
of.....
.....
have shown the papers mentioned to my chums, who have signed their names on my list, and I have got them to read them.

Let your chums sign their names and addresses on one side of the column, like this:

Name of paper which they have read.

.....
.....
.....

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.....
.....

THE JUDGE:

The Decision of the EDITOR of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" must be accepted as ABSOLUTELY FINAL.



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to —
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
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For Next Wednesday—

"FINDING HIS LEVEL!"

By Martin Clifford.

Such is the title which Martin Clifford has bestowed upon next week's splendid story of school life. The admission of Harry Mayne, the son of a humble sergeant in the British Army, to St. Jim's, provokes the wrath of Levison, Mellish & Co., the black sheep of the Fourth. The new arrival is a splendid fellow in every way, but, owing to the impracticables of his less worthy schoolfellows, his path is rendered a very thorny one, and there are stirring scenes at the old school before Harry Mayne succeeds right valiantly in

"FINDING HIS LEVEL!"

A WOUNDED SOLDIER'S OPINION.

That the "Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries rank high in the estimation of British Tommies is amply proved by certain letters I have been receiving lately from the trenches and from hospitals and military bases in Great Britain.

I have pleasure in publishing below a typical spontaneous message of praise for the king of boys' story-papers:

"The Red Cross Hospital,

"Foxlow, Leck, Staffs.

"Dear Editor,—I am a private soldier in the North Staffs Regiment, and have been a reader of the companion papers for about seven years, but I should like to say a word about the same.

"I was wounded in the Battle of the Aisne by shrapnel, and not having the opportunity to get one of your books whilst fighting in France, I had to rest content until I came home wounded.

"First of all, I must say that the 'Gem' is one of the best, and although I am twenty-one years of age, I am as deeply interested in it as when I was a boy at school, and I can safely say that I have derived both comfort and amusement from it, which makes me think that your paper is suitable for readers of all ages.

"I think my fellow-readers of the 'Gem,' both far and near, will agree with me when I say that, apart from the amusement it gives, there is always a splendid moral attached to each story, and I hope the circulation will go up by leaps and bounds.—Wishing you every possible success, I remain, yours truly,
 PRE. H. YATES."

I thank my soldier chum for his inspiring letter, which, by the way, reminds me that I have to thank certain Gemites for sending me back numbers, which I, in turn, have forwarded to Miss Doris E. Frodin for distribution among the wounded Tommies.

Miss Frodin, in writing to me, says:

"I should like you to thank, in the name of the wounded soldiers at Hampton Hospital, all those Gemites who have sent copies of our topper-paper to these heroes. The men are extremely grateful, and it pleases them to think that people appreciate the sacrifices they have made."

The following readers are to be especially commended for their kindness:

A. Campbell, Edinburgh; W. A. B. Kensington; Hannah White, Bolton; Ronald Gilchrist, Sligo; Mercia Cutler, Birmingham; Joseph Wilson, Warrington; R. Hall, Walthamstow; Marjorie Lee, Chesterfield.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"Scottie" (Glasgow).—Your suggestion has already been thought of, but I am afraid it would incur too much expense to put it into practice.

"Pop" (Spalding).—Many thanks for your cheering little note. It is to the influence of such readers as yourself that the "Gem" owes a great deal of its present success.

G. Horn (Belfast).—Jack Blake is the finest boxer in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

J. N. N. (Calgary).—Kildare is seventeen years of age, and Talbot and Monty Lowther are fifteen.

S. Hoar, Ivy House, Addington, Liskeard, Cornwall, would like to hear from "Gem" readers interested in stamp collecting, with a view to forming a club.

J. D. Thomas (Llaneddy).—Thank you very much for your excellent letter, which I would gladly publish were it not for the heavy tax upon my space.

"A Loyal Welsh Chum" (Borough, S.E.).—I quite see your point, and will endeavour to bring about the alteration you name.

Driver A. C. Morris (British Expeditionary Force).—Very glad to hear from you for the first time, and hope you will come safely through the strenuous period you are having.

H. L. R. (Bayswater).—Your proposal is duly noted. Many thanks.

Dennis Eagle (Stockwell).—You should write to A. W. Gamage, Ltd., Holborn, London, E.C.

Lionel Payne (South Australia).—In view of the unsettled times through which we are passing, I have deemed it wise not to resume the "Gem" Correspondence Exchange at present.

"A Loyal Girl Reader" (South Australia).—The idea of a badge for "Gem" readers is already under consideration.

S. Rothera (Gateshead).—You should write to Mr. Norman Mitchell, 31, Meldon Terrace, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne, who will, I think, be pleased to give you such information as you desire.

"Teel".—A good idea, and one which I will consider. Best wishes.

Tom Walsh (New South Wales).—No; your supposition is incorrect.

Patty R. (West Australia).—Thank you very much for your appreciative remarks on the subject of "The Gem" Library.

"Tintack" (Manchester).—I quite disagree with you that the storyette in question was too lengthy to send in on a postcard. The reader you refer to used the whole of one side of the card and half the other side, and got his joke in with apparent ease.

Marjorie Morton (Birmingham).—As you will have seen, your suggestion was carried out in the number of the "Gem" containing the story, "Grundy's Downfall."

Archie Spencer (Walthamstow).—Send in your storyettes on postcards; otherwise, they cannot be considered.

Charles A. (West Australia).—I am pretty certain that if I were to raise the price of the "Gem," as you suggest, I should mighty likely offend the majority of my readers.

Arthur B. Hine (U. S. A.).—The Correspondence Exchange has been suspended indefinitely.

A. Salter (Mordialloc).—Poor old chap! You won't find it altogether easy to do as Master Robert Carlton did in the past, especially as there are a host of loyal "Gemites" living in your town. I note your remark that the "Gem" is "a medium for drumming silly rot into boys' heads." Apparently your schoolmaster has drummed no spelling into yours!

A. S. (Manchester).—The character you mention will be in the limelight shortly.

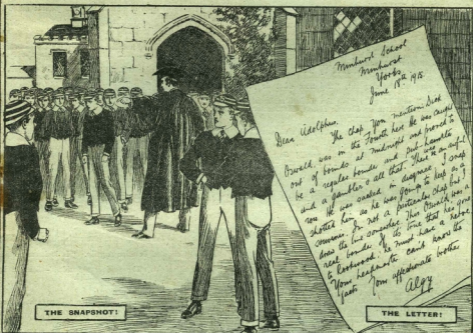
YOUR EDITOR.

THE BOYS' FRIEND



READ

"HIS TRUE COLOURS!"



THE SNAPSHOT!

THE LETTER!

Monkswold School
 Monkswold
 Yorks
 June 15th 1915

Dear Adolphus,
 The chap you mention Dick
 Oswald, was in the Fourth here he was caught
 out of bounds at midnight and proved to
 be a regular bonder and post-graduate
 and a gambler & all that. There was an awful
 row. He was asked in disgrace I snap
 shotted him as he was going to keep as a
 witness. Is not a particular chap but I
 don't know his name. This Oswald has a
 real bonder of its time that he goes
 to Rookwood. He must have a rebel
 You hear, mate. Can't have a rebel
 from apprehensive brother
 Algy

A Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the
 Chums of Rookwood, in

TO-DAY'S ISSUE OF

THE BOYS' FRIEND



A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.

Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

NATIONALITY UNKNOWN.

"Nora," said the mistress, "are these French sardines?"
"Shure, Oi don't know, mum!" said the new Irish maid.
"They were past sarkin' when Oi opened the tin."—Sent in by L. Maddison, Gateshead.

UNBASHED.

There was once an Irishman who joined the Army, and one morning he forgot to clean his boots. The sergeant who was drilling the recruits at once spotted it.

"Come out here, Murphy! Disgraceful exhibition! Never seen anything like it in all my life! March up and down the ranks, and show the men what a state you're in!"

At last Murphy returned, followed by the derisive smiles of his fellow-recruits.

"Well," snapped the sergeant, "and now what do you think of it?"

"Faith, sor," said Murphy, "it's the dirtiest regiment I ever inspected!"—Sent in by Chadde Haine, Manchester.

HIS OWN DEFENDER.

Judge: "You are charged with robbery with violence."

Prisoner: "Yis, yer honour."

Judge: "Have you anyone to defend you?"

Prisoner: "Defend me? I'll defend myself! Jest let any 'arf-dooner of yer come outside, an' I'll show yer!"—Sent in by C. E. Fry, Bedford.

NOT A DOORKEEPER.

A party of surveyors were working on a farm in the Far West of Canada, when an old man came hurrying out of his house and asked:

"What are ye doing here?"

"Surveying," was the reply of one of the engineers.

"Surveying for what?"

"For a railroad, I guess."

"Whar's it goin'?"

"Right through your barn, I reckon," laughed the engineer.

"Wal now, mister, I calculate I've got somethin' ter say to that. I want you to understand that I've got somethin' else to do besides runnin' out to open and shut them barn doors every time a train wants to go through!"—Sent in by H. Schofield, Warrington.

NOT ITS ELEMENT.

The teacher was endeavouring to illustrate to his pupils the association of different species of life with common substances.

"For instance," he explained, "you will always find plants where there is soil, birds where there are trees, and so on. Now, can anybody tell me what we associate fish with?"

"Like a flash a hand shot up from the back row. It was the property of Pat Grimes."

"Well," said the teacher.

"Chips," was Pat's prompt reply.—Sent in by H. Hodges, Birmingham.

NOT A NATIVE.

Sergeant (to recruit, who does not seem to be able to run property): "Halt! You don't seem to know much about 'doublet,' my man."

Recruit: "No, sir, I don't. I come from Cork."—Sent in by H. Arnott, Hull.

NOT SURPRISED.

A doctor once performed an operation on a man, and had to unstick the patient no fewer than three times, having twice left swabs behind, and the third time locating a pair of surgical scissors he had sewn up.

After the third time of unstitching, the patient asked to speak to the doctor.

"What is it?" asked the surgeon.

"Don't you think it would save you a lot of sewing, and me a lot of pain, if you put buttons on?" asked the patient.

The doctor glared and hurried out, leaving his pipe behind him on a table. He looked into the sick-room about ten minutes later.

"Did I leave my pipe behind?" he inquired of the nurse.

The patient wriggled a bit.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you did," he said. "I've got a hot feeling in me stummick."—Sent in by K. Morris, West Leederville, West Australia.

HE SCORED.

On the road to a country market-place a youth was trying to get a cart of vegetables along, but his donkey was stubborn, and would not move.

A crowd of people gathered round, some sympathising and others jeering. One man, thinking to be humorous, shouted:

"Hi, boy, how much do you want for your donkey?"

The warty youngster replied:

"Before you think of buying a donkey, you'd better go and ask your mother if she can afford to keep two."—Sent in by H. Whyte, Doolham, Essex.

TRANSPLANTED.

One morning Jenkins looked over his garden wall, and said to his neighbour:

"What are you burying in that hole?"

"Oh," replied the other, "I'm just replanting some of my seeds, that's all."

"Seeds?" shouted Jenkins angrily. "It looks more like one of my hens!"

"That's all right. The seeds are inside!"—Sent in by W. Bryant, Pontycymer, South Wales.

CANDID!

A pompous clergyman went into the village school, and began to question the class.

"What am I?" he asked proudly.

"A man, sir," came the reply.

"Yes, yes. I know I am a man; but what kind of a man?"

"A little man, sir!"

"Dear me!" he exclaimed pettishly. "I know I am a man, and a little man; but you should see the clothes I wear when I preach in church! Now, what kind of a man am I?"

After a painful pause, a little girl held up her hand.

"Well, dear, what am I?"

"Please, sir, you're an ugly-looking man!"—Sent in by James McKay, Greenock.

HARDLY FAIR.

"Did you tell your school-master that I helped you with your French exercise?"

"Yes, patter."

"What did he say?"

"Said he wouldn't keep me in to-day, 'cos it didn't seem fair I should suffer for your ignorance."—Sent in by John Stones, Manchester.

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.

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